

LinkedIn (or Left Out) for Lawyers

Janet Ellen Raasch

Janet Ellen Raasch is a writer, ghostwriter, copyeditor and blogger at Constant Content Blog who works closely with professional services providers – especially lawyers, law firms, legal consultants and legal organizations – to help them achieve name recognition and new business through publication of newsworthy and keyword-rich content for the web and social media sites as well as articles and books for print. She can be reached at (303) 399-5041 or jeraasch@msn.com.

Until recently, very few lawyers and corporate counsel had even heard of the social media site LinkedIn. In fact, it surprises many to learn that LinkedIn was launched ten years ago. How quickly things have changed!

Ninety-five percent of ABA members indicate that they have posted their profiles on LinkedIn. Seventy percent of corporate counsel indicate that they use LinkedIn regularly as a tool to find and vet outside counsel. These statistics come from a 2012 ABA survey.

LinkedIn is now one of the world's most popular websites. If you would like to be found by potential clients, your LinkedIn profile has become even more important than your website biography. If you are looking for networking opportunities, your LinkedIn presence and activity have become just as important as your face-to-face networking.

LinkedIn launched in May 2003. "From the very start, LinkedIn differentiated itself as a site for business, business development and recruitment rather than a social site," said Phil Nugent.

"In just ten years, LinkedIn has gained 225 million users around the world, including 80 million users in the United States," said Nugent. "More than 173,000 people join LinkedIn each day. It is a great place for many attorneys, because the demographics of LinkedIn skew older, wealthier and more-educated than any of the other top social media sites."

Nugent discussed effective use of LinkedIn by lawyers and law firms at the monthly educational meeting of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the [Legal Marketing Association](#), held July 9 at Sullivan's Steakhouse in LoDo Denver. Nugent is a non-practicing attorney and principal at [NCG Strategic Marketing](#).

"Successful use of LinkedIn as a business development tool has three steps," said Nugent. "First, you must post a complete and compelling profile. All too many lawyers and law firms leave it at that, however, and then wonder why LinkedIn is not working as well as they had hoped.

"To achieve success on LinkedIn, you must build a strong network of connections in terms of both quality and quantity," said Nugent. "With this accomplished, you can leverage LinkedIn as a business development tool to find others, to get found and to conduct market research."

Getting Started on LinkedIn

The creation and posting of a good profile is step one of a solid LinkedIn presence. However, it should not be the same as a lawyer's website bio. Instead, it should be designed to satisfy the unique needs of LinkedIn's search algorithm.

"LinkedIn's algorithm uses a metric to quantify profile strength, which has a huge effect on search results," said Nugent. "Different areas of your LinkedIn profile carry different weights. You should aim for a profile-strength of "all-star," or as close to 100 percent as possible."

Nugent discussed and gave specific recommendations regarding the algorithm's weights.

Name and title (25 percent) -- Do not make the mistake of simply listing a generic job title in this very important space. It should include carefully selected keywords – the keywords that those searching for someone like you are likely to use. The title category can be as long as 120 characters, or about 18 words.

Photo (5 percent) – A profile that includes a photo is seven times more likely to be viewed than one without a photo. Be sure that the photo is both professional and recent.

Summary (10 percent) – Use your summary to tell a compelling story about how you help clients solve their legal problems. This section should include plenty of keywords. It can include up to 2,000 characters, or about 350 words. Spell check is always recommended.

Education (15 percent)

Previous two jobs (30 percent)

Three recommendations (15 percent)

Another smart tactic for promotion of your LinkedIn presence is to customize your profile's URL. LinkedIn automatically generates a random URL, but this easily can be changed to a much shorter version featuring your name. Additionally, you should be sure to add links to your website and blog.

On the "Edit Profile" page you can add content modules that include projects, publications, honors and awards, patents, certifications and languages.

"Throughout your LinkedIn profile, remember that content is king," said Nugent. "The copy should be compelling and should include plain-English keywords that are the same words that will be used by your target market or your ideal clients. These keywords should indicate who you are and what you do. Avoid 'legalese' -- unless your clients use it, too."

Once you have prepared and posted a strong LinkedIn profile, you want to make sure that people can actually gain access to it. Go to the "privacy controls" section of your profile and choose the settings that allow "everyone" to view your profile photo and visibility.

Creating a LinkedIn Network

To support a strong LinkedIn profile, you need a strong network. When it comes to building a network, you can pitch as well as catch. This means that you shouldn't rely only upon the invitations that you receive; you should proactively send invitations to those with whom you would like to be connected.

A LinkedIn network works like a big circle, with you in the middle. First-degree connections are direct connections. These are the people you have accepted and who have accepted you. Second-degree connections are friends of these friends. Third-degree connections are friends of second-degree connections. Your level of visibility into third-degree connections is limited, and a request to connect must be routed through the second-degree connection that controls the relationship.

"The quality of your network is important," said Nugent. "If you accept too many random invitations, your network, although large, may not be sufficiently useful. If you accept (and send) too few invitations, you won't be able to use the database as it was designed.

"Before accepting any invitation," said Nugent, "ask yourself if this person is potentially a client or a source for the kind of work you really want to do. Strive for balance between the quantity and the quality of the invitations you accept."

When vetting an invitation, check out the inviter's profile. Is the invitation from a real and (apparently) respectable individual? Does the inviter have quality contacts that might prove valuable? Does the inviter have a large number of contacts? Did the inviter include a personal note with the invitation? "Rely on these factors to determine if it makes good sense to connect," said Nugent.

When sending out your own invitations, start with your existing contact list. Include your firm's partners, associates and staff; members of professional, business and industry groups that you belong to; and referral sources, clients and friends.

"Never allow your network to stagnate," said Nugent. "It should grow continuously. When you meet a new contact, follow up within 48 hours with an invitation to connect on LinkedIn instead of (or in addition to) an email or a written note. To facilitate this tactic among those you meet, consider including your LinkedIn address on your business card."

Using LinkedIn for Research

"A well-crafted LinkedIn network is like a finely tuned sports car," said Nugent. "It's really a waste if you just let it sit in the garage. You should take it out for a spin as often as possible. The more you 'drive' LinkedIn, the more you'll discover its usefulness -- and the more you'll realize what a powerful tool it can be on a daily basis."

Your LinkedIn network is essential when conducting pre-interaction due diligence. "You can search your network in order to find out useful information about prospects, their companies, clients, competitors, consultants, referral partners, media sources and employees," said Nugent. "The quality of your results will be determined by the quality of your contacts and the size of your network.

“LinkedIn can help provide answers to many important questions,” said Nugent. “These include who is the right person to talk to in a particular organization? What can I discover about this person prior to our meeting? Who else is on their team? Who might be able to provide me with background or an introduction?”

LinkedIn’s “advanced search” capability allows you to refine a search by relationship, location, current company, industry, past company, school and language. Search can be further narrowed by groups, years of experience, function, seniority level, interests, company size, Fortune ranking and date joined.

Lawyers who want expanded search capabilities and additional functionality can try a premium membership on a monthly basis rather than sticking with the basic free membership. However, the free membership provides plenty of power for most LinkedIn users.

“In just ten years, LinkedIn has gone from being a novelty embraced by techies to a must-have marketing tool for all professionals who hope to compete in today’s marketplace,” said Nugent. “By creating a strong profile and a robust network, and by being an active user, any lawyer can vastly enhance his or her online visibility and reputation.”