

Taney's a-Twitter for clients — and fun

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If you want a snapshot of Frank Taney's world, look no further than his Twitter page. Taney, a younger partner at Buchanan Ingersoll law firm, who goes by the moniker "Scary Lawyer," discusses why Tom Petty's "Apartment Song" is a lost classic, why the Phillies had no business winning the previous night's game or how intricate his 6-year-old son's Lego set is compared to those from his own childhood.

But he mixes that in with his professional life, where he represents technology-centric clients. He discusses an upcoming meeting with a prospective client from Australia or an event he is planning in his capacity as president of the Entrepreneurs Forum of Greater Philadelphia, which featured speakers such as Mayor Michael Nutter and Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank CEO Charles Plosser.

"I've come to use it as a mix of professional and personal things I choose to share," Taney said. "It's partly self-expression but not as extensive as a formal blog. I can also get the word out about certain things that are important to my clients."

But while Taney is all a-Twitter about the social networking site, most large law firms are still trying to wrap their heads around whether the latest social networking craze is worth the time investment.

"Twitter has been around a much shorter time than Facebook and LinkedIn and lawyers are not fast adopters of new technology," said Pam Woldow, a consultant with Altman Weil of Newtown Square who conducts social networking tutorials with law firms. "Associates are already on all the social networks but not partners. There is a generational gap. The jury is still out on Twitter in terms of its effectiveness compared to the others, which are more blog-like."

Twitter is a micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets — postings of no more than 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to subscribers who are known as followers.

Most of Philadelphia's large law firms do not have active Twitter accounts and those that do have not made much use out of them. The most active is Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis, which tweets whenever it has a new press release on its Web site. Marketing director Jim Matsoukas said the firm has seen an uptick in its Web site hits.

Woldow has not seen any law firm use Twitter effectively yet.

"They are just putting out more content from their Web site," Woldow said. "The next step is to interact with people to develop relationships. One way to do that is to follow thought leaders and get a sense of what's being written out there. Once you do that, you get your own followers and can then post something of interest to that population. And that can lead to direct messaging, which leads to relationships. It's a dialogue. If firms don't recognize that they are missing the boat."

Gina Rubel of Furia Rubel Communications in Doylestown also trains lawyers in the art of turning social networking into client development. She tells lawyers they can use social media to share information and cross-market practice areas but that tweeting about everyday life is fine because it builds relationships.

Rubel recently put out a query on Twitter looking for a lawyer to quote for one of her blog entries. A lawyer responded with a quote. But he also had a client in need of a public relations firm and

referred that client to Rubel.

Woldow recently gave a presentation about using social media for business development to Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young, which does not have an active Twitter account and is focusing on sites like Facebook because scads of its associates have accounts.

Executive Director Gilliam Facher said the session won over practice group leaders and now partners want to learn even more. But she thinks the firm needs to move quickly.

“A year from now, everyone will be in this market, so time is of the essence if you want to carve a niche for yourself,” Facher said.

Taney’s younger, tech-savvy client base is a perfect fit for Twitter. He said many do not have in-house lawyers and use Web searches as part of the process to find outside counsel. And Twitter does show up on those searches.

“No one has sent me work because they saw me on Twitter,” Taney said. But my clients like me to be technologically adept so it helps solidify those relationships.

“I have a client from Australia that found me through an Internet search. So I would not be surprised, in fact, I would expect, that sometime in the next year if someone reacts to one of my tweets and some business results from it.”