



Marketing Tips

Social Networking – A Marketing Tool for Lawyers and Other Professionals

What is Social Networking?

Social Networking is the “6 degrees of separation” as enabled by the Internet. It harnesses the power of instant communication with a broad range of expression, and is able to reach individuals worldwide. It’s fundamentally about people, not organizations, and equalizes the power of relationships – putting professionals in large firms and solo practitioners on equal footing. Finally, it engages people through information.

What are the tools?

Social Networking provides a whole new set of Internet-enabled branding tools. Some of the most well-known sites are: LinkedIn (the most business-oriented site) Plaxo, Facebook (more casual), and MySpace (best for teens and 20-year olds). But everything on the Internet changes daily, so these will not be the last, or necessarily the best. There are also blogs, which are on-line shared journals maintained by an individual. A blog can also be a website in the form of a journal.

And then there is Twitter. Twitter is micro-blogging based on the simple question: “What are you doing?” The writer has 140 characters to answer. Although there is a lot of unimportant, silly information such as “I’m having a latte,” there is also more valuable information, such as “I’m speaking at

the Bar Association on Social Networking.”

What can Social Networking do for you?

Social Networking can expand your network from local to global. It can help you discover new blogs, mold your image, and distribute your news. You can meet people over a significantly larger geographic region in a much shorter time. You can follow – or lead – discussions on the newest legal changes that affect your practice and clients. Using it, you can refine your image based on your insight and knowledge of the subject now, in the present, not years later as in the past. You can distribute your news faster and cheaper than by printing and mailing a newsletter. And people can find you, follow your conversation, and reach out to you.

Who’s using Social Networking?

Lawyers: 2008 Networking Counsel Survey said: “50% of lawyers were using some type of Social Networking,” and last December *AmLaw 200 Report* said: “over 35% of the AmLaw 200 law firms have blogs” – some have more than one.

What is the value to you?

Using Social Networking tools, you can create an online community among other lawyers, professionals, in-house counsel, industry groups, and friends. It can draw you closer to clients, potential clients and key influencers. Use it as one of a combination of marketing tools to raise your profile over a wider area and share information. Social Networking is about sharing information.

Ethics considerations

Three caveats: Disclosing an attorney/client relationship without

the client’s authorization to do so is unethical. Recommendations that you receive could amount to testimonials, which are not permitted in some states. And Social Networking blurs the personal and the professional, which can be an issue for lawyers.

According to the ABA, “There are no exceptions – rules and codes for lawyer behavior apply to all aspects of public communication.” And although there are some written opinions on lawyers using Social Networking, there is little or no case law – yet.

How can Social Networking help your practice?

It demonstrates your expertise and helps you build your reputation. And you can follow conversations and meet people with shared interests.

Looking to the future, we know for certain that Social Networking as we know it today is certain to change – and change rapidly – because that is the nature of the Internet. The Net Generation (27% of the population) now outnumber the Baby Boomers (23% of the population). The Net Generation has always had the Internet. This is where future clients will be coming from.

According to a recent Nielson study, Social Networks and blogs are now used more than e-mail.

Recommendations

Create a profile on LinkedIn.

Explore Social Networking sites and evaluate what suits you best.

Have an objective.

Focus – it can be time-consuming, so stay on topic.

Have a strategy and review it often.

Contribute regularly.