

Why LinkedIn may be your most effective social media

Twitter and Facebook don't fit the style and demeanor of most legal marketing

By Jessica Jaramillo and Amber Vincent

The e-mail in your Inbox says: "Jessica has asked you to connect to her on LinkedIn," or "Amber is now following you on Twitter," or "You have pending friend requests on Facebook."

Do you hit the delete button? Most lawyers do. But is that the best move?

Along with Martindale Connect and JD Supra; LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook are the social media networks now common in the practice of law. Like any emerging area of law practice, however, not everyone knows how to apply the underlying theory effectively.

What does social networking mean for you as a business professional? Should you be involved? Is it worth the time? What should you do first?

We have worked with thousands of lawyers, and hundreds of architects, engineers, accountants over the past decade and helped them harness the business development potential of social media. After getting them all online, we train them how to set-up and maintain an effective online marketing presence. Our mission in this article is to educate and motivate you to get involved in an online network.

The facts

According to the Pew Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that conducts original research exploring the impact of the Internet's growth on society, the median age of LinkedIn users has climbed to 40. Further, our firm's own national law firm marketing effectiveness survey shows that nine percent of commercial, transactional and defense firm lawyers in 2009 got cases, directly or by referral, from a social networking site such as LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter.

So the data confirm a respectable number of mature professionals are successfully using these networks as tools for business development. There are dozens of online social networking groups out there in addition to those we have listed. Which one is best for a lawyer in private practice that get work from other professionals?

LinkedIn

In our experience, that's LinkedIn, www.linkedin.com. If you do nothing else – we think it's fine to ignore all of the alternatives for now – join and participate in this network. Don't freak out – "I haven't got time for that!" – we are talking about a commitment of about 15-20 minutes a month here. After giving you an overview of this network, we will explain later in this article how to get started and how to determine who you know already on LinkedIn, so you can get comfortable, make some friends and get the system working for you right way.

LinkedIn is an interconnected network of experienced professionals formed in May 2003. Currently there are more than 60 million LinkedIn members around the world with 150 industries represented and 200 countries participating in this 24/7 networking experience. It is estimated that a new member joins LinkedIn every second. Of those, more than 500,000 are attorneys/lawyers. Many are in-house counsel; more than a few are probably your existing referral sources.

This means LinkedIn is an opportunity for constant visibility. Since visibility and frequency of contact are the greatest challenges to any professional's personal business development, LinkedIn will reduce the time you need to spend personally networking. LinkedIn lets you get the word out and subtly promote what you do 24/7. Your profile is searchable. More importantly, it has a feature that lets you send pithy – no more than 140 characters in length – updates about your activities to everyone to whom you are connected by the service.

"Preparing for an NLRB hearing next week about a client's recent RIF," one employment lawyer recently wrote as his update. Perfect.

"Just funded a private placement for an ethanol plant," wrote another. Those are good examples of how to write an effective update.

Everyone in your network and anyone able to see your profile will see and watch for your posted updates like these. They're essential if you want LinkedIn to work for you. Every two weeks, your updates will be in an e-mail sent to everyone to whom you are connected on LinkedIn. Consider it your personal newsletter.

You also have the ability to upload your e-mail contact database from Outlook into LinkedIn. This allows you to pick and choose everyone you would like to include in your LinkedIn network, and see who is already involved in LinkedIn. If you are one of those lawyers whose

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e-mail addresses are not on v-cards in Outlook itself as Contacts, but instead are stored in the auto-address function, this will be a bit more difficult but not impossible. You'll need to buy a data-mining software, about 30 bucks, that downloads those addresses to your Contacts in Outlook and then upload those addresses to LinkedIn. This is not as hard as it sounds – your IT person (or teenage daughter) can do it for you.

Another crucial element to LinkedIn's network is to give recommendations and to ask for recommendations from those with whom you have worked. Some lawyers embrace this aspect of the service enthusiastically, others do not. It's up to you.

LinkedIn gives its members a chance to join groups, too. For example, we have an attorney who is a former JAG. He's joined the LinkedIn JAG group in the spring. He got a referral from another JAG from a neighboring state late last year. There are thousands of groups on LinkedIn. Search for them in the Groups area. Don't forget to join those created by your alma mater.

Twitter and Facebook

What about Twitter and Facebook? The former is time-consuming and does not fit, in our opinion, into the style and demeanor of marketing for most lawyers. We struggle with how it can be effectively employed even for consumer practices. Facebook is about friends so trying to make it work in a commercial sense, we think, is inappropriate. On the other hand, we do think that having a firm Facebook page, showing firm functions and delineating community activity and pro bono work, is a great way to show people your value and culture.

All in all, the world of online marketing is here to stay and social networking is a crucial component to maintaining frequency to contacts. Please contact us for training seminars we offer in various states.


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