

Twitter: Still Misunderstood by Law Firms

Adrian Dayton

The National Law Journal
December 21, 2010



Adrian Dayton

According to the Pew Research Center, 8 percent of Internet users in the U.S. are using Twitter. While 8 percent may seem a small number, it represents a substantial population. More important than the size, though, is the influence wielded by that 8 percent. Every major media outlet has reporters and bloggers using Twitter to share information and to find sources. You can see for yourself at muckrack.com — an aggregator of Twitter conversations by reporters from every beat.

Most law firms get that Twitter is important, but they don't really grasp why it is important. To jump on the bandwagon, they have opened a firm Twitter account that broadcasts everything created by the firm. "Check out our Superlawyers!" "Check out our new offices!" "Look who just made Partner!" Twitter is being used to brag and broadcast. Other firms aren't even doing that much. Take [Cravath, Swaine & Moore](#); [Latham & Watkins](#); and [Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom](#) — they have Twitter accounts but have never shared a single tweet. I'm not sure which is worse: mega-firms not using Twitter, or using Twitter in an ineffective way.

Here are six ways in which lawyers and law firms could more fully take advantage of Twitter.

TWITTER AS A REAL-TIME RESEARCH TOOL

The networks broadcast the news every night. CNN.com has updates every few minutes. Twitter beats them all. Using <http://search.twitter.com>, you can instantly discover what is being said, blogged or reported about breaking news. Whether it's the latest news on Wikileaks, Brett Favre or the U.S. Supreme Court, Twitter searches can provide you with instant news but also with an unfiltered collection of thoughts, expressions and ideas about the latest news topics.

One of the biggest problems people have with Twitter is that there is already too much noise in their life from e-mail, Facebook and junk mail. They don't understand that tools like Twitter search can help them reduce the noise and focus only on those issues most important to them and to their clients. Go ahead and try it out — you may be surprised to see what people are sharing on Twitter about your area of expertise.

TWITTER AS A CUSTOMER SERVICE TOOL

Is it easy for your clients to get in contact with you? How easy? How fast is your response time? One of the great appeals of Twitter is that all communications are limited to 140 characters, so you can get the attention of even the busiest attorney or corporate client. I can't tell you how many busy professionals I know who won't respond to an e-mail or voice mail message but will respond immediately to a private message (called a direct message or "DM") on Twitter. It is much more manageable to respond immediately to a Tweet than to listen to the voice mail, delete it, write down

the phone number, then return the call. Twitter provides attorneys with a more efficient response time and a higher level of connectivity with their clients.

TWITTER AS A FOCUS GROUP

Some call Twitter the lazy man's Google search. There is a lot of truth to that. Twitter can be used to poll a wide audience on any topic you are curious to learn about. Let me give you an example. I am passionate about social media, but when it comes to programming or gadgets I know that there are hundreds of people on Twitter who know more than I do. So I send out a tweet to ask questions: Should I go iPhone or Android? I could Google the results, but wouldn't it be better to have live responses from people with real experience with both devices? Legal questions about cloud computing or e-discovery can easily be addressed to the engaged and educated populace on Twitter.

TWITTER AS A NETWORKING TOOL

Two weeks before I attend any major conference, I start networking through Twitter. I can run a search for the event and then identify something called the "hash tag" related to the event. The hash tag is a # followed by a few letters that identifies all conversations on Twitter related to a specific event. Let me give you an example. Last year I attended Legal Tech in New York, where Malcolm Gladwell spoke. By searching for "Legal Tech" on Twitter, I discovered that everybody talking about Legal Tech was using the hash tag "#LTNY." By running a simple search for "#LTNY," I could see what everybody was saying about this event. As a result, I was able to plan my networking meetings and after-parties well in advance of the conference.

Note: Twitter only works as a networking tool for attorneys if the attorneys themselves are using it. Just as your trainer can't do your push-ups for you, your marketing department can't do your online networking for you. Attorneys can start by searching for their next conference using <http://search.twitter.com>.

TWITTER CAN MAKE YOU FAMOUS

Twitter can make anybody a little famous. I'm not talking famous like Ashton Kutcher or Shaquille O'Neal, but it can make you famous in your own little niche. If you want to gain a national reputation online for your area of law, then Twitter is the perfect way to develop your own individual brand and, more importantly, to connect with others who are interested in that same area of law. Think of Twitter like the school lunchroom, except this lunchroom has more than 10 million people. Somewhere in that group, people are talking about a subject that is important to you. Join the discussion and greater exposure for your ideas and expertise will follow. On Twitter, the only barrier to entry is the quality of the content you create. The great ideas on Twitter are passed on, while the average, mundane ideas are quietly ignored. What do you want to be a little bit famous for? What do you already have a name for offline? How would you like to bring that reputation online? Twitter can help you get there.

TWITTER FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The law of seven touches holds that we must interact with potential clients seven times or more before they will buy our goods or services. Twitter is a perfect format to get additional touches with potential clients by sharing articles, commenting on information they are sharing or simply by checking in with them on Twitter from time to time. Twitter is a powerful tool to build deeper relationships with existing connections, as discussed in last week's article. There is also a community on Twitter that is very open to networking and conversation. This is one of the biggest flaws in most law firm social media strategies — they are all about broadcasting, and ignore the

opportunities online for conversation. Twitter makes it easy to meet new business contacts, set up phone calls and get meetings with potential referral sources. What can you possibly say in 140 characters that can help with business development? How about, "Let's have lunch next Tuesday at 12:30?"

Getting started on Twitter isn't easy, especially at first. It requires a time commitment to get going, but the attorneys who really understand Twitter use it not because it is new and innovative, but because it provides an advantage over their competitors and is a superior method of sharing information. It's time to get in the game and sign up for Twitter — not because everyone else is doing it, but because it works.

Adrian Dayton tweets [@adriandayton](#) and wrote the book, [Social Media for Lawyers: Twitter Edition](#). You can grab a free chapter of the book at <http://adriandayton.com>.