

BUSINESS & CAREERS

Expanding your network by hopping on the Internet

Lawyers who network already know the rubber chicken circuit. Many such lawyers are now venturing into the virtual chicken circuit, adding online social networking to their marketing efforts.



HI-TECH
LUIGI BENETTON

Their “iChoices” continue to increase. In addition to online forums dedicated to the legal profession, lawyers also create their own groups in general-purpose networks like LinkedIn, Facebook, Second Life and Twitter.

James Roberts, the Los Angeles-based managing partner for Global Capital Law Group PC, mentions the obvious benefits of potential referrals and getting to know other lawyers, but his reasoning takes both geographic and philosophical turns.

The geographic: “Lawyers tend to know other lawyers in their own geographic areas,” he explains. “If I hear about the need for a British lawyer who represents artists and galleries, I pass that on.”

The philosophical: “I think there is this ‘karmic debit and credit system’ connecting all people in all industries.”

Benjamin Duranske, the Palo Alto, Calif.-based author of *Virtual Law: Navigating the Legal Landscape of Virtual Worlds*, easily rattles off several legal fields besides technology, including tax and real estate, that

find relevance in Second Life. “If somebody has a million dollars’ worth of value in Second Life, they might want to make it an inheritance to their children,” Duranske says.

Citing the emergence of 3-D spaces on the Internet, Duranske explains why lawyers would attend meetings in virtual worlds. “Everybody has a sense of being in the same space at the same time,” he says. “It’s closer to real-world meetings than other social media. This synchronous nature leads to ‘water cooler’ moments. People trade ideas, cluster in small groups away from the main discussion, then bring results back to the main discussion.”

Roberts scans online groups for relevant legal and business issues, topics and trends, though he admits this might not drive social media adoption: “There are other places to find out more about trends and topics,” he says.

His firm also communicates via groups, posting announcements about things like speaking engagements. “That catches the attention of quite a few people,” Roberts says.



Logging on to a slew of burgeoning social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, can be a great way for lawyers to expand their network — if it’s done right.

“In this economy, where marketing budgets are shrinking, and print and other forms of advertising have decreased, you need to use free services to get information out there,” argues Kevin L. Nichols, president of KLN Publishing LLC.

Given the large numbers of industry associations that main-

tain corresponding groups on LinkedIn or Facebook, “if you are already a member of an association in the ‘real world’ you should also join that association’s group online,” advises Helen Bertelli, the Richmond, Va.-based senior vice-president of Hellerman Baretz Communications LLC.

“There are also many impor-

tant networking groups that aren’t necessarily ‘formalized’ that lawyers can join,” Bertelli continues, “and become part of the conversation.”

She offers the example “Strengthening Brand America” on LinkedIn, which attracts people who work with emerging busi-

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Blakes tops M&A deals for first half of 2009

Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP came out on top for mergers and acquisition (M&A) deals during the first half of 2009, according to mergermarket’s M&A league tables. Here’s how the big firms are faring this year so far, compared to last year when it comes to M&A deals:

Legal advisers to Canadian M&A: value

| H1 2009 | Y/E 2008 | Company Name | Value (US\$m) | Deal Count |
|---------|----------|--------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 | 8 | Blake, Cassels & Graydon | 24,810 | 26 |
| 2 | 1 | McCarthy Tetrault | 24,588 | 25 |
| 3 | 55 | Shearman & Sterling | 22,692 | 6 |
| 4 | 9 | Torys | 22,618 | 10 |
| 5 | 29 | Macleod Dixon | 19,825 | 9 |
| 6 | 4 | Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt | 13,224 | 17 |
| 7 | 5 | Stikeman Elliott | 12,326 | 25 |
| 8 | 42 | Fasken Martineau | 10,484 | 15 |

| H1 2009 | Y/E 2008 | Company Name | Value (US\$m) | Deal Count |
|---------|----------|---------------------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 9 | 19 | Fraser Milner Casgrain | 9,162 | 4 |
| 10 | 44 | Vinson & Elkins | 9,106 | 2 |
| 11 | 12 | Burnet Duckworth & Palmer | 5,171 | 7 |
| 12 | 21 | Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom | 4,668 | 6 |
| 13 | 2 | Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison | 3,836 | 3 |
| 14 | 98 | McDermott Will & Emery | 3,502 | 2 |
| 15 | 30 | Clifford Chance | 2,385 | 3 |

Practice Management



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Social networking can be hard sell to lawyers

Networking

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nesses. “There are few (if any) lawyers in this group — but what an opportunity!” Bertelli says.

Duranske makes the same argument regarding a group he founded, the Second Life Bar Association (SLBA). Lawyers who specialize in new media, video game or related fields of law earn street cred with their SLBA membership, he claims, adding “It’s a social Bar — we don’t issue licenses.”

While the SLBA meets monthly, it also performs community outreach and runs free legal seminars on topics of interest to the virtual world community (like protecting intellectual property) that are open to the public.

Each week, several people approach the SLBA with legal questions. “We try to pair them with lawyers who can help them,” Duranske says.

Nichols established the California Minority Counsel Program Bar Association of San Francisco on LinkedIn, and he joined the recently formed “Heller Erman LLP Alumni” group to find out where his former colleagues landed.

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Which brings up the question of how to network online. “You don’t want to spend all your time bragging about your practice or firm because people will tune out,” Bertelli advises, “but you also don’t want to spend all your time avoiding the subject because you lose the opportunity to build a brand for your business online.”

Bertelli proposes the “3-3-3 rule. People should spend a third of their social media time on personal issues, another third talking about their businesses and the remaining third about their industry as a whole.”

Social media can be a branding boon. Since people needn’t use their real names as online handles, certain lawyers call themselves names like “constructionlaw” or “venturelawyer,” identifying themselves in their public profiles.

Whether groups prove fruitful depends on the content they gen-

erate. Roberts uses the “follow this discussion” button in LinkedIn groups, but doesn’t feel obliged to remain in groups. “We participate for 90 days, and if we don’t think it’s all that valuable, we move on to other groups,” he says. For all the anecdotal evidence of value, social networking devotees also understand why it remains a hard sell to certain lawyers. “If we were to use the very low number of referrals, then

time devoted to social networking groups would be terribly inefficient,” Roberts admits.

“These efforts are not sales, per se, but they are ‘marketing’ — building awareness in the market of our existence and capabilities.”

While LinkedIn has built a more professional image than its more “social” competitors, even it can prove less than businesslike. “Most groups aren’t moderated,” Roberts states. “You have to filter

out stuff like pure sales pitches that are completely irrelevant.”

These networks are not private either. “Make sure there’s no way a substantive discussion can be attached to a client,” Roberts warns. “You don’t want to lose attorney-client privilege.”

Such dangers help explain why certain firms restrict the use of or block access to social media.

The learning curve and time commitment involved also deter

lawyers. Both molehills, particularly the learning curve bump, can seem like mountains when virtual worlds enter the mix. “Second Life is pretty complicated,” says Duranske. “That does stand in the way of widespread adoption.”

“There’s a general fear among lawyers about ‘giving away too much’ when participating in almost any groups,” Roberts says, quickly adding: “I think their fears are overblown.” ■

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