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Real-time Web a game changer

You'll have to forgive me for having online technologies, including social media, on my mind a lot lately.

I've been speaking about social media for lawyers quite a bit in recent months and am now enmeshed in the process of writing a book with Carolyn Elefant about social media for lawyers, which will be published by the American Bar Association.

As a result, I've spent a good deal of time mulling over how the rapidly changing world of online technology will affect the legal profession. The technologies are evolving at a rapid pace and changing the world around us on a global scale. Rest assured, our profession is not immune to the paradigm shift.

Social media, cloud computing, mobile computing, real-time Web and real-time search are some of the core areas predicted to be game changers over the coming year.

Lawyers cannot afford to ignore the trends and should, at the very least, make an effort to learn and understand the concepts.

Two major developments were announced last week that will make one of the predicted game changing trends — real-time Web and real-time search — a more viable reality. Twitter announced agreements with Bing (Microsoft's search engine) and Google to allow both engines full access to its data, as produced in real time. Microsoft also negotiated an agreement with Facebook that will allow Bing access to some of Facebook's data.

Of course, some of you are probably wondering: What is the real-time Web, and why should I care? Good question.

In July, Wikipedia described the real-time Web as: "[T]he concept of searching for and finding information online as it is produced. Advancements in web search technology coupled with growing use of social media enable online activities to be queried as they occur.

"A traditional web search crawls and indexes web pages periodically, returning results based on relevance to the search query. The real time web delivers the most popular topics recently discussed or posted by users. The content is often "soft" in that it is based on the social web — people's opinions, attitudes, thoughts and interests — as opposed to hard news or facts."

Now in its infancy, the real-time Web soon will be common-

place, and will allow instantaneous access to information on any topic or event, as soon as that information becomes available, and as the event is occurring.

At first glance, that may not seem to be an earth-shattering concept, but it is a paradigm shift worthy of note. Lawyers should sit up and take notice.

User-generated content, the fundamental building block of the "social Web," now is more influential, and instantaneously is given more credence as a result of appearing in search engine results as soon as it is created.

Criticisms of legal employers or law schools appearing on Twitter have become infinitely more powerful.

Small businesses, including law firms, that use Twitter or Facebook as part of their marketing efforts online can strategically tweak their marketing approach on those platforms to mirror trends and topics affecting their business, and thereby appear higher in search engine results.

Astute lawyers likewise will use real-time search to locate issues and trends that may affect their areas of practice, then tailor their marketing and litigation efforts accordingly. Class action attorneys, for instance, can search for real-time complaints about a particular drug or product and predict when or where a class of injured people may exist long before their technologically deficient colleagues get wind of it.

Make no mistake about it — real-time search finally is here, and it's going to alter the way that business is done. It's a game changer, folks.

At the very least, learn about it and understand its ramifications. If you're feeling especially daring, put it to work for your law practice. It can never hurt to stay ahead of the curve, especially when most of your competitors don't even realize the curve exists.

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