



Social Networking Initiatives

March 1, 2011

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How LinkedIn Can Net Women Lawyers More Work

The Internet is a virtual gold mine for lawyers wanting to actively grow and sustain their business and client relationships. Relationships are critical for business. Women are innate relationship-builders. Couple this intrinsic skill with the Internet's social networking opportunities, and the potential for women attorneys to develop business relationships is endless.

Are women lawyers taking ownership and advantage of the potential rewards to be found in social media networks? Do women attorneys make lasting impressions when marketing themselves in online communities? Here are some definitions, guidelines and tips that will highlight the values to be found in social media networks and provide insights into why women attorneys should participate fully in digital networking.

Social Media and Social Networks: Defined

A social media network is an association or group that develops relationships between people and information, in communication formats other than face-to-face.

People have been sharing information and expertise in a group environment or association since the beginning of time. The current edge is the unrestrained accessibility that technology brings to these communications. Technology greatly assists with the sharing of information and expertise by breaking down communication barriers, such as time zone, gender and language. Online communities emerge from social media networks. Members often have to be invited to join, making them safe places for members to share information, ask questions and suggest answers on a common theme, subject or issue. Online communities allow women lawyers to confidently venture into areas and relationships from which they may otherwise find themselves blocked.

Marketing: Playing to Women Lawyers' Strengths

Legal practitioners and client relations are changing and becoming more diverse. Law firm marketing is also changing to reflect this new reality. Traditionally, when women lawyers have wanted to market to clients and prospects, their business development models have been dominated by sports-focused events, women-themed gatherings, charitable functions, lunches and dinners. At the same time, these efforts do not always build on women lawyers' intrinsic talents and strengths. At worst, they place women lawyers in awkward situations. When presented with another uncomfortable afternoon or evening away from work and family, many women lawyers may try to avoid these marketing ventures and eschew opportunities to participate.

Social media marketing and social networking allow women lawyers to market like women from the get-go. Social networking communities allow women lawyers to be authentic and communicate, on their terms. Women lawyers still want to be wherever their clients and prospects are. Increasingly, their clients and prospects are spending more time online. This means that social media networking and online professional networks have become powerful tools for women lawyers who want to take their networking efforts to the next level. Social media networks give women lawyers access to other professionals and prospects they might otherwise not have the opportunity to meet. Connections may be localized, with a focus on the practitioners' cities, practice areas or current clients, but they can also be much broader, linking prospective contacts in larger international communities. The potential for connecting and building relationships in social media networks with hundreds of individuals with shared business interests and experiences is very real. Social networking promotes immediate communications. And, the connections can happen whenever and wherever it best suits the women practitioners' schedules and availability.

Networking: Communication Plus Relationships

Networking is a time investment. Women lawyers can control their business development efforts by evaluating where things currently stand and where they would like them to be. Building a relationship with one prospect or client means potentially networking with everyone the prospect or client knows. Effective networking helps to get practitioners "through the door" with all forms of communication. Once they have communicated something it is online and accessible, whether it is spoken, written or typed as an article, blog, or tweet: all is "Googleable." In all forms of networking, connections are key conduits to business relationships and getting work. Building, maintaining and sustaining work are activities built around trust.

Social networks are a treasure trove of relationships and provide huge opportunities for women lawyers. Women are strong networkers and relationship builders. Just imagine what tapping into social media networking could mean in terms of business development for women lawyers. What better way to see the value of social networking than by examining the benefits of the social networking online community for business relationships and generation, LinkedIn.

LinkedIn: Business Opportunities for Women Lawyers

The largest and most powerful business-focused social media network is currently LinkedIn. It was launched in May 2003 as a professional networking resource to help members nurture relationships and keep in touch with their contacts. As of February 2011, LinkedIn had over 90 million members in 200 countries on all seven continents. LinkedIn's focus as a professional social media network, and the support it has gained in global business communities, distinguishes it from other popular social media networks. LinkedIn is a free online service, highly credible and accessible. It is an extremely powerful tool for connecting, reconnecting and building on relationships. As there are so many millions of members on LinkedIn, its search engine and Internet presence holds great value to those who are part of its enterprise. Joining LinkedIn allows women practitioners to distinguish themselves digitally and effectively. Women lawyers having profiles on LinkedIn are visible to all prospects searching for attributes that may be included in their profiles, regardless of whether the lawyers know they are being searched, as the traffic on LinkedIn is extremely heavy. Notwithstanding how the prospect lands on a practitioner's profile, women lawyers' LinkedIn profiles will be featured near the top of prospects' search results. And, their LinkedIn profile will often trump the lawyers' firm profiles, just by virtue of the sheer collective presence of members on LinkedIn, in comparison to the number of lawyers at their law firms.

The key attributes to navigating LinkedIn successfully for women lawyers is the ability to connect and reconnect with connections that can help build and sustain business. Social networks allow women lawyers the opportunity to leverage relationships and level the business development playing field. These relationships and connections can cross current business lines with potential emerging interests, client relationships with old business ties and newly introduced online connections with long-forgotten acquaintances. Online opportunities abound; the major advantages to using LinkedIn are creating and preserving an online presence by setting up and maintaining a profile, and linking to and adding connections to other professionals.

Here are key initial steps women attorneys can take to leverage relationships successfully on LinkedIn.

Create a Strong Profile

Go to linkedin.com and establish a profile as completely as possible: photo, Web site link, employment history, education, and detailed description of expertise. To jump-start your entry, consider cutting and pasting your current law firm resumé into your LinkedIn profile. LinkedIn ranks the profile's completeness by rating it out of 100%: It will display what information is needed to complete your profile.

LinkedIn feeds off peoples' business and education connections. The more complete the profile, the more connection points there are and opportunities to be had to contact or be contacted by other LinkedIn members. Use your profile to express your experience and to educate readers about your legal abilities. Highlight capabilities and specialized legal expertise that may be uncommon or particularly desirable. Use words that your prospects and clients use so they can find you. Keep your profile current, as a current profile will always provide business opportunities.

Add Contacts

Making contacts and building relationships are driving forces behind LinkedIn. Active LinkedIn members invite contacts, accept invitations, and ask to be introduced to their contacts' connections. Who to invite? How many contacts? Some women lawyers download their electronic contact lists from Outlook and Gmail into LinkedIn. Others look for current and past colleagues, college and law school classmates, family friends and acquaintances. Regardless of the sources chosen for connections, women lawyers will succeed on LinkedIn by initiating new connections, investing in and building on existing contacts.

As the key benefits of LinkedIn include building professional relationships, developing relationships online and following contacts' activities, it is important to keep contact numbers manageable. Think in terms of one or two hundred contacts as opposed to 500+. It is prudent to be selective when inviting contacts and responding to invitations; it is not necessary to link to every person who sends an invitation or every person you know who also has a LinkedIn profile. Be selective and gauge the usefulness of each contact and the value to being linked. Contacts' connections should be reviewed regularly for potential introductions. Contacts are only as valuable

as the connections they provide. If a connection no longer holds value, de-link the contact.

Use LinkedIn Strategically

When treated as a business development investment, LinkedIn provides women lawyers with good returns. The access to available audiences is endless. Consider these strategic tips for increased benefits and opportunities:

- *Visit your LinkedIn home page at least once a day.* Each member is provided with a personal home page that highlights the member's LinkedIn activities, and those of all active contacts. This is where having a manageable number of contacts is effective. Get comfortable reading updates about your contacts and respond appropriately.
- *Post updates on your profile.* There is a feature on each profile where current news and insights can be shared in a limited space, similar to a tweet. This information can be updated as frequently as desired. Remember that LinkedIn is a professional network: maintain a business-like tone in all your communications. When used appropriately, this is a great business development tool.
- *Subject area groups.* LinkedIn contains hundreds of subject-focused groups, which are invitation-only online communities and provide valuable touch points for professional networking. There are a lot of groups in the legal space and for women lawyers specifically. If a group does not exist that could be of value to you and your target groups, initiate it. To get the most value out of group memberships and participation, select your groups wisely.
- *Questions and answers.* Outside of groups, there are over 20 established topic areas from which to post or answer posted questions. There are specific topics for law and related industry areas. These features provide additional opportunities to grow networks and display expertise. Postings are very public and will turn up in Google search strategies. Participate actively but use judgment when posting or responding.

Conclusion

Social media networks are very effective tools for women lawyers to build and sustain relationships. The ability to tap into larger and more diverse pools of current and potential customers and clients has never been more accessible. Participating effectively in online communities will net women lawyers more clients. Not joining an online community like LinkedIn is leaving money on the table.

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