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Preventing “Lawyer Meltdown” and Creating Productive, Profitable and Enjoyable Law Practices



LinkedIn® for Lawyers

By Allison C. Shields, Esq.

Social networking is gaining in popularity, and for lawyers (and law students) LinkedIn is often the most palatable network, since it is known as the ‘professional’ network. But LinkedIn is more than just a static profile service, and there is much more that lawyers can do to boost their visibility and even get business from LinkedIn.

As of early 2012, LinkedIn has over 150 million members worldwide, including executives from every Fortune 500 company. There are 700,000 members in the legal field alone. Over 40% of LinkedIn members are a Manager, Director, Owner, Chief Officer or Vice President, and 50% of users are business decision-makers.

Does it sound like your target audience might be using LinkedIn? How about your potential referral sources? Perhaps it’s time to take another look at LinkedIn.

Did you know you could do these things with LinkedIn?

Segregate your contacts by tagging them. Send updates, event invitations or other messages just to specific segments of your network. Some experts note that this is a good way to keep up with journalists and media and to send them ideas and stories. It's also a good way to ensure that you are not overloading your audience with too many messages that may not be of interest to them.

Rearrange the sections of your profile. Want your experience to show at the top of your profile? Prefer your recommendations to be front and center? Roll your mouse over the section title and you'll see 'handles' appear that you can drag and drop to rearrange your profile sections.

Improve your profile. A new feature helps you get the most out of your profile. Click on the yellow "improve your profile" button on your edit profile page and you'll get specific suggestions on what you can do to improve your profile for better visibility.

Create a Company Page for your firm. When you create a Company Page for your firm, all employees of your firm who have a profile on LinkedIn will automatically be attached to your Company Profile page. Your page can not only give a brief summary of your firm, but in the "products and services" area, you can list and describe your practice areas and create links to your website for more information. The Company Page even comes with a specific "Disclaimer" section, where lawyers can post whatever disclaimers are necessary according to their jurisdiction's ethical rules.

Clear the clutter from your Network Updates. When you post an Update on LinkedIn, your connections will see that update on their LinkedIn Home page, but they will also receive Network Update emails. And that means you see your connections' Updates in those places. If you have a lot of connections, that can be a lot of Updates.

In the past, your Network Updates showed you every update from all of your connections. Now you can customize your Network Updates to hide Updates from some connections who may not be relevant to your business. The change is not permanent, so you can always restore them later, but this will reduce your frustration with those who tend to 'overshare.'

Make sure you stay abreast of Updates from clients and former clients so that you can be alert to opportunities to reach out or to help them.

Showcase your accomplishments as a student or young lawyer. More and more employers are looking to LinkedIn when it's time to hire. LinkedIn has created sections with students and recent graduates in mind, allowing you to showcase your involvement in organizations, your honors and awards, projects you have been involved in, etc. And there is a new LinkedIn job portal for students and recent grads as well.

Get relevant news quickly. LinkedIn Today is a relatively new feature that gives you news from three sources: News your connections are sharing; news industry peers are sharing; and popular news trends outside of your industry. It can be a good source of ideas for blog posts, social media sharing, newsletter updates, or networking conversations. You'll find some of this information on your LinkedIn Home page, but for more news, go to the News tab on LinkedIn and click on LinkedIn Today.

Use applications to highlight your uniqueness. Applications like JD Supra Legal Updates are made just for lawyers and can demonstrate your expertise by linking your JD Supra content and profile directly to LinkedIn. The Slideshare and Google Presentation applications let you share presentations on your LinkedIn profile, and you can link a blog to your LinkedIn profile using the WordPress or BlogLink applications. The Events application lets you search for Events to attend or post your own events.

Who should I connect with on LinkedIn?

Who you connect to depends on your purpose for using LinkedIn and your philosophy about connections. Some lawyers believe that connecting to as many people as possible expands their network and gives them additional visibility. I prefer to establish robust relationships and create a network that is useful not only for me, but for my connections as well. I need to know enough about my connections to converse intelligently about them, make introductions and referrals.

When I receive an invitation to connect from someone I don't know or don't recognize, I will review their profile to jog my memory (one reason why having a photo on your profile matters!) and see which connections or groups we have in common. I will sometimes reach out to common connections to learn more. On occasion, I will send a response without accepting the invitation to connect, send a private email or make a telephone call to find out more about that person and their business – and perhaps to meet them in person, if possible - before accepting the invitation.

When I receive a link request from someone I don't feel I know well enough to introduce or refer - or to call upon if a need for their services arises - I generally send an email or make a telephone call to find out more about that person and their business - and perhaps to meet them in person, if possible -before accepting the invitation.

Questions to ask when determining whether to connect to someone include:

- Why did I decide to engage in this particular social media outlet?
- Is this person someone that I know, or would like to know?
- Is this person someone that would be a good connection for my clients or colleagues?
- Is this person someone with whom I would like to be associated?
- Is this person a potential referral source or strategic partner?
- Would I be comfortable introducing this person to other professionals or others in my network?
- Do I know enough about this person, their work and/or their reputation to enable me to introduce them to others in my network?

If you think the connection might bear fruit but you still aren't sure who the person is, feel free to postpone your decision and reach out to the person making the request to open up an email dialogue, make a date to talk by phone or in person to learn more about each other and what you might be able to do for one another. Review that person's on-line profile and their list of connections to see which connections you have in common. Reach out to your common connections to learn more about them.

If you haven't been to LinkedIn for a while, it might be time to go back and explore what is new, make some connections, beef up your profile and get active.

Interested in learning more about LinkedIn? Check out my new book, co-authored with Dennis Kennedy and published by the ABA Law Practice Management section, [LinkedIn in One Hour for Lawyers](#).

About the Author

Allison C. Shields, Esq., President of Legal Ease Consulting, Inc., is a former practicing attorney and law firm manager who helps law firms create more productive, profitable and enjoyable law practices by providing practice management and business development coaching and consulting. Contact her at Allison@LegalEaseConsulting.com, visit her website at www.LawyerMeltdown.com or her blog, www.LegalEaseConsulting.com.

