

Oregon Law Practice Management

Sorting Out Social Media

Later this year I will be submitting an article for the [Oregon State Bar Bulletin](#) entitled “Sorting Out Social Media: Tools & Etiquette.” For those of you who can’t wait, here is a sneak preview:

Sorting Out Social Media: Tools & Etiquette

If you are blogging, tweeting, or posting status updates to build your brand and reach new clients, you already know how daunting it can be to keep up with social media. Understanding ethical boundaries is an important starting point, as are privacy considerations. See Helen Hirschbiel, “[Social Media for Lawyers: A Word of Caution](#),” (*Oregon State Bar Bulletin* November 2009) and Sheila Blackford, “[Social Media Safety: Avoiding Pitfalls in the Kingdoms of Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter](#),” (*Oregon State Bar Bulletin* June 2010.) But once you know the ethical and privacy concerns, how should you proceed?

Social Media Etiquette

While it may not be obvious at first glance, there is etiquette to using social media. To keep your audience engaged and avoid irritating your “friends” and followers, apply these tips:

- Give yourself the benefit of a broad-brush overview. Read Carolyn Elefant and Nicole Black, “Social Media for Lawyers: The Next Frontier,” (American Bar Association June 2010.) (ABA products are available at a discount on the [Professional Liability Fund Web site](#). Select – ABA Products under the Loss Prevention heading.) Alternatively, check out [Mashable](#), which bills itself as “...the largest independent online news site dedicated to covering digital culture, social media, and technology.” [Mashable](#) has detailed how-to’s and online guides to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, and LinkedIn, among others. It’s also a great site to visit if you’re a gadget junkie.
- Start slowly and build momentum. While it’s tempting to set up your LinkedIn profile, Facebook page, and Twitter account on the same day and start posting and tweeting, your experience with social media will be better if you approach it gingerly. Begin with one account. Once you familiarized yourself with the terminology, acronyms, and abbreviations, you can move on to your next social media endeavor.
- Engage with others. This is what social media is all about – reading, sharing, and responding to what others post, asking what they think – not just pushing your own content in a “one-way” conversation. This is an important point to grasp, but many law firms miss it entirely. To an avid user, social media is an intensely personal medium of communication. When you participate, you begin building relationships and become part of an online community. If you aren’t prepared to interact, and if you don’t have the time to personally manage your accounts, then social media may not be for you. For excellent pointers about the “social” aspect

of social media, see Cindy King, "[17 Twitter Marketing Tips from the Pros](#)," (*Social Media Examiner* October 26, 2011.) and Lisa DiMonte and R. Michael Wells, Jr., "[Growing Your Online Footprint: An Ethical Approach to Building a Powerful & Influential Online Presence Through Social Media and Blog Writing](#)," (*American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division/MyLegal.com* October 14, 2011.)

- Remember to give your audience a breather. Most followers and contacts don't want to be barraged by ten updates in a row from the same person. If you haven't been on Twitter or Google+ for a few weeks, don't try to "make up for it" by over-posting. Social media users can lose patience quickly. If you engage in a posting frenzy, your content may be viewed as spam. Followers and friends may soon unfollow, unfriend, or block your account. Then all your effort will be for naught.
- Test all links before including them in a post, especially if you using a URL redirection service like Tiny URL, goo.gl, or bitly. If you post a link that returns an error message, your followers or contacts will be frustrated. Some may inform you of the non-working link. Others will ignore it and move on, never seeing your content.
- Some users prefer to create a personal and business account for the same service. For example, lawyer Susan Smith of the Smith Law Firm might choose to set up two Twitter accounts – one under her personal name and the other under the name of her firm. If Susan uses both accounts to simultaneously post identical content she may annoy followers and wear out her welcome quickly. In addition, not all content is appropriate for both personal and professional accounts. The best approach is to use your personal account for personal interests and professional account for professional interests.
- Should you thank other users who retweet, share or +1 your posts? Some experts say yes, others say it isn't necessary. If you want to thank others who are sharing your content, you can do so publicly (where everyone can see your post) or privately (in a direct message to the specific person you wish to thank). If you post publicly, pace yourself and keep our tip about over-posting in mind. On Twitter, you may want to thank others who retweet your content by using #FollowFriday. The #FollowFriday hashtag is used to suggest people to follow. For example: #FollowFriday @OregonStateBar. By using #FollowFriday to recommend someone with whom you interact, and who retweets your content, you show appreciation for their support, build a stronger bond of social engagement, and provide your followers with the names of other interesting Twitter users. You can read more about #FollowFriday and how it works [here](#):
- Speaking of public versus private posting, know the difference! [Twitter claims that "if you've posted something that you'd rather take back, you can remove it easily."](#) But I caution against relying on this. Once content is posted publicly on the Internet in any social media site, assume it is cached and available somewhere – even if you removed it from your account. This is another reason to take your time learning social media. It is also a good reason to approach social media with the mindset that *everything you post online is or can become public, even if privately sent*. Therefore, if you wouldn't say something publicly, you

shouldn't post it online – anywhere. This may seem like an overly conservative approach, but it will keep you safe.

- Lastly, don't be afraid to ask for help. If you have colleagues who enjoy social media and have built a substantial following, talk to them. How do they engage others? How did they build a following? What type of content do they typically post? What is their take on our list of etiquette tips? Do they have any pointers to share? Having someone show you the ropes will shorten your learning curve substantially.

Essential Tools for Managing Your Social Media Presence

- If you have more than one social media account, use a social media aggregator. These services bring together in one location the posts, streams, and updates from the most popular social networking sites. All are free. The idea behind an aggregator is to gather all content in one location (as opposed to checking all your social media accounts separately.) Of course they can also be used to simultaneously post content across multiple accounts, but remember to weigh this convenience against the potential downside of annoying your audience. Some aggregators are web-based, others are available as desktop and mobile applications. The most popular aggregators are Hootsuite, Tweetdeck, Netvibes, Yoono, Streamy, Flock, FriendFeed, and Socialite from Realmac Software. Aggregators also offer other helpful features, like scheduling of posts, direct uploading of images, videos, and files, mobile updates, organization of content into columns, auto-shortening of URLs, and alerts for specific types of content.
- If you prefer a more “organized” experience on Twitter, consider [TweetChat](#) which organizes content by hashtag (topic) instead of conversation (like the aggregators mentioned above). To use TweetChat, enter the hashtag you want to follow or talk about, and then sign in by using your Twitter account information. Once you're logged in, you'll see only those tweets referencing the hashtag or topic you selected. Use the message box in TweetChat to participate in the conversation. TweetChat is free.
- Direct messages in Twitter seem to accumulate endlessly. Deleting them one at a time on <http://twitter.com> is tedious. You can delete all direct messages or selective direct messages (messages from a particular user or messages containing a specific phrase or word) using the free online utility, [InBoxCleaner](#). Deleting content from Facebook, Google+, or LinkedIn has to be done directly from within the application.
- Backup your social media content using [BackUpMyTweets](#) (which also captures Twitter updates, mail, blog posts, and online photos) or the more comprehensive [Backupify](#) which captures content on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, LinkedIn, Blogger, and various Google apps. BackUpMyTweets is free. Backupify offers weekly backups for up to three personal accounts at no charge. [Pricing plans](#) are available if you have more than three accounts or prefer nightly backups. For more options, read Gina Trapani, “[Free Tools to Back Up Your Online Accounts](#),” (*Lifehacker* August 12, 2009.) .
- Want to keep in touch on social media without being a slave to your computer or mobile device? Consider scheduling your posts. Use your social media

aggregator or one of these services described by Lars, "[18 Twitter Tools for Scheduling Future Tweets and Improving Your Social Networking](#)," (*Tripwire Magazine* May 6, 2010.) .

- Looking for more tools and ideas? Check out these resources: Twitter – [Robert J. Ambrogi](#), "[Building on Simplicity: 20 Tools to Make Twitter Sing](#)," (*Oregon State Bar Bulletin* May 2009) and "[Tweet 16: 16 Ways Lawyers Can Use Twitter](#)," (*Oregon State Bar Bulletin* January 2009); Blogging – ABA Legal Technology Resource Center: "[FYI: Blogs](#)" and "[FYI: Feature Comparison – Major Blog Providers](#);" Facebook, Google+, or LinkedIn – Googling "Facebook for lawyers," "Google+ for lawyers" and "LinkedIn for lawyers" will return pages of tips, ideas, and pointers.

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