

# Lawyer Twitter Practices: 29 Do's and Don'ts

Steve Matthews | April 2009

Twitter is undeniably the social media darling of 2009. From celebrity stalking to Oprah coverage, the *monopoly of micro-blogging* is now pushing 10 million active users. The legal profession is equally aboard this bandwagon, with adoption numbers rising fast. Where tools such as LinkedIn and Facebook have traditionally helped to create value from existing relationships, Twitter is fast gaining its reputation as a tool to help generate new relationships.

So Twitter gets your foot in the door? A great tool for business development, right? Unfortunately, the answer to that question is a very lawyeresque 'it depends'. While deriving business value from of Twitter is indeed possible, that value is often indirect in nature and depends greatly on personal approach. Similar to all forms of the online participation, there's no room for the *Injured? Call now!* lawyer. Those that can't drop the advertising and solicitation approach are inviting failure.

It's these types of lessons that I hope to address in the list below - which tactics will put you offside, and which will add value. The following practices (I'm hesitant to call them 'best practices') are tips that either work for me, or methods that seem to consistently work for others. Enjoy!

## The Dos

1. **Do** start by replicating your offline network on Twitter. There's a much greater likelihood that people you already know in real life will follow you back.
2. **Do** be strategic, geography-wise, about who you follow. Consider whether you stand a realistic chance of future networking, referrals, friendship, or other value before clicking "follow".
3. In the same vein, **do** understand professional demographics. If you're a tax lawyer and you know that a good deal of your work comes from accountants or other financial services professionals, seek out those people. Just as you would in real life, use Twitter to embed yourself in your chosen industry — show that you are in tune with the industries that relate to and intersect with your own.
4. **Do** exchange content and opinions.
5. **Do** be thought-provoking.
6. **Do** poll your followers and ask questions. Take advantage of the opportunity to consult the crowd. The more followers you have, the more varied the responses, and the more value you get from your network.
7. **Do** recommend books and articles that you've read.

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8. **Do** tweet about events and conferences you attend. Identify the event's #hashtag before you get there – you can't attend all the sessions, but you can track what people are saying about them.
9. **Do** keep a balanced approach when demonstrating your professional and personal characteristics; don't veer too much in either direction.
10. **Do** post your blog posts to Twitter. It's a great place for feedback as well as continued conversation on the topic. (Tip: use Twitterfeed (<http://www.twitterfeed.com/>) to automate this process.)
11. **Do** use Twitter to publicize your upcoming speaking engagements.
12. **Do** use your real name as your username, the one that people know you by. Your name is your brand, after all! There is SEO value in Twitter only insofar as it can help extend the reach of your content and build a network — there's no *juice* in the links you post or the URL in your profile. One exception on the branded username: If you've built a personal brand around a name other than your own (e.g., @taxgirl), staying consistent takes priority.
13. **Do** craft your Twitter bio with consideration, and use the 160 characters wisely. Cut right to the chase with what you do and, offer a keyword rich profile to help others find you. Although Twitter has a social slant to it, use a balanced approach: if your description is too "business", people may be inclined not to follow you. But by the same token, if your bio appears too personal, people can't discern what you do for a living.
14. **Do** track what people are saying about you, by using your @username in Twitter search (<http://search.twitter.com/>) - for instance, @stevematthews—<http://twitter.com/timeline/home#search?q=@stevematthews>). The replies function in Twitter misses references to your username mid-tweet.
15. **Do** respond when people engage you in conversation.
16. **Do** include a photo in your profile. Not everyone is comfortable with displaying a photo, but the reality is that it's standard practice. People are reluctant to follow or trust someone who isn't willing to use a picture of their face. As for how formal your picture is, that's up to your individual taste.
17. **Do** get yourself listed on Adrian Lurssen's big list of lawyers to follow on Twitter (<http://scoop.jdsupra.com/2008/09/articles/law-firm-marketing/145-lawyers-and-legal-professionals-to-follow-on-twitter/>)...but **don't** follow the entire list indiscriminately and without vetting.
18. **Do** use an application like Tweetdeck to filter topics, create groups, and maximize your time on Twitter.
19. **Do** engage the people you follow in conversation shortly after you connect. Ask them a question, or inquire about something they've read. They'll be more likely to follow you back! And as much as I like web-automations, don't auto-welcome new followers – it's obvious & tacky.

### The Don'ts

1. **Don't** follow more than 100 people than are following you. Watch the ratio and consider what it says about you. Following 6000 and being followed by 120 says twitter-spammer.
2. Despite the fact that you may be using Twitter as a marketing tool, **don't** try to solicit business or make sales. It looks spammy, and aside from that, a number of states that have state bar ethics

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- rules that prevent ANY type of solicitation. Bottom line: you gain business by letting people know what you do for a living and what makes your job meaningful.
3. **Don't** tweet more than 10 times a day or more than five times an hour. There are different schools of thought on this one – for instance, Jim Calloway advises that four times a day is appropriate (<http://www.okbar.org/news/onlineexclusives/twitter.htm>). This might seem low compared to others you follow, but in the end, you don't look like a busy professional if you're tweeting all day.
  4. **Don't** feel compelled to answer the question “What are you doing?” – but don't worry if you occasionally are.
  5. **Don't** tweet anything you wouldn't want to be quoted on in the news. Twitter exists in the public space – remember that it's micro-blogging and as available and accessible as any other type of public commentary.
  6. **Don't** expect to read everything on your Twitter feed. Think of it as a river, or a fire hose! Jump in -stream, participate, and then get out. NEVER worry about what you've missed – it doesn't work that way.
  7. **Don't** forget to consider the formal to informal rule (<http://www.slaw.ca/2009/03/07/the-formal-to-informal-rule-of-lawyer-web-publishing/>) – piping blog posts (formal) to Twitter (informal) is a great idea, but you'll want to be careful when reversing the direction of that flow.
  8. It should go without saying, but **don't** tweet anything about a client without explicit permission. Along the same lines, even if it's good or exciting news about the client, don't assume that the client has already made it public. Even if it IS public, you may still want to get permission first.
  9. **Don't** forget to fill out the location portion of your Twitter profile. Be accurate about the geographic region where you work. This is a simple step to help establish your presence locally.
  10. **Don't** let Twitter replace your personal blog, if you have one. Medium-length discourse is still a better way to impart your knowledge and exhibit your skill as a lawyer.

What do you think? Do you agree with these? Disagree? Leave a comment with your own ideas and suggestions.

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