

A one-stop business tool

One look at Michele Allinotte's website tells you this is a lawyer who's "connected."

Prominently displayed on her firm's home page (www.yourcornwalllawyer.com) is a "Follow Michele" box that lets visitors follow her on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn or through an RSS (really simple syndication) feed. The site also features a blog and a sign-up box for Allinotte's weekly Wealth Secrets e-newsletter.

Allinotte, who practises business, real estate and estates law, opened her solo practice in Cornwall, Ont., on October 1 after working with firms in Cornwall (her home town) and North Bay for several years.

She uses social media to market her services, build connections with other lawyers and potential clients, and gather and share information.

It takes a little time to figure out what you want to accomplish with the social media and how to do it, says Allinotte. But once you have it set up, it doesn't take a huge time commitment. Content from her blog or e-newsletter can be posted simultaneously to Twitter and Facebook.

She uses Facebook primarily for personal reasons, but also finds it useful as a marketing tool.

"I already know most of the people on Facebook in some other way, but it helps to keep me in their minds so that when they do need legal services they think of me." About a dozen of her clients originally contacted her through Facebook. "Because we were friends on Facebook, they emailed me when they were buying a home or making a will." And showing her personal side is not necessarily a problem. "If a referral source learns that I'm worrying about what kind of mittens my kids are going to wear, that's not going to hurt."

Allinotte uses LinkedIn to connect with business people in the Cornwall area. Using the "Advanced Search" function in LinkedIn lets her restrict her search by geographical area, resulting in links to people around Cornwall she might know and network with.

Her blog helps her to establish credibility as someone who is knowledgeable in a particular area of law. "Sometimes when I post my blog post on Facebook, people will email me almost immediately and say 'Omigosh, I need to do that' – so I can say 'you know me, so call me at work and we'll discuss it.'"

The social media "are a pretty effective way for people to get information from a lawyer that they might not know that they



Michele Allinotte, photo by ROY STUDIO

need – or that they know that they need but might not want to ask for!" says Allinotte.

There are, she admits, risks to using social media. A useful resource, she says (one that prompted her to make changes to her own social media practices) is the Canadian Bar Association's new Guidelines for Ethical Marketing Practices Using New Information Technologies (www.cba.org/CBA/activities/pdf/ethicsguidelines-eng.pdf).

Fittingly, she first learned about the CBA guidelines through a tweet from a friend in New York state – a good illustration of how Twitter facilitates the flow of information.

Allinotte follows many people on Twitter. Some, she says, consistently provide useful information. Some have made personal connections. For example, she connected with estates lawyer Donna Neff of Neff Law Office Professional Corporation (www.nefflawoffice.com) in Ottawa through Twitter, and "we now have a great friendship/mentor-mentee relationship."

"I don't really expect that I'll get any clients through Twitter, but it's a valuable source of information on legal marketing and on building the type of practice that you want to build."

Through Twitter she learned about the Personal Family Lawyer® program (www.personalfamilylawyer.com), a U.S. program for lawyers who do estate planning and work with small business.

Twitter is also what prompted her to go solo: It helped her find and connect with others who had set up their own law practices. "That's why I give valuable information – because I get valuable information."



Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) is a free micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read brief messages known as “tweets” – text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length. The tweets are displayed on the author’s personal Twitter page and delivered to other users, known as “followers,” who have signed up to receive them.

When you join Twitter, you get a personal page and a dedicated Twitter address (www.twitter.com/yourusername). Your personal page shows your latest tweets and the tweets of the people you have chosen to follow. You can choose to follow anyone on Twitter, including friends, business associates and clients.

The 140-character limit on message length was originally set for compatibility with Short Message Service messaging, which allows the interchange of short text messages between mobile phones. Tweets can be sent from a computer, a cellphone or any web-enabled smartphone.

Although Twitter had a reputation as a time waster (users’ detailed responses to the “What are you doing?” question posted at the top of the Twitter page range from the mundane to the inane), it is now coming into its own.

Many lawyers are now using Twitter to quickly and easily share content posted on a blog or website, an interesting news story on a media website, a government announcement or an important new court decision.

You can also “retweet” (i.e., forward) an interesting tweet originally posted by someone else.

Most useful tweets contain links. To fit within the 140-character constraint, tweeters use free URL-shortening tools, such as Tiny URL (<http://tinyurl.com>) or bit.ly (<http://bit.ly>). Several free Twitter management applications, such as TweetDeck, have built-in “automatic” URL shorteners.

General social networking sites



YouTube (www.youtube.com) is a free video-sharing website. Anyone can upload and share or view videos. Lawyers can market their expertise to clients and potential clients by posting informational videos about topical legal issues on YouTube. The videos can also be integrated into websites and blogs and imported directly to Facebook.



Social networking websites, such as Facebook and MySpace, focus on building online communities of people who share interests and activities. Until recently these tools were almost entirely for personal networking. They are now also being used for commercial networking.

These sites, which are free to join, all have a similar structure. Users set up their own profile page, where they provide the information they want to share with their network. When members discover their friends, they connect to each other by adding each other as friends on their profile page. As these groups of friends grow, the members can create extensive networks. The members of these networks communicate with each other and share photos, links, videos, web links, blog posts and other information.

Facebook (www.facebook.com) is the world’s largest social networking website with more than 300 million active users. MySpace (www.myspace.com) is similar in structure, but today much less popular than Facebook.

Facebook features include the Wall, a space on every user’s profile page that allows friends to post messages for the user to see and Status, which allows users to inform their friends of their whereabouts and activities. A News Feed appears on every user’s home page with messages, status updates, profile changes and blog posts from the user’s friends.

Facebook users can also create communities of people interested in a particular topic or issue by setting up or joining public or private groups. These groups lets their members interact with discussion boards and other tools.

Facebook allows you to establish customized privacy levels and restrict the content that is publicly accessible.

An effective marketing tool, Facebook can bring you referrals and clients by helping you to reconnect with old classmates, colleagues, and friends. A Facebook page tends to rank high in Google searches for an individual’s name.

For an example of how Facebook has been used in the legal arena, see our Casebook article on page 19.

Professional networking sites



LinkedIn is a social networking site for business professionals with over 50 million members in more than 200 countries. Its basic services are free.

Underlying LinkedIn is the notion of six degrees of separation. Each of us knows people who know other people, and we are usually within just a few clicks of knowing someone who can introduce us to someone we want to know better.

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Prolific blogger loves to write



Garry Wise

It all began with a penchant for writing. It's led to a reputation as a prolific, respected online communicator.

"I began blogging because I wanted to write – with absolutely no business purpose at all," says Garry Wise of Wise Law Office (www.wiselaw.net), a four-person firm in mid-town Toronto. Wise practises primarily family law, employment law and civil litigation.

Wise Law Blog (www.wiselaw.blogspot.com), launched in April 2005, features commentary on legal developments and politics in Canada and the United States, technology and current affairs.

The blog nevertheless supports the approach that Wise took when he built his firm website in 1999, which was "it's all about getting information out there, providing good backgrounders on the key areas of our practice. The rule of thumb I developed is that if I would have provided a certain amount of information during an initial consultation without fee, I just put all of that information online.

"As a result, when people come to see me, they're unbelievably well-informed and we can get into the real substance of their issues right away."

His blog is another means of "getting the information out there" – in a variety of formats. He often includes video clips, for example, and has just added a video series called OMG! Law Talk, which features "informal, but often emphatic conversations on legal issues, politics, technology and social media" between

Wise and fellow law bloggers Michael Carabash and Omar Ha-Redeye.

Facebook represents yet another opportunity to put information out there.

But lawyers should first think about whether they want to make Facebook a personal or professional site, says Wise. They may not want to share with their clients and professional colleagues what they share with their family and friends.

He suggests that lawyers consider having two Facebook sites – a professional one and a personal one – something he is now in the process of doing.

A problem for lawyers is that "Facebook does not currently offer adequate archiving systems to ensure that all communications are saved and retrievable by users. As a consequence, maintaining comprehensive and complete records of all client communications via Facebook can be cumbersome and difficult."

Recently a client sent a Facebook message containing a video in which the client explained the legal problem he wanted to discuss. "My first thought was, 'How the heck am I going to keep a copy of this for the client file?' In this case, it was innocuous, and I confirmed it all by email."

Reputation management can be a problem on all social media. If you're going to write on blogs or even on Twitter, people are going to disagree with you, and they may do so in "colourful" language. The result may be that the first entry on a Google search of a lawyer's name is "so and so is an idiot."

But this just shows the necessity of having a presence on the social media as a pre-emptive measure, says Wise. You want positive information about you to appear in Google searches – not just the nasty comments.

Wise finds an RSS reader, such as Google Reader, invaluable. Not only does it enable him to stay current, but it also enables him to "automate" the supply of content for his Twitter page. Google Reader lets you share items. Twitter can import those shared items directly without any intervention. This has enabled him to develop a presence on Twitter with a minimal investment of time.

"When people say to me, 'how do you find the time to do all this?' my answer is simple. I read anyhow, and all I have to do is press the share selection on the Google Reader post and it's on my Twitter automatically within five minutes and there's no effort involved. It's getting information out there, and it's really worthwhile doing it."

LinkedIn enables you to import your formal résumé to create a profile that summarizes your professional expertise and accomplishments. It's therefore an effective way to back up personal referrals and other forms of traditional marketing. One of the first things someone will do after a referral is "Google" the person's name. LinkedIn profiles tend to rank very high in the search engine results for individual names.

Your profile helps you find and be found by former colleagues, clients, and partners. You can add more connections by inviting contacts to join LinkedIn and connect to you. Special tools help you to mine your Outlook, Yahoo, HotMail, and Gmail accounts to add connections.

You can post recommendations for your connections, and you can ask your connections to write recommendations for you.

Employers can list jobs (for a fee) and search for potential candidates on LinkedIn. Job seekers can search for jobs and can review the profile of hiring managers and discover which of their existing contacts can introduce them.

LinkedIn has an Answers feature that allows users to ask questions for the community to answer. By answering questions about the law, lawyers can potentially market their expertise (although they should be careful to provide legal information and not legal advice). The answers you provide become part of your profile and demonstrate your expertise to your connections, potential clients or employers.

The searchable LinkedIn Groups feature enables users to establish new business relationships by joining alumni, industry, professional or other relevant groups. Group members can participate in online discussions.



Plaxo (www.plaxo.com) is an online address book and social networking service. It claims to host address books for more than 40 million people.

Like other social networking sites, it allows to you create a profile and share photos, videos and content from other websites. The contents of your blog or your tweets on Twitter can be sent to your Plaxo connections.

Plaxo provides automatic updating of contact information stored on its servers. When a user edits this information, the changes appear in the address books of all those who listed that user in their own books.

Legal networking sites



Legal OnRamp (<http://legalonramp.com>) is a networking and knowledge-sharing site for in-house counsel and invited outside lawyers and third party service providers. The site was designed specifically to help in-house counsel and lawyers from corporate law firms connect. Only lawyers can join, and only by invitation.

The site has more than 23,000 members from over 40 countries, more than half of whom are in-house counsel. Basic services are free, but "all members are expected to contribute" articles.

Like other social networking sites, it includes walls where users can post messages to each other, group functions that are closed to non-group members, and open forums for discussion and document-sharing. It also has a job-posting service and a marketplace where in-house counsel can post projects and receive tenders from firms.



The County & District
Law Presidents' Association

CDPLA's INFORMATION EXCHANGE PLATFORM

The County and District Law Presidents' Association (CDLPA) recently unveiled a new interactive website for practising lawyers in Ontario, the Information Exchange Platform (IEP) (www.cdlpa.org). The IEP enables practising lawyers to interact with other lawyers in Ontario through a moderated forum. It is also intended to give lawyers relevant and timely information to help them in their practices and permit lawyers to participate in CDLPA online surveys to help CDLPA gather information quickly for advocacy purposes.

Martindale-Hubbell® Connected **BETA** The premier global network for legal professionals

Martindale-Hubbell Connected (www.martindalehubbell.com/connected) is a free global online network for legal professionals (many from larger firms). Linked to the martindale.com data base of more than one million lawyers, it enables lawyers to expand their professional referral network, demonstrate expertise, share knowledge and collaborate globally through online groups, blogs and forums. The site provides access to thousands of articles.



Legally minded (www.legallyminded.com) was launched in late 2008 by the American Bar Association (ABA) as a social network for lawyers. Membership is free and open to all lawyers, not just ABA members.

The site features social networking tools, news and articles, and user-generated content. Lawyers can expand their professional networks using member-matching and search features. The News section contains links to law-related stories in the mainstream media and articles in the ABA Journal. The Resources section contains articles about practice management and technology, among other topics.

Knowledge-sharing tools on the site enable members to exchange ideas, files, and schedules within virtual groups and engage with other members via blogs, wikis, chats, and discussion groups.

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Donna Neff

Making Twitter fit the needs of the business

other estate planning professionals that she has found to be an invaluable resource.

As some of her estate work involves other jurisdictions, she also uses LinkedIn groups to find estate lawyers in other provinces or American states.

Neff uses Twitter to stay in touch with staff and colleagues rather than as a marketing tool or to communicate with clients. (However, she has had clients referred to her because of Twitter.) Instead, she reaches out to potential clients through her website and her blog on estate issues (nefflawoffice.com/blog). Her entries address estate planning issues and questions, which would be of interest to other estate lawyers as well as providing potential clients with answers to many questions before they even arrive at the firm. As a further step to reach out to clients, she is planning to have short video segments hosted on her site that would explain particular aspects of estate planning and what services her firm can offer.

Lawyers who are just getting onto the website bandwagon may think the interactive worlds of Twitter and blogs are one step too many – or something best left to the younger members of a firm. But age has nothing to do with it, says Neff. “It’s less about age, and more about attitudes to technology in general.”

Here are a few sites Neff recommends to improve your Twitter experience:

TweetDeck (tweetdeck.com): Lets you bring some order to your Twitter universe by organizing your contacts, how you follow them and building searches for particular terms (e.g. “estate planning”) if used even by non-followers.

TweetFeed (tweetfeed.com): creates instant Tweets of your blog entries.

SocialOomph (www.socialoomph.com): formerly “TweetLater”, lets you schedule Tweets in advance for future posting.

“Tweet 16: 16 Ways Lawyers Can Use Twitter” (www.tinyurl.com/cmv5pr): A great article by Robert Ambrogi, a Massachusetts lawyer and media consultant.

Donna Neff has a penchant for “tech” tools. An estates practitioner in Ottawa, she has adopted the latest technology to make her firm paperless, and speaks at conferences advising other lawyers how they can do the same. This determination to be at the forefront of law practice innovation also extends to making great use of online social media, particularly Twitter.

Like many first time users, Neff initially found Twitter a bit bewildering, and its potential business uses a bit elusive. It was at the ABA TechShow in Chicago that she came across a lawyer working for a German company who used Twitter to stay in touch with head office staff overseas. Neff applied the same idea to her firm, in which several staff work remotely and don’t have daily face-to-face contact.

As well as using phones and email to connect, the scattered firm members and staff have discovered that Twitter helps them maintain a personal connection. Through their firm-only Twitter account, staff can share office information, tell each other of new links and ideas, and do problem-solving on firm issues. In a nutshell, it helps keep the “feel” of an office even when people aren’t always in the same location.

Neff has a second, public Twitter account (twitter.com/donnaneff) which she has used to build a North America-wide network of

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Another way to get your name out there



Stuart Rudner

“Social media are part of my marketing effort,” says employment lawyer Stuart Rudner. Instead of replacing traditional methods of marketing, “they work in tandem with the more traditional methods, like the other writing that I do for HR Reporter and The Lawyers Weekly, speaking engagements, word of mouth and the networking that we would traditionally do over cocktails.”

But social media, Twitter in particular, are also an effective means of communicating with clients, says Rudner, an employment lawyer who practises with Miller Thomson LLP at the firm’s Markham office. “If I’m working on a file and I think of something that an employer or employee has done that they shouldn’t have done, it’s pretty easy to post a one- or two-sentence warning on Twitter – remember to do this, remember not to do that. At 140 characters or less, it doesn’t take a lot of time, but it certainly gets the message out there.”

The “one-third rule” frequently recommended for Twitter – one-third original thoughts, one-third retweets and one-third links to longer articles – makes good sense to Rudner, who tweets at [@CanadianHRLaw](#) and [@srudner](#).

Some typical Rudner tweets:

RT @Eric_B_Meyer New blog post: Can employers require flu shots for their employees? <http://bit.ly/fn9IE> [#HumanResources](#) [#EmploymentLaw](#)

HR Recordkeeping: Keeping What You Need for As Long As You Need <http://bit.ly/b32L2#EmploymentLaw#HumanResources>

Rudner also blogs through First Reference (www.firstreference.com) and Canadian HR Reporter (Thomson Reuters Canada Ltd.) (www.hrreporter.com). (First Reference is a Canadian publisher of compliance-based human resources, payroll and internal control resources.)

He joined LinkedIn about five years ago. “Nothing happened for four years, but it has really taken off in the last year, and a lot of people are now using it for professional marketing.” As of October 24, he had an impressive 426 connections.

Although he joined Facebook primarily for personal reasons – to stay in touch with family and friends – it has produced the most tangible results for him when it comes to attracting new clients. “You tend to reconnect with old friends and old

colleagues. A few people I knew as far back as high school are now human resources managers or directors who are looking for an employment lawyer.”

He has also gained some new work through LinkedIn and Twitter, but says that, like all marketing efforts, marketing through social media is a long-term process. “It’s just like writing in magazines or speaking – you assume that three or four years down the road someone who read your article or heard you speak may call you up. It’s hard to measure how effective these things are, but I’ve definitely seen some results from Facebook.”

What are the dangers for lawyers of using social media? For a lawyer, obviously client confidentiality is crucial, says Rudner: “Don’t disclose anything that you shouldn’t disclose.”

Instead of just “jumping in and joining various sites,” lawyers should take the time to think about how to use social media. “You need to make yourself known as someone with expertise in your area of practice. A lot of people join LinkedIn and join groups on LinkedIn but don’t really get involved. You can be on Twitter, but not post anything – and then there’s really no benefit to you.”

When it comes to marketing, “everyone has their own strengths,” says Rudner. “Some people like cocktail parties, some people like to write, some like to speak. Whatever you’re comfortable with – if you can add social networking as part of your marketing plan, it’s just another way to get your name out there.”

A tool to establish expertise & authority



John Boscarior

International trade lawyer John Boscarior says his main goal when using social media “is to stay top of mind with clients and potential clients.” Boscarior, who practises with McCarthy Tétrault LLP in Toronto, has also found social media to be a very practical way of providing information to clients.

Boscarior’s social media experience started with the professional networking site LinkedIn. As well as posting his c.v. and making connections, he uses LinkedIn to provide legal updates. For example, using Slideshare, he has posted PowerPoint presentations on his LinkedIn page on such topics as Doing Business with Cuba and A Legal Perspective on Customs Audits.

But he finds Twitter – which lets him send frequent updates in a very compact 140 characters or less – even better for passing on helpful information to clients.

A typical Boscarior tweet: “Confusion continues on Russia’s entry into WTO <http://ow.ly/uvd6> EU demanding explanation of trade plans.” (The URL links to an article on the website of European Voice, a weekly newspaper that covers European Union news.) Not surprisingly, more and more of his clients are following Boscarior’s tweets as they learn about the valuable updates he is providing.

Facebook is reserved for personal use, to connect with family and friends: “I think the verdict is still out on Facebook as a business development tool for lawyers and professionals. I don’t think clients view it as a professional or business tool.” Despite his skepticism, Boscarior now has his Twitter messages set up to also appear automatically on Facebook.

To Boscarior, the social media are primarily useful “as a means of establishing expertise and authority – one way of doing that among many. I would be surprised if anyone said ‘I got a client because I was on Facebook or LinkedIn.’ But when you are connected through these vehicles to your clients, it reinforces the existing client relationship, and for others it establishes you as an authority in the area.”

Because Twitter is still being used “for a lot of useless purposes – like what’s going on in peoples’ day,” many lawyers question its value. That view needs to change, says Boscarior: Lawyers need to view Twitter as a means of putting out relevant information in

their practice areas for their followers. For example, it may take a long time to write a legal update but “writing something in 140 characters and providing a link to the relevant source or document can be just as effective sometimes in getting the information across to the client.”

Sometimes it’s a challenge to get the message across in 140 characters, but “in these days of the news bite, people appreciate shorter pieces.” Many applications, such as TweetDeck, have built-in URL shorteners, which helps.

While lawyers can establish and reinforce their brand by using social media, they can also damage their brand if they don’t always use them for professional purposes. Lawyers should assume that anything they post is going to be read by all their clients. “Don’t get too relaxed because the format is so easy to work with. Once it’s on Twitter and shoots off into cyberspace, you can’t take it back.”

Boscarior also advises against taking a strong or harshly critical position on an issue in social media, as opposed to providing information. “Getting political on Twitter can come back to haunt you. You might take one position on an issue and then later be retained by a client to take the opposite position. Do you want to be out there in cyberspace and on the record as opposing your own client’s position?”