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“You've got a friend”

(With apologies to James Taylor)

Or

The Friendly Side of the Social Network

By

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- “Winter, spring, summer, or fall, all you have to do is [click], and I’ll be there.”

Social media is not a fad; it is a new way of communicating that attorneys need to master. First generation static web pages and emails are being supplemented or replaced entirely by interactive Web 2.0 technology. Video gaming may not be of interest to you, but its programming has carried over to the web. Multiple 360 degree photos of real estate, today’s cutting edge for Realtor web pages for example, will be replaced by a virtual walk through of a property similar to that of today’s video war game. Paperless land surveys and title exceptions will be a click away and tied to photos, allowing simultaneous comments from several sources and saving time and money for real estate attorneys. Trust and estate work will increasingly include online assets. A brief review of our Section’s social media pages and what has been posted by our members already reflects how dynamic Web 2.0 is.

Today’s web is interactive. It is fast. It is visual. It is mobile and most importantly it “talks” to you. In short, it is social. “Friending,” networking, following, updating, micro-blogging, commenting, and sharing photos and videos has replaced conventional facsimile transmissions, list serves, chat rooms, voice mail and email. If your practice is not changing to reflect this, clients that prefer turning to the internet for information will not find you. Last year Facebook, for example, toppled Google as the world’s most popular web page. For many, Facebook is their home page of choice and Facebook and Twitter are clearly preferred over email. LinkedIn has

become the darling of head hunters for leads within a targeted company. Hard to find “inside” information is suddenly available. Is the social media an effective tool of communication? Just ask a dictator from Tunisia, Egypt or Libya. It is a communication revolution with powerful overtones for every aspect of society. It is sweeping the world.

- “You just call out my name, and you know where ever I am, I'll come running...”

Martindale's Connected has a data base of over one million legal professionals throughout the world; LinkedIn, our Section's most popular site, has over 90 million business professionals and one million attorneys. Facebook has grown from 175 million users in 2009, to over 500 million users in 2010 and claims it will reach over one billion users by the end of 2011. Regardless, all three networks are expected to grow exponentially for the remainder of this decade. Why join? Ask the Queen. Last year Queen Elizabeth II joined Facebook. It was not for social purposes but to help shape her “online brand.” Many major companies have staff whose sole job is to monitor and respond to what is being said online. Protecting your image online is a new business strategy that attorneys need to master.

- “They'll hurt you and desert you. Well they'll take your soul if you let them.”

As attractive a communication tool as these social media sites may be, attorneys are subject to the same rules as before regarding the practice of law and the marketing of their profession. The social network is a new media, not an excuse to break these tested rules. Before you do anything online, check with your state bar regulators as to what is allowed. Clients also need to know that regardless of what they may have heard, nothing is truly private on the web. Everything is subject to eDiscovery. The web has little or no privacy. It is easy to make a high profile mistake. It is less personal and it is less targeted.

- “...And soon I will be knocking upon your door.”

Web 2.0 is now in the process of being replaced by Web 3.0 and will dramatically change our use of the Internet in the future. Broadband voice, video and information over wires, satellite and newly available “white space” airwaves as a result of the

changeover from analog to digital TV will transform instant messaging, searching and surveillance on the web.

The third generation web will find you when you go online! Advertising will be highly targeted. Previous searches will generate more “suggestions.” The battle lines are already drawn. Microsoft (Bing), Google (Chrome, Android and Google TV), Apple (iPhone, iPad and Apple TV) and Facebook all want to change the web to their advantage. Lawyers will need to adapt quickly to stay ahead of this new technology.

- “Ain’t it good to know you’ve got a friend.”

Clients routinely use Google, Bing and Yahoo to learn more about the attorneys they intend to hire. What will they learn about you? Have you “Goggled” your name recently? Do you use Google Alert? There is no better time than now to review your “online brand” and to improve it by posting a profile you control on appropriate social network sites and by joining our Section on its Connected, LinkedIn and Facebook pages.

Our Section has established itself on three of the most popular social network sites for attorneys. This is an excellent mix of professional, business and personal social media sites for your consideration. Joining one of our group pages on Connected or LinkedIn or listing our Section as a “fan” of yours on Facebook clearly establishes for millions of potential clients and other attorneys your interest in real property, trust and estate law. In addition, Martindale’s Connected is the perfect place for sharing ideas among peers and asking for their suggestions in an online environment with many built-in safeguards for legal professionals. It is also a good place for referrals and to connect with in-house counsel. LinkedIn on the other hand is ideal for researching companies and reaching out to business professionals as well as establishing a cost efficient, increased visibility personal profile that can easily be tied to your firm’s web page. Facebook rounds off your online persona with personal information about your family, hobbies and other interests with information that is within your control. It puts a friendly, less formal, face on your “personal brand” or public image that you have created online. LinkedIn and Facebook also increase your personal search engine rank, especially if you regularly post comments, discussions, questions and news items that are also tied to your web page or blog. Search Engine Optimization or SEO is easy when you have a LinkedIn or Facebook page. LinkedIn and Facebook profiles usually appear in the top three search engine hits for your name.

For our Section, our social media sites are also a low cost way to attract new members, increase our Section's visibility (including the work of our committees), promote our publications and CLE events, open some of our benefits to the public, and preserve our work. It is also an excellent tool to expand our diversity efforts and to attract new corporate sponsors. Social media is here to stay; use it effectively.