

How to Sign Up for Twitter and Facebook Accounts

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In September, dozens of Palm Beach County Bar Association members crossed the digital divide to become new Twitter and Facebook users when they attended the Technology Committee's Tweet, Meet and Eat seminar. If you couldn't make it, here is a quick overview of how to sign up and start using these social networking sites. Also, the PowerPoint presentation from the seminar is available under "Materials" at FloridaLawCommentary.com. You will never know if these social networking sites can help market and improve your law practice without setting up your own accounts and taking them for a test drive.

Twitter – Visit www.twitter.com and hit "Sign up now." Pick a sensible, short username and create a free account (you can delete it at any time). Under "Settings" (upper right corner), go to "Account" and provide your background information. Under "Devices," include your mobile phone number so you can receive messages on your mobile phone (alternatively, if you have a smartphone you can use a Twitter program like Twitterrific). Under "Notices," set if/when you receive emails from Twitter and use "Picture" and "Design" to add some flair to your Twitter page.

Now you need to "follow" people to get a sense of how short 140-character posts work. In the top right corner, click "Find People" and enter someone's real name or user name. For local legal information, consider following SpenWen (Palm Beach Post legal reporter), PBCBar Prez, and your authors, cbhopkins and martin_di. For news, follow WPTV, WPBF, PBPost, and CNNbrk. Finally, for local interest tweets, search and follow WestPalmBch, CityPlaceWPB, and TheGardensMall. Alternatively, on the "Find People" page, consider any of the Suggested Users.

Go back to the Twitter home page, click "Following," and look at the list of people you are following. To the right of each name and most recent post, you can set whether that person's posts will be sent as a text message to your mobile phone or not. Ideally, you want to access Twitter on a smartphone rather than log onto the website – the 140-character posts are easy to quickly skim in a spare moment.

You can search for keywords and topics on Twitter by going to search.twitter.com. As a test, enter "PBCBA" to see recent posts about the Bar association. Why not mention PBCBA in your first Twitter post (aka "tweet")? Go back to the Twitter home page and type in a message no longer than 140 characters. Now other local bar members can find and follow you by searching for PBCBA.

These steps will get you going on Twitter. Feel free to print out the PowerPoint from the seminar for more tips on direct messages, "at replies," how to gain followers, and how to market your practice. By just making an effort to use and familiarize yourself with Twitter, you will find effective uses for it in no time.

Facebook – Facebook is easier to use and understand because you will immediately see friendly faces of fellow users you know in real life when you create your account. But privacy settings are important, so be careful to check the right settings when you sign up. Note you can also create a separate, public page for your law firm. This is like having a second website presence on the Internet – without cost.

Go to Facebook.com and, just like with Twitter, select a reasonable username for your account. Facebook will send an email to you, which you need to confirm. Back on Facebook, take

five minutes to follow the four steps to add friends and create your online profile. The more information you provide, the easier it will be for friends to find you (depending upon your privacy settings).

You will then get a "welcome to facebook, [your name]" page. Use "find people you know" and "Friend Finder" to see if Facebook can match you with people you know from your area or prior schools, and people with similar names. Facebook can even access your email contacts and search for Facebook users. Most people have allowed Facebook this one time access to their email list and there are no known reports of security risks. Expect that up to 50% of your email contacts will have Facebook accounts. For some final connections, search for "Palm Beach Bar Association" or your authors.

Once you have amassed some Facebook friends, you will need to spend some time with your settings. Click "Settings," then "Account Settings" in the upper right corner of the screen. Here you can join networks (categorized by city, workplace, school, or region) that will make it easier to connect with other people in the same network. You can also specify which email notifications you would like to receive and set you account to send these notifications to your mobile phone. Just like Twitter, there are Facebook applications available for accessing the site on smartphones.

Now click on "Privacy Settings." Click "Profile" and specify who you want to be able to view your Facebook profile and what information they can see. You can make your entire profile viewable by everyone; your networks and friends (which is a broad grant of access, particularly if you joined a large network like "West Palm Beach"); your friends as well as their friends; or just your friends. You can also make the settings for each portion of your profile different by allowing more people to see your "Basic Info" than your "Personal Info," for instance. Go back to the "Privacy Settings" page and go through the list specifying what information you want accessible through Facebook and general internet searches, what information you want to appear on your "wall" (main page you will see each time you log into your Facebook account), and what information you want accessible to third-party applications that interact with Facebook. Many users play games, take quizzes, or use other small applications on Facebook – often not realizing that applications publish your results and what you are up to. Turn most, if not all, of those sharing settings to off. Also check "deny" to Beacon websites, which is simply a marketing tool for Facebook.

Now, go back to your Facebook homepage and look at the posts of some of your new Facebook friends. Then join in with a comment of your own. You will soon find Facebook is a great place to reconnect with people that you do not get to see often, as well as a great place to meet new people and even market your law practice.

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