



A guide to online social networking for law firms

Prepared for Core Legal by The Fedora Consultancy
Marketing and business development advice for smaller law firms

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1) INTRODUCTION

As a marketing consultant advising law firms, my opinion of social networking sites was best described as 'sceptical but curious'. Now having joined and got involved with Linked In, Twitter and other associated sites - plus set up a couple of blogs - I am starting to see how it all joins up and how it is blurring traditional boundaries of communication.

This guide provides an introduction to the opportunities arising from online developments that are rapidly changing how the internet is used. It sets out to cut through the hype and understand how these tools can be used to real effect by law firms.

Please note that this guide is not definitive - it is put together as a guide from my experience/research so far. Secondly, do consider the risk issues surrounding the use of social networking in a legal context.

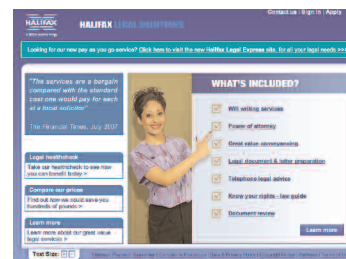


2) THE CHANGING USE OF THE INTERNET.

- The use of the internet for communication via social networking sites is in addition to traditional product/service information sourcing.
- These sites were primarily used in a domestic/social setting, but they have become increasingly important and integrated into people's daily working lives. Organisations of all kinds need to adapt accordingly. Internal company policies tend to restrict their use – but are law firms missing an opportunity?
- The next step for the internet - the ability to personalise a continuous, more relevant, online experience - is what I believe will be of particular interest to forward-thinking law firms. It gives the opportunity to establish and maintain contact with clients and potential clients, and to gain a clear insight into their thoughts, opinions and priorities.
- It is the shift from the occasional, specific search to the continuous/ongoing awareness of the opinions/activities of those you have chosen to connect with that is the difference.

3) THE NEW REALITY FOR LAW FIRMS

- A huge amount of legal information is freely available on the internet and innovations in online legal services for easily 'commoditisable' services are continuing.
- New competition from the high street – the Halifax and Co-op have started; others will undoubtedly follow. Think of the size of their customer/membership databases...
- Recommendations continue to play a large part in decisions about which law firm a potential client chooses. Demonstrably better client service levels will be a key source of competitive advantage.
- For younger people, the preferred method of communication is moving from the social environment into the work place, forcing law firms to reconsider how they interact with their clients and potential clients.



- Being able to communicate more effectively with clients by using their preferred method of communication and generate revenue by reaching new potential clients through a presence on these sites

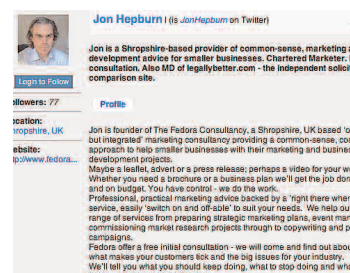
4) GETTING STARTED

Draw up a plan deciding the following:

- Why you are doing this? What is your objective for committing time to it?
- Which sites do you wish to have a presence on?
- Who you would like to make contact with?
- What topics do you wish to comment on/seek opinions about?
- When are you going to update/add information about you/your firm? Ideally this should be daily – that ‘drip, drip’ effect of providing small bits of information has a cumulative effect in the minds of people you are communicating with. Suggest 20 minutes each day – I tend to do 10 minutes in the morning and again in the afternoon.
- Remember the rules - your social media connections have given permission to communicate about your business so don’t abuse that permission. Recommend people, add new connections, communicate with others but don’t be overtly ‘salesy’, build the relationship over time.

5) CREATING YOUR PROFILE

Once you have a plan, the next step is to build your ‘profile’. Basically speaking, this is how you would like to project yourself online for others to see. This should include business information, a professional photo, and links to your on-line presence -- like your website, blog and other social networks. At this point decide if you wish your presence to be your own personal one or on behalf of your firm.



- Make sure you add a picture or logo to your profile – it does make an enormous difference, but consider the image you want to project. If you’re not sure about doing this then consider whether you’d look at an online car for sale advert if you couldn’t see what it looks like.
- Be consistent. The image you portray on the social networking sites you join should link to your own website. Also try to keep the same look and feel across all of your branded items.
- It goes without saying that your online presence should be consistent with your printed corporate identity. Use the same colours on your website as you use on printed material. Remember that a brand is a shortcut to help people make a purchasing decision. For professional service providers, personality is a big part of your brand and how you present yourself online is of huge importance.

Promoting your presence

- Your email address will serve to help link all of the other aspects of your social networking presence because it is used on all the sites. Make sure you use an email ‘signature’ that has links to the social networking sites you join and link it to your website.

- Your company logo is not essential because as an image it may get caught in a spam filter or not downloaded even though the message may be read. Consider a brand statement or strapline as an alternative.
- Create an account on your selected online social networking site, even if only to reserve the account name. Give consideration to developing an online social media advertising campaign to further promote your brand online.

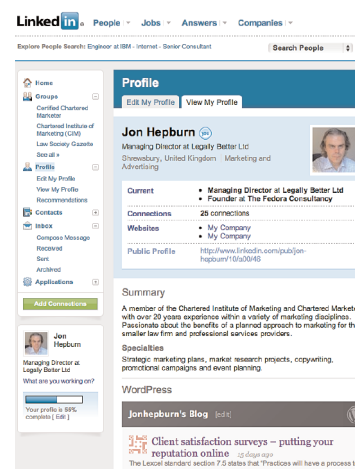
6) A SAMPLE OF NETWORKING SITES:

Social networking websites are free services enabling participants to connect to others in order to build new relationships, obtain business referrals and establish new alliances for future business.

i) LinkedIn <http://www.Linkedin.com>

LinkedIn focuses on professional contacts. You create a profile consisting of your work history, education, professional qualifications and organisations you belong to. In effect you are putting your CV online where it can easily be found by other business professionals.

- LinkedIn profiles generally rank high in the search engine results for individual names; and provide more depth for potential clients to research you and your firm.
- A particularly useful facility is the ability to join specific interest groups to discuss topical matters. A client grouping could be set up on LinkedIn, and kept private for only your clients and invite them to join, making them feel exclusive.
- For a law firm, activities here may improve your 'visibility' i.e. raise your profile on LinkedIn by answering questions posed by other users and by providing and receiving recommendations from your connections.



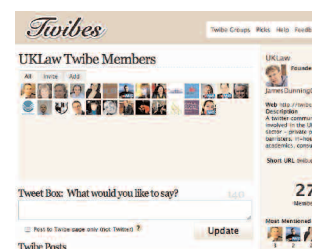
ii) Twitter <http://www.twitter.com/>

Twitter is a 'micro-blogging' site - you can only post messages with a maximum of 140 characters. The much talked-about site is in essence the equivalent of 'chatting over the garden fence' by computer, but it complements the face-to-face contact by maintaining a dialogue with contacts that may be potential clients.

- For law firms it is best used to share articles of interest, observations on industry trends etc, not that you had a baked potato for lunch (though many do).
- The main function of a Twitter account is to provide your 'followers' with an answer to the simple question, 'What are you doing?' Twitter can be used to update, or Tweet, people that are 'following you' when something happens. This could be an article you wrote having been published, when you updated your blog or new content on your website.



- You can also 'follow' opinion leaders in your sector and rapidly find out when something 'blog-worthy' happens. Providing that you wish to raise your profile online, a quick response will help put you at forefront of comments on pertinent issues.
- Tweetdeck <http://www.Tweetdeck.com> - An automation tool to keep you organised in Twitter. Helpful as your Twitter following grows.
- 'Twibes' - <http://www.twibes.com/> a group of Twitter users with a common interest, like LinkedIn interest groups. See an example at <http://www.twibes.com/group/uklaw> and an explanation on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA6GEUiSRRE>
- Twollo <http://www.Twollo.com>- Automatically follow people who Tweet about keywords which interest you, e.g. law firm marketing, Shropshire business, tax law, etc
- Twellow <http://www.Twellow.com> Like other directories, search by keyword, e.g. location or industry for people you'd like to follow.
- Bitly <http://www.bit.ly> Use this to shorten long URLs in your Tweets (remember the 140 character limit). You can use it to track how many people click on a link.



iii) 4networking <http://www.4networking.co.uk>



A regional networking organisation - online and face-to-face. 200 breakfast groups nationwide and 20,000 members. A 50/50 split between business and social participation.

- 'Meet like-minded business owners who want to learn more about you and your product or service. Members attend because they want to. All linked with a vibrant website'.
- 'Relaxed, informal style, yet structured for efficient and effective use of your business time.' 'Our members have 3 business appointments, up to 4 times each week.' *Source: www.4networking.co.uk*

iv) Facebook <http://www.Facebook.com>

Facebook is a very large social networking website primarily for personal friendships but also offers opportunities for business users. Business accounts are designed for individuals who want to use the site to administer pages and their ad campaigns.

- What an individual who may also be an employee chooses to use the site for is entirely their responsibility. Remember your basic profile can be seen by just about everyone and potentially revealing to future employers...
- Users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Users can join and create up to 200 groups according to their interests or areas of expertise. They can also join networks organised by town/city, work place, education etc to connect and interact with friends.
- Some larger firms are blocking Facebook access. There should be a policy in your firm's employee handbook and/or contract of employment.
- There are opportunities for law firms. Identifying and targeting relationships with opinion leaders, especially younger 'Generation Y' age groups, can be good for business. Be aware though that the fastest growing segment is users aged over 35.

- In the US, the legal industry's presence on Facebook is growing rapidly, including law firm profiles, industry discussion groups and personal document collections. Younger lawyers are using Facebook as a primary method of keeping in contact with peers, keeping social communication out of their in box. A logical split is email for business communication, and social networks for more informal messaging.

7) BLOGS

Your own space on the internet where you can encourage comment/feedback on whatever topics you wish to discuss. Blogs are an excellent medium to generate inquiries, to establish and demonstrate expertise, and to get calls from the media.

- A blog can be used to encourage existing clients to provide feedback etc. Getting comments is a problem.
- Having a blog will improve search result rankings than a static website. Blogging about controversial issues is a great way to show how consistent your brand is. If you respond to similar issues in the same way, it will lend itself to your authenticity. Authenticity should be an aspect of everyone's brand, regardless of the other qualities you have chosen to brand yourself with.
- Blogging does work, but needs to be provide information of value, be kept up-to-date and topical. A good starting point is Wordpress - see <http://wordpress.org/>
- Send out a Twitter to your followers, telling them what's on your blog. For a law firm this may be their specialist area of law or a particular geographic area.



8) IS IT WORTH IT?

Advantages

- It has never been easier to make contact, build relationships, share knowledge or form a consensus with a huge range of individuals, special interest groups, professional groups, like-minded professionals etc.
- It has never been so easy or cheap to get 'published', for discussion topics to be started and tracked. If it is your objective you can develop a reputation through leadership and reputation management. If you want privacy, then don't!
- It complements other parts of a firm's communications programme – adding value by making a website more of a hub or focal point for communication by linking to blogs, Twitters etc. It can help with recruitment and developing customised legal services.
- It supplements any face-to-face networking community, making it easier to establish new contacts between regular face-to-face networking meetings/groups. Social networking online is particularly useful if you are not comfortable in face-to-face situations.
- If you wish to target specific companies or industry sectors, social networking sites will help you find the names of their top decision-makers. Search for those names across social network websites, then find contacts in your own social network to help obtain an introduction to them.
- You may never meet these contacts face-to-face, but you will still know who they are. These online relationships, apparently superficial in one sense, are part of the cultural shift to an even more focused internet experience.

Disadvantages

- Determining the value of the time spent. They're all free to join but you can waste a lot of (billable) time if you're not careful. Time wasted reading comment, information that is not relevant to the needs of the business. Similarly, feeling the need/pressure to read non-essential information in addition to 'traditional' emails.

9) ONLINE SECURITY

- It is important to remember that on all these sites a unique user name and password should be used. They should never be the same as any online banking and other personal sites you may utilise. Information that could assist with identity theft is of course best kept private.
- Be mindful that you never know who may be reading about you, or following your blog. Information about valuable items you may have in your home or office, along with mention of holidays or other times when you will be away should be kept to yourself.
- There are people who scour social networking sites for such information and have been known to glean the exact time that a taxi is calling to take someone to the airport so that they know exactly when to break into their home/office.
- As an example the latest release of a new item of computer software or a new mobile 'phone often generates lots of comment – it might be desirable to tell the world you're using it and how great it is, but it also lets 'undesirables' know that you have got it on you or on your premises.



10) SUMMARY

- A lot of time could be wasted, but if it is your objective to attract new business, make contact with and build relationships and share knowledge with your peers, then draw up a plan with your colleagues for your firm, consider some external advice and explore.
- Think about the amount of time you spend working on business development – phone calls, reading professional journals, travelling, meetings etc.
- Expect to spend sometime initially finding your way around the sites, blogs and seeing how they link together. Colleagues may be able to advise you, so pool your knowledge.
- Remember the importance of not mixing business and pleasure – telling people what you had for breakfast will not make you a valued contact.
- In a reasonably short space of time you will be able to become adept at filtering out unnecessary information and develop high quality, valuable business relationships with new clients and fellow professionals - amongst many others.



11) ARTICLES OF INTEREST/SOURCES

Supercharge Your Referrals with Technology

<http://www.lawmarketing.com/pages/articles.asp?Action=Article&ArticleCategoryID=13&ArticleID=918>

The Social Net is Just Working a Bigger Room

<http://marketingcatalyst.blogspot.com/2009/07/social-net-is-just-working-bigger-room.html>

The Role of Social Networking in Law By Paul Lippe The American Lawyer

http://www.law.com/jsp/legaltechnology/pubArticleLT.jsp?id=1202432624155&The_Role_of_Social_Networking_in_Law

A tectonic shift for the legal profession

http://www.cbanational.rogers.dgtpub.com/data/issuePDF/NATIONAL-E/9000000687_the_rise_of_law.pdf

Social Networking at Work

<http://www.attwells-llp.co.uk/news-article.aspx?one=news-and-events.aspx&newsItem=2067>

What Lawyers Need to Know About Social Networking Sites

https://www.dallasbar.org/members/headnotes_showarticle.asp?article_id=1530&issue_id=138

Legal OnRamp - A US focused social networking website for lawyers

<http://www.legalonramp.com/>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_OnRamp

Social Media for Law Firms

<http://www.conscious.co.uk/site/marketing/webmarketing/socialmedia/>

Snapshot Findings: Web 2.0 and social networking 2009

<http://www.pmforum.co.uk/snapshot/index.aspx>

The Legal Pitfalls of Online Social Media

<http://www.lawmarketing.com/pages/articles.asp?Action=Article&ArticleCategoryID=58&ArticleID=922>

32 Ways to Use Facebook for Business

<http://webworkerdaily.com/2009/07/21/32-ways-to-use-facebook-for-business/>

10 Things All Businesses Should Do to Market More Effectively on Facebook

<http://www.insidefacebook.com/2009/01/27/10-things-all-businesses-should-do-to-market-more-effectively-on-facebook/>

A new book on the subject

Social Networking for the Legal Profession.

Very expensive but does look absolutely spot-on for any law firm serious about their presence online.

<http://www.mpmagazine.com/Publication.asp?pubid=9909C410-4AB4-42FC-8D38-5ED5F2ACFB55>



12) OTHER INFORMATION

i) Video content

- Legallybetter has two videos on its site; one explaining the benefits of participation to law firms, the other providing a guide to consumers to help them choose the best law firm for their needs. The key messages/themes can be reproduced in print/online as part of an integrated communications campaign.
- Video content is 'sticky' i.e. great for search engine optimisation, surprisingly cost-effective and great for personalising/putting a friendly face to an occasionally used, intangible service such as legal advice.

ii) Online reputation management

- 'The practice of consistent research and analysis of one's personal or professional, business or industry reputation.' (Source: wikipedia) A new business sector of firms – that will monitor your presence online and report on what is being said about your brand/firm. 21st century take on the press cuttings service PR firms provided.
- It includes online journals/publications, user-created and user-generated blogs, ratings, reviews, and comments specialised websites about any particular subject company, business, product, event, concept, or trend. (Source: wikipedia)

iii) A cross-section of Social Networking sites by size/user category *(Source: wikipedia)*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>No. of users</i>	<i>Age</i>
• Bebo	General	40,000,000	13 yrs +
• CafeMom	Mothers	1,250,000	Mums/mums-to-be
• Eons.com	For 'baby boomers'		13 yrs +
• Facebook	General	250,000,000	13 yrs +
• Flickr	Photo sharing etc	32,000,000	13 yrs +
• Friends Re-united	School, college, streets	19,000,000	13 yrs +
• LinkedIn	Mainly business	43,000,000	13 yrs +
• MySears	For Sears customers	240,000	18 yrs +
• MySpace	General	263,920,102	13 yrs +
• Twitter	Micro-blogging, RSS,	44,500,000	Open

13) PROFILE - HERE'S WHAT JON HEPBURN AT FEDORA IS DOING

- Aside from my involvement with Core Legal I have two main web presences - the Fedora Consultancy website (soon to be updated) and Legallybetter.com.

- The former acts as the hub for my other communications and requests for consultancy work by driving traffic from all my other presences on networking sites to it.

See <http://www.fedoraconsultancy.co.uk/>



- Then there is my involvement with Legallybetter, an independent solicitor comparison site providing a quick, reliable way for both private individuals and companies to find the right legal advice.

- We promote the reputation of participating law firms through the publication of verified client reviews about their experiences with their solicitor.

See <http://www.legallybetter.com/>



My Networking sites

- LinkedIn http://www.linkedin.com/profile?viewProfile=&key=38320182&trk=tab_pro
- Twitter <http://twitter.com/JonHepburn>
- Twellow <http://www.twellow.com/user/JonHepburn>
- 4Networking <http://www.4networking.biz/members/view.htm?UserID=30999>
- Ecademy <http://www.ecademy.com/account.php?id=420081>

My blogs

- Fedora <http://jonhepburn.wordpress.com/>
- Legallybetter <http://legallybetter.blogspot.com/>

Key issues/areas of interest:

Law firm marketing, online marketing, client satisfaction, legal marketing innovations etc





Core Legal is a comprehensive group of legal support providers who have come together to offer solicitors a better alternative.

The 15 members who make up Core Legal are experts in their respective fields, who have all been working with solicitors for years. We offer an effective resource for solicitors to tap into, should they wish to operate at a higher level by utilising our combined experience.

Core Legal members are in finance (banking, legal cost draftsman, cashier, insurance broker), admin (process server, audio typist, translations), operations (accounts software), strategy (buying/merging/selling practices, coaching) and marketing (pr, copywriting, marketing, research, branding & design and websites).



The Fedora Consultancy is a founder member of Core legal and specialises in providing marketing and business development services to smaller law firms.

We do our utmost to get marketing delivering the value you expect from your investment.

We have the experts and the experience, and, working to an agreed plan and budget, will do what needs to be done, leaving you to get on with what you do best.

Contact: Jon Hepburn for your firm's free initial consultation.



Jon is a Chartered Marketer, Member of the Institute of Marketing and Law Management Section of the Law Society

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