

Use Twitter to cut the clutter

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The other day my son was sitting next to me while I did some work on the computer. He started pushing icons on my screen with his finger. My computer doesn't have a touch screen like my iPad, so nothing happened, but it demonstrated an expectation my son is growing up with. He expects to get the media he wants, when he wants it at a touch of a button. When I was a kid (not very long ago) the only options for watching cartoons were right after school and Saturday morning. I wouldn't ever think of sleeping in on Saturday mornings or I would miss Transformers, HeMan and possibly even The Smurfs re-runs. I was completely at the mercy of the TV schedule. My son will likely never have to deal with this constraint. He can simply watch Cartoon Network all day every day, or the History Channel, ESPN or Seinfeld re-runs. I had to search through libraries to find content as a child; for my kid, finding content will be as simple as a Google search.

This search capability presents a problem, referred to by many as information overload. "I don't have time to answer my e-mails every day — how will I find time to use social media?" complained one attorney. "I just can't handle sifting through any more information," complained another. What these lawyers don't realize is that as this technology progresses, so does its ability to organize information.

Twitter is a great tool for organizing information. Think of every Twitter profile as a TV channel. Pick only the channels that are interesting to you. Interested in links to articles on employment law? Follow @danielschwartz. Interested in tech and antitrust? Follow Glen Manishin @glennm. Want to hear the latest on alternative fee arrangements? Patrick Lamb @valoremlamb is your guy. See, it isn't about consuming more content, it is about consuming more *relevant* content.

If you don't have time to search for multiple Twitter accounts to follow, there is a shortcut called Twitter lists. Many of the power users of social media have spent hours and hours organizing lists of people to follow that share about certain topics. Here we have Glenn Manishin's Twitter page, as you can see he has created lists with topics

ranging from tech-policy to skiing. You have the option of simply following an entire list, no additional research required. (Simply click on the list name and select "follow.")



The screenshot shows the Twitter profile of Glenn Manishin (@glennm). The profile includes a profile picture, name, bio, and a link to his blog. Below the profile information, there are navigation tabs for Timeline, Favorites, Following, Followers, and Lists. The Lists tab is selected, showing a list of lists created by @glennm, including @glennm/geeks, @glennm/ipad, @glennm/bloggers, @glennm/web-2-0, @glennm/skiing, @glennm/sports, @glennm/celebs, @glennm/tech-policy, @glennm/dc, and @glennm/power-ladies. A 'View All' link is also present.

Twitter is very different from e-mail, because whereas in e-mail your inbox fills up with messages as they arrive, Twitter functions much more like a river with information flowing by. There is new information coming in every moment. If you miss it, its gone. If something is very important however, it will likely be repeated or "re-tweeted" over and over, making it far less likely you miss it.

Another great tool for organizing all this information is Tweetdeck. It's a free download, and allows you to set up multiple columns with searches, lists and even allows integration of LinkedIn and Facebook streams. Many IT departments aren't big fans of Tweetdeck because it is a desktop application and requires you to download software to

your computer. If your IT department won't allow it, there is a similar Web-based tools called Hootsuite that is very similar and also very free.

Once you have started to organize your stream and set up tools like Tweetdeck to manage all of this new highly relevant information, it is time to turn off e-mail alerts. Go into the settings for Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook and limit e-mails being sent to you from these applications. If our objective is to prevent information overload, it is essential to turn off most e-mail alerts. You may still want to receive message from LinkedIn, because these allow you to respond directly to the sender of the message via e-mail, but I recommend turning all other alerts off.

Check-in at least once per day. One busy attorney I spoke with told me, "That shouldn't be a problem — I check Facebook at least once per hour." I wouldn't recommend checking quite so often; follow the advice of Tim Ferriss in the Four Hour Work Week and schedule the times you will be checking in with social media. If you turn off all the alerts and never log in, than you aren't any better off than before. Keep in mind this is a new process, and it takes time and effort to develop any new process, so be patient with yourself.

My grandparents aren't big fans of satellite TV. The prospect of picking between 300 channels is just too much for them. They prefer the manageable three channels they grew up with. If you just want three channels, that's fine — just make sure you use social media and technology to guarantee those three channels are the right channels for you.

Adrian Dayton is an attorney, speaker and author of the book Social Media for Lawyers: Twitter Edition (ARK Group 2009). He provides coaching and training for attorneys and practice groups, to help them develop high-value relationships through social media. Read more about social media for lawyers at <http://adriandayton.com>