



# Social media: Do it! Do it now!

*If you think Facebook, YouTube or Twitter is just for kids, you're missing an opportunity.*

**BY BOB WEISS**

Venerable Martindale-Hubbell has entered the online legal social-networking fray with Martindale-Hubbell Connected®. When an organization with that kind of institutional status embraces such progressive strategy, particularly on the heels of the equally careful American Bar Association, which is now beta-testing its own Legally Minded® social networking site, it's time to join in.

## **A free marketing tactic**

We recommend to all our clients to actively participate on at least one social-networking site. Another reason: our clients report obtaining substantive work from the personal profiles they regularly maintain on LinkedIn® and Facebook®. (Note that regularly updated profiles help your search-engine rankings.) Our rec-

ommendation is confirmed in several recent articles detailing business development results for attorneys. These articles have run in numerous respected publications, including the ABA Journal. Social networking is an effective marketing tactic, one providing unlimited audience reach. However, it cannot go unsaid that it raises issues involving firm technology, ethics and human resources. Twitter®, as yet unprofitable but in negotiations for acquisition by Google®, remains a bit unproven for professionals. It's immediate but can be generating traffic that most attorneys would find overwhelming. It's on our "wait and see" list. (Note to litigators: someone should be monitoring traffic on Twitter® during hearings, jury selection, trial and other proceedings.)

Operational and ethical concerns should also be considered (see sidebar.) Albeit nettlesome, these issues must be dealt with quickly. Failing to employ so-

cial networking means you are simply giving work you could have had to other lawyers, and limiting your own access to information and resources that may help you serve clients.

Also, in these economic times, how can you ignore a new, proven marketing tactic that's free?

## **Connections**

Of course, it takes time. Figure on spending 90 minutes to an hour, at a minimum, and probably that much time twice monthly, to send messages, respond and update your profile. (Figure in the time your administrator/marketer will consume working with key partners to update firm profiles, which you should have on LinkedIn® and Facebook®, too.) Find that time by attending one less community or trade group function you feel has been diminishing in value. Recognize this as an efficient decision – so-



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## Social media guidelines

Social media presents a number of human resources, ethical and risk management issues for lawyers and firms. Foremost, a firm's professional liability insurance may require a social media policy, we are told. Some firms are issuing their own policies or guidelines. Several with which we are familiar say:

- Don't give legal advice.
- When you discuss law firm matters do so in the first person.
- Don't use the firm's logo without permission.
- Don't cite or reference clients, partners or vendors without their approval.
- If identified as an employee or partner with the law firm, ensure profile, connections and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself to colleagues and clients – and forever due to cache programs!
- Follow Bar rules.
- Consider a disclaimer: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent my firm's position, strategies or opinions."

We further advise those lawyers involved with social media sites to:

- Add value – your postings should provide worthwhile information and perspective.
- Respect your audience – avoid being aggressive, slurs – even in jest, personal jibes, obscenities.
- Show proper consideration for the privacy of others.
- Avoid provocative topics, i.e. religion and politics. — BW

## Some useful statistics

The Pew Center, which studies media trends, reports average age of LinkedIn® users is now 40+.

Nielsen reports that 24 million people ages 35-49 joined the network in 2008 – triple the number of those ages 18 and under. About 15 million people ages 54-69 joined. Facebook® isn't a kid toy.

One of the most effective personal injury commercials, licensed to firms using it in many cities, features actors Robert Vaughn and William Shatner. They dramatically urge injured listeners to contact a lawyer saying: "Do it . . . and do it now." That's my message when it comes to social networking.

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cial networking allows you to connect with, well, everyone you know, everyone you have ever known, and everyone who knows them but does not know you. That's a big number. (And, you don't need to speak before an audience, walk into a roomful of strangers - those activities the majority of professionals would prefer to avoid.)

Which network should you choose? As of this writing, we say LinkedIn® is best. It was developed specifically to support the needs of working professionals. Every lawyer should be in this network.

If you have a practice driven by referrals from non-professionals, Facebook® profiles and video on YouTube® would be good additions to LinkedIn. If you get nearly all of your work from other lawyers, who also get the majority of their work from other lawyers, we say you should choose between the now in beta-testing Legally Minded® from the ABA and Martindale's new venture. (If you get most of your work from general counsel, consider getting invited onto Legal Onramp® by an in-house lawyer you know who is using it.)

