

Social media:

why



This is not another article about how social media is going to be the next big thing, because it already is.

Nor is it another article about how social media is changing the web and the way we communicate, because it already has.

This article, however, is about the fascinating new landscape developing online, and the tangible ways you can leverage social media.

Contrary to some beliefs, social media isn't only for Internet marketers and teenagers. It's for anyone looking to engage, connect and network with others online. The tools themselves are simple to use and easily adapt to suit the user. Think of the different social media services as food ingredients – depending on who's doing the cooking, you're bound to get different results.

And results are what it's all about. Never before have there been so many options that offer such a variety of results. You can use social networks to learn, exchange ideas and collaborate on projects. You can use them as a human search engine – “crowd-sourcing” the answers to very specific questions. Or you can turn those same social media services into an exceptional marketing tool – growing your business and connecting with potential clients in a way you never could before.

Yes, the possibilities seem endless.

Take marketing for instance. As little as 15 or 20 years ago, the options for self-promotion were limited: newspaper ads, the yellow pages, a radio or TV ad (if you were really willing to spend).

twitter Search

Wonder if someone's talking about you or your firm on Twitter? Interested in connecting with potential clients? Try looking through people's tweets.

Twitter search (search.twitter.com) works like a web search, but restricts its search to Twitter posts. Typing in a few key words, say – “legal advice” or the name of your practice – generates hits featuring those words.

This is ideal for finding out what people are saying about you or for getting in touch with someone who might be looking for someone with a specific expertise.

You've been served

Political blogger Donal Blaney recently was the victim of an online impersonator. Someone started a Twitter account in his name and started posting. Blaney filed a suit against the imposter, but with limited options for tracking down the imposter, the law firm was allowed to serve the injunction via Twitter. A tweet was sent to the user with a link to the full court order. The tweeter complied with the order and is discussing damages with Blaney who apparently is thinking about letting this individual impersonate him one more time – and donate the settlement to charity. (For more on social media and the courts, see *Casebook* on page 19.)

Now, your choices have multiplied and, amazingly, cost less than ever. Through a blog you can promote your knowledge and background, plus interact with readers in the comments section. Twitter lets you talk in real time with followers and share key information. As well, a simple keyword search connects you to people who might be looking for specific information or resources that you possess (see *Twitter Search*). And while social networks are a great way to gain exposure and profile your achievements, they're also a good place to advertise. Facebook, for example, allows you to create localized advertising, targeting only people in your area.

But where to start?

An easy first step is to investigate the different services and start signing up. If you don't already have a LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) profile, now would be the time to get one. A social network geared toward professionals, LinkedIn allows you to connect with business associates and "meet" with other people in your profession.

As you'll see in the rest of the magazine, lawyers are also using another social network – the popular Facebook (www.facebook.com) – in some truly enterprising ways to connect with potential clients by engaging in discussions and groups. Sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook also serve as public bios, making them an excellent way to profile your background and accomplishments. And they make it easy for prospective clients to find out about you and enlist your services.

Twitter is another tool that's hitting its stride in the legal community. Lawyers around the world are now sharing blog postings (their own or others) or posting links to important legal information that they think their followers will find interesting (in 140 characters or less). There's even a site devoted to lawyers on Twitter (www.twitter.com) called lawtweet.ca that connects tweeting lawyers.

But there's still more. Through sites such as Gigpark (www.gigpark.com) people turn to their online community of friends to suggest services and professionals with whom they've had good experiences (or to recommend one).

On Yelp (www.yelp.ca) people are writing reviews of experiences they've had (good and bad) at restaurants, stores or even law firms.

Sharing with others is second nature to our technology-skewed generation, whether it's pictures (Flickr, Picasa, SmugMug), social bookmarking websites (Delicious, Digg), Books (Shelfari, Scribd) or opinions (blogs and Twitter). (Corresponding websites are as follows: flickr.com, picasa.google.ca, www.smugmug.com, delicious.com, digg.com, www.shelfari.com, www.scribd.com)

However, the social media world is not without its perils. There have been instances of online imposters (see *You've Been Served*) and issues surrounding privacy. The same questions keep cropping up: How much of my real-life persona should I share online? How many people are seeing the things I post? And does the information I put online still legally belong to me? (See *Pitfalls To Avoid* on page 16 for more on some of the dangers of using social media – and how to mitigate them).

The one thing social media **is not** is a passing fad. It is fundamentally changing the ways we interact and communicate. The time to dive in – with both feet first – is now.

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Women rule

Did you know that women outnumber men in the social media landscape?

Breaking down the statistical data of the most popular social networks showed women users outnumbered men in almost every case. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and MySpace all saw more traffic from female users, while Linked In and Youtube were basically an even split between the two.

Statistics courtesy of PR 2.0 – <http://bit.ly/6mv4S>