

LinkedIn to My Facebook on My Blog Social Media for Lawyers and Law Firm Staff

There has been a lot of buzz about social media sites. In case you missed it, "You" were Time's Person of the Year for 2006. There is now more user-generated content than media-generated content on the internet. LinkedIn.com claims to have more than 17 million professionals using its site, and Facebook.com claims to have at least 64 million active users. ILTA even has its own group on LinkedIn, with almost 350 members at last count (Many thanks to Jeffrey Brandt, CIO of Cozen O'Connor, for creating that group and individually approving all 350 of its members!). Technorati.com, a website that actively indexes and tracks web content, is actively tracking 112.8 million blogs at last count, and says there are over 175,000 new blogs being created every day. According to Real Lawyers Have Blogs, 39 of the AmLaw 200 firms have bloggers as of August 2007. Justia.com lists over 2,000 law blogs (law blogs) as of February 2008. With all of those people using these sites, if you are not already using them, you must know some people who are using them. With all of those people using social media, lawyers and law firm staff need to consider whether they are useful for personal networking, generating business, recruiting and staying in touch with alumni.

What Are These Sites and How Do They Work?

Both LinkedIn and Facebook are social networking sites that allow you to share information about yourself with the people you know or with the public in general, depending on your tolerance for disclosure. Both sites allow you to control who sees what pieces of the information you chose to make available. They are also free, so you can start using them and experimenting with them for no out-of-pocket cost.

LinkedIn is a great tool to share connections and create an online resume, and it is the easiest first step into social media. When you create an account, you can publish less information than you have on your business card. You can easily expand that to the information you have on your resume, and take small steps in adding more information as you choose. Then you can hunt down "connections" to people in your firm, former classmates, fellow ILTAns and contacts in your address book. However, once you make the connections and finish your LinkedIn profile, there is not much else to do. You can answer questions from other members of the LinkedIn community and provide recommendations for your connections. But there is a very limited ability to share day-to-day information with your connections.

That is where Facebook comes in. It is a good second step into social media. Facebook allows you to share information about yourself, both personal and professional if you choose. Facebook was founded in February of 2004 on the campus of Harvard as a way for college students to communicate. You can see the early origins of Facebook as the contents of your college paper "face-book" and the white board on your dorm room door being combined into an electronic media.

Facebook is all about communication and sending information. Facebook aggregates and dis-aggregates information in several ways. In your personal mini-feed, there is a history of what you have done with Facebook, including new people on your friends list, new personal information that you put in your profile, your communications with other members, and

various new applications you have added to your profile (although you can suppress items if you want). Your mini-feed is aggregated out and combined with other mini-feeds, so your Facebook friends see your updated information combined with the updates from their other friends. Updates and notifications have RSS feeds associated with them, so you can be updated via your feed reader (assuming you have one), rather than having to go back into Facebook. Essentially, you are mini-blogging. Facebook is powerful tool for distributing information to your "friends."

Of course, there is a lot of frivolous communication in Facebook. (Just as there is a lot of frivolous communication in your firm's email). However, there is a lot of personal and professional communication in Facebook as well. Where do you draw the line? One person may view a set of pictures as a drunken out-of-control party. To others, it is simply the usual firm holiday party.

You should not dismiss Facebook just because it was originally created by college students for college students. Now it is a multi-billion dollar company with tens of millions of active users. Some of those are bound to be people you know and some of them are letting you know more about themselves and publishing some useful information. Facebook also opened their platform to allow other applications to tie into their platform. For example, we both have our blog posts published in Facebook to our Facebook "friends." You can tie your movie watching habits into Facebook through Flixster. You can tie the books you are reading into Facebook through Shelfari. You can even point your Facebook "friends" to your LinkedIn profile!

Facebook is still relatively new. Its strong tie-in with college students indicates that Facebook's users are going to be pouring into the business community in the next few years as they graduate. Will Facebook crumble under the weight of bad social behavior or dominate as a communications platform? If it is going to crumble, we can ignore it. HOWEVER, if it becomes a dominant communications platform, we cannot afford to ignore it.

Looking back many years to the adoption of email, businesses (especially law firms) ignored it for a while. Eventually, they had to adopt it in order to communicate efficiently. Now, college-age students use Facebook as a primary way to communicate; they use email sparingly. Facebook has become the new email for the college-age crowd. Will it become a new communications tool for business as this generation enters the workforce?

There are also lawyer-specific social network sites developing. LawLink and Legal OnRamp are each in their early stages. Of course, the idea of an on-line social network site just for lawyers may not sound very exciting. However, the practice of law and the development of a law practice is about developing relationships. Legal OnRamp is going a step further by developing a large repository of substantive legal knowledge to go along with its lawyer-to-lawyer (and in-house counsel) social networking.

Beyond these tools are blogs, which you can use to communicate your thoughts and message to the online world. Like other social media sites, they are free or very low cost. We set up our blogs in less than ten minutes. You do not need any programming language or learn any special techniques. Wordpress, Blogger, Movable Type and several other vendors provide free blogs and host them on their servers. You just pick a design and some colors, and then you can be off and blogging! Of course, you do need to decide what you want to blog about.

How can I use these sites for marketing myself?

Creating Your Brand

One of the most powerful tools in any marketing campaign is having a brand. No, we do not mean the kind made by hot irons, but some folks think this is just as painful before they try. Your firm has probably gone to great efforts to position itself in the marketplace and attract its target clients, and has probably had some measure of success doing so. According to almost every career site on the planet, creating your own brand in order to position yourself in the marketplace and attract your target "clients" is one of the most effective ways to reap career results.

If you already have a presence on the internet, take a step back and make sure that it says about you what you might want potential employers or clients to know. If you have pictures on MySpace that might not go over well in a business context, I would suggest that now is the time to lock your profile down to private, so that only your drinking buddies can see the pictures. If you have lots of little silly applications on your Facebook, you should consider whether you want a potential employer to see them. If you have a blog describing your adventures in breastfeeding, it might be time to change topics slightly—the world loved reading www.dooce.com when she stuffed cabbage in her bra, but your managing partner might not like it as much. (It should be noted that Heather Armstrong, the writer of dooce.com was actually fired for the content of her blog, creating the term "dooiced" for being fired for online shenanigans).

If you do not know what online presence you might have, it is probably time to Google yourself. You might find that, like Jenn, you share a name with a porn star—quite a shock to her father when he Googled her! For Doug, who has been using social media for a longer time, the top ten results in Google all refer to his presence on the internet, only one of which is his profile on his firm's website. You might find that the first few hits are your firm, your presentation at ILTA, your LinkedIn profile, and your 25th college reunion. Or you might find that you have no presence at all.

Once you know what is out there, you can start building the presence that you *want* potential employers and clients to see. One of the easiest places to start professionally is the first site we mentioned: LinkedIn. Go to <http://www.linkedin.com/> and click "Join now". The more completely you fill out your profile, the more people will recognize you from three jobs back. Create links to your firm, your professional blog, and your volunteer organization, and people can find out even more about you (again—only what you want them to know!). Once your profile is complete, start searching based on name, company, or group, and invite people you know to connect. Set your profile to public, and you will start seeing your LinkedIn profile on Google!

A LinkedIn profile, may not be enough to show your brand and your expertise to the world. If your firm policies allow it and you have something worthwhile to say, you may consider starting a blog. If your firm does not allow professional blogging, then they should. Some firms have theme-based blogs for their clients, and you may be able to contribute to one of those. Whatever you decide to do, make sure that it is both professional and consistent with the image you want to portray.

Blogs are one of the best ways to get your message out there; search engines love content in blog form. All of the linking and cross-linking is what makes the internet so useful.

Remote Social Networking

The ILTA eGroups are a powerful tool for remote social networking, but it can be difficult to find information about your colleagues from across the globe. Sites like LinkedIn and Facebook can be valuable tools for remote social networking. Did you meet someone at a conference and wonder where her or she might have worked before? A business card can only tell you so much about a person, but their LinkedIn profile might tell you much more. Do you wonder what friends or colleagues you have in common? Check their friends or connections. Do you wonder what books she is reading or what his latest blog post might be? Check out Facebook. You never know what you might find, although you probably hope it is professional, rather than intensely personal.

These sites are also a way to continue "listening" to a person after having met them. Email or telephone communication is great, but there is only so much time in the day.

Finding that Job...

According to almost every job site and recruiter, a huge percentage of job seekers find positions via networking rather than via postings. But who has time for intensive face-to-face networking these days? Whether you are supporting a 24/7 shop or servicing clients every minute of every day, it can be difficult to keep up with connections in anticipation of needing to find your next big opportunity.

Here is where these sites can help you. Just as with remote social networking, these sites help you keep in touch with recruiters and colleagues from across the globe. Because these sites provide up-to-date ways to contact people, you do not have to worry about dead contacts in your address book--just send a message via the appropriate site!

How can I use these sites for marketing my firm?

Alumni

Instead of creating your own silo of internal alumni databases, use the social media where your firm's alumni may already be. As an extranet provider will tell you, 99% of the site maintenance is related to creating user accounts and retrieving passwords. A walled community for alumni creates another user and password that the user needs to remember. LinkedIn allows you to create a private group, allowing you to restrict who can get into the group; there are groups for ILTA and Goodwin Procter. It allows you to easily add connections and then track those connections as they change their LinkedIn profile information.

Recruitment

Use social sites to stay in touch with young recruits. They will be more interested in real communication and interaction than slick marketing videos. Doug conducted a survey of Goodwin Procter's summer associates during the summer of 2007:

- More than 80% have a Facebook account
- Of those, 2/3 check Facebook at least once a day
- Only 25% have a LinkedIn account

- Of those, only 10% check LinkedIn once a week, with the rest answering rarely

The future associates are already using Facebook as a way to communicate. The Goodwin Procter summer associates of 2007 formed their own Facebook group. The recruiters at law firms should think about stepping into the forum that their candidates are already using. Goodwin Procter plans to launch a Facebook group for its summer class of 2008. This should give the summer associates a chance to introduce themselves to each other and find out about each other prior to showing up at the law firm's doorstep.

LinkedIn and Facebook are only two of the more popular social networking sites. As more people are using these, users are starting to splinter into smaller network sites focused on their profession. We already mentioned LawLink and Legal OnRamp for lawyers.

Intranet/Extranet

Firms can even use social sites as intranets/extranets. Facebook is powerful enough that at least one firm has chosen to use Facebook as its Intranet. [<http://kmspace.blogspot.com/2007/12/facebook-as-intranet.html>]. Also, with the Facebook's open platform you can integrate your enterprise systems into their platform. Worklight's Workbook tool allows you to share project information and expertise within the Facebook platform. Your corporate information stays on your servers, but is wrapped around the Facebook communications platform.

Show Your Expertise

Blogs are a great way to communicate your expertise to clients and colleagues. Networking is really about giving something to the group and joining the conversation. A blog is a great way for your firm to be part of the conversation. The blog content will get indexed much more rapidly by internet search engines and displayed higher in results than static pdf documents published to your firm's website. If you want to get known out there as an expert, there is nothing easier than getting that done through publishing good content on a blog. The second thing is to start searching and reading other blogs that are on the same or a similar topic. You can engage that other blog author in conversations on your topic. Leave comments, join his/her social networks, get yourself known to them, and provide relevant commentary. Add to the conversation.

Some Warnings

For lawyers, blogs and profiles in LinkedIn and Facebook and similar sites can be considered advertising in some states. So if your lawyers are going to be using these sites, they should be cautioned to comply with their states' ethical requirements.

Unfortunately, some law firms have strict policies about blogging and other social networking activities. You should check on the policies before setting up any professional blog that could be traced back to your firm.

If you set up an account on a social network site, you need to go back and make sure that your profile remains true and does not violate the ethics rule for your jurisdiction. If you do not maintain your profile or do not check back on your profile, then delete your account.

Whether or not you have set up an internet presence, you should be checking to see what

might be out there about you. Set up a search for your name and see what the internet is saying--you may be able to take action by deleting things or contacting site administrators if what you find is unfortunate. It is very easy to set up a perpetual search through [Google](#), [Yahoo](#) and many other search providers, which can alert you when new items appear on the internet. Unfortunately for Jenn, that may be a lot of porn!

About the Authors

Doug Cornelius is a knowledge management attorney at Goodwin Procter LLP, focusing on ways for attorneys to better collaborate, capture their experience and work more efficiently. He is the author of *KM Space*, a blog focusing on law firm knowledge management. <http://kmspace.blogspot.com>.

Jenn Steele has been in technology since 1998, when the dot-com boom lured her away from biology. She has been in legal technology since 2000, and is the New England Regional Vice President of ILTA. She is the author of *Leading Geeks*, a blog focusing on best practices for leading technologists. <http://leadinggeeks.blogspot.com>.