

# DON'T BE AFRAID TO BE A SOCIAL MEDIA NOVICE

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The Bay Area is the land of the technology hipster. The ubiquitous white earbuds lazily dangling from every third passerby commuting to and from the Financial District in San Francisco provide a visual reminder that this, my dear technologically mundane friend, is *their* land, not yours.

Finally feel comfortable adopting that new-fangled iPad-Kindle-touch-iPhone-Droid-Blackberry-bluetooth-wireless-4G mobile device? Along comes the latest version that instantly makes your newly purchased machine passé. This, of course, after you grudgingly shelled out a few hundred dollars in the interest of at least nominally keeping up with the times and for the hopeful promise that you too may reap the improved efficiency, marketing, and entertainment that your first-adopter friends assured you would be your reward.

The desire to “measure up”—technologically speaking—can be both immense and overwhelming. The practical consideration of whether or not to buy in to what may be a passing fad leaves many risk-averse lawyers choosing to stay out of the formidable technological arms race altogether.

After all, what lawyer really has the time to become a master of the latest and greatest in technological innovation? You're busy enough trying to keep in touch with the latest and greatest in *legal* innovation, lest you miss the case that discusses the point that could lead to victory in the courtroom or, at the very least, stave off legal malpractice.

So while you may have heard that social media can transform your practice, you are rightfully skeptical that you have the resources, ability, or creativity truly to master the

online domain. There may be lawyers out there who have built their entire practices off of their social media prowess, but that isn't going to be *you* anytime soon, right?

The seductive messaging from your favorite Continuing Legal Education provider (The Bar Association of San Francisco, I can only presume) is aimed to convince you that with just one class you too can become a social media guru. But can a brief investment of your time in learning the ways of Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter really be worthwhile?

The answer to that question is a resounding *yes*.

Social media platforms are natural complements to what have always been the standard tools in the business of lawyering—networking, client development, building a referral base, presenting credentials, and marketing. Even a novice with limited exposure to social media can reap rewards for his or her law practice. And given that the price is right—all the forms of social media discussed in this article are completely free—what harm is there in giving it a go?

Facebook's stated mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.” With more than 500 million individuals with whom to connect, it's quite obviously the premier networking location for any lawyer.



The true beauty of Facebook is the ability to reconnect

with individuals from your past and more fully connect with those from your present. Former colleagues and long-lost friends abound on Facebook, and even social media

My suspicion is that the simple fun inherent in Facebook will keep you coming back to network with more and more individuals. Just remember to cultivate the benefits

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beginners will quickly find themselves connecting with people they wouldn't have otherwise encountered face to face.

The lawyer business is riddled with stories of the chance meeting that turned into a long-term client relationship. Part of the allure of networking events is to increase the probability of just such a meeting. Why not increase your odds by coupling your chance meetings in "real life" with the possibility of similar meetings on Facebook?

A few tips for your foray. You shouldn't join Facebook with the goal of making connections with as many of those 500 million potential clients as possible. You wouldn't attempt to hand your card to every single attendee at a five hundred person networking event, would you? The same common sense you would use in face-to-face networking is the key to successful networking through Facebook.

For example, when you attend a networking event, you aim to put your best foot forward by dressing professionally. Your online appearance is just as crucial—it's important to keep your Facebook profile clear of anything inappropriate (photos as well as language should reflect you in your best light) and free of unnecessary distractions (noisy or annoying applications can diminish your credibility). An easy rule of thumb is to think of your Facebook profile as your desk at the office. The manner in which you organize and personalize your desk reveals a great deal about you. So too does the way you organize and personalize your Facebook profile.

of those connections—the distracting joys of Facebook can lead you to overlook the very real possibility that a friend on Facebook could also turn into a long-term and profitable client.



Founded in 2003, LinkedIn has grown to nearly 80 million members located across the globe. Long considered the online tool of choice for professional networking, LinkedIn has successfully positioned itself as the go-to resource for gaining insight into someone's professional history.

It's no surprise, then, that LinkedIn's stated mission is "to connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful." While Facebook increases the social media novice's odds at the happenstance meeting, LinkedIn offers a different but equally important function for the social media novice—presenting your qualifications.

LinkedIn is basically a way to present your résumé in overdrive. It allows you to present not only the information you would typically summarize in one page, but also your other credentials, memberships, affiliations, and other such information that is often impossible to convey in a traditional paper résumé.

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Perhaps even more importantly, LinkedIn offers individuals interested in your services a chance to see how you and they are connected. If a general exploration of your connections (otherwise known as the company you keep) is not enough to make them feel comfortable hiring you, their discovery that you and they share a trusted connection will surely do so.

A social media novice who takes the time to create even a preliminary profile on LinkedIn will benefit from simply being “findable.” Taking a little time to complete your profile will enhance your image to anyone who may consider contacting you. Taking a little bit more time to seek out and connect to your colleagues will further unlock the potential of LinkedIn to serve as a spectacular résumé site and referral service.

# twitter

Twitter is generally considered by legal professionals to be the most quixotic of the social media services. Twitter describes itself as “a real-time information network powered by people all around the world that lets you share and discover what’s happening now.”

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This can be overwhelming for the social media novice, as Twitter may appear to be nothing more than a potential ocean of useless information that is impossible to wade through effectively and efficiently. To “time is money” lawyers, Twitter can seem like a giant sinkhole.

However, applications abound to categorize and cull the torrent of irrelevant “tweets” to help pull out the golden nuggets and real-time happenings that make Twitter so useful to those who use it with skill. Twitter can be a phenomenal “pull” service when used correctly—allowing immediate interaction and answers from entire commu-

nities of well-situated and knowledgeable colleagues and potential clients.

But the primary use of Twitter for a social media novice is as a “push” service. Twitter offers an unparalleled way for a lawyer to connect with the right audience at the right time. This is marketing at its finest. Not only are you able to reach out to an audience that is specifically hungry for the information you can provide, but the 140-character limit forces you to be creative with the hook you use to draw that audience. Once you’re engaged in “tweeting” back and forth with other Twitter users, you’ll experience the unique dynamic of “real-time” communication in short snippets for which Twitter is so well liked.

Twitter can be used in ways akin to a press release (beginner tweets) or a webinar (advanced tweets). A social media novice can emulate the former by using Twitter simply to highlight areas of expertise. A more advanced social media user can use Twitter to educate potential clients and answer their basic questions in an interactive forum. This offers a powerful way to establish a personal brand as an authority in a given area—crucial for those who seek to develop a special niche.

Remember, resources abound to help you get started with any of these social media portals. The best resource is probably closer than you think—your assistant, your

associate, your kids, and, believe it or not, in this day and age, it could even be your parents! Give it a try and don’t be afraid to play around—you’ll quickly find that, in the world of social media, even being a novice has great benefits.

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