

THE DAILY RECORD

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@Lawyers: Networking online?

By **ELIZABETH STULL**
Daily Record Reporter

Kids do it. Jurors do it. Even members of the bar do it. Online social networking is more than a time-killer, say some Rochester attorneys, who also use it increasingly as a marketing tool.

Some larger law firms are resisting the trend, however. According to an informal survey reported in the March 2009 edition of Law Practice Magazine, 45 percent of law firms are now blocking access to some social Web sites. The survey, conducted in January 2009 by Doug Cornelius on Zoomerang.com, received 231 responses.

Eighty-five percent of respondents said their law firm blocks access to Facebook; 77 percent said they were blocked from MySpace. Another 55 percent are blocked from accessing YouTube, 26 percent from Twitter and 14 percent from LinkedIn.

Reasons cited by firms for blocking included loss of productivity, increased risk of viruses, confidentiality concerns and bandwidth consumption.

But those who use the sites argue the benefits of networking online far outweigh the risks.

Rochester attorney Nicole Black, of counsel to Fiandach & Fiandach and an expert on Web 2.0 technology, said firms that block networking sites simply don't understand the power of social media.

"It's just a way to expand your influence and showcase your expertise," said Black, who personally maintains four separate blogs in addition to Web sites and pages on sites including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. "I think that the solo practitioners and the small firms are the ones that are going to be the first to use these [online sites] effectively."

Most of Cornelius's survey respondents — 79 percent — came from firms with 50 or more attorneys (19 percent said their firms employed 50 to 200 lawyers).

Several smaller Rochester firms are maximizing their online presence.

Attorney Alexander Korotkin, a solo practitioner, said his Web site and family law blog generate paying clients at a minimal cost.

He established the Web site and blog in July 2008 using free software from Yahoo. It costs less than \$20 a month to maintain the site and the blog, as a subdomain, is free, Korotkin said.

By also using free legal directories and sites such as Justia, LawLink, Cornell LLI, Technorati and Divorce360.com, and linking them to his blog — which he updates weekly — Korotkin has boosted his platform.

A Google search of Korotkin's name on Wednesday afternoon

provided his direct contact information in each of the top 31 results. Search for "divorce lawyer Rochester NY" and Korotkin, who started his firm less than a year ago, appears on the first page along with larger, more established firms such as Lacy Katzen LLP, Trevett Cristo Salzer & Andolina and the Law Office of Robert A. Shapiro.

Attorney Lawrence Kreiger's name also appears near the top of those search results. His Web site includes a YouTube video featuring his legal assistant, Marcy DiGirolamo.

Korotkin said his Web presence has resulted in more than 15 paying clients since its creation nine months ago.

Fee-based legal directories such as FindLaw could boost Korotkin's Google rating even higher, but he said he sees no reason to pay for a service he already receives for free.

In addition to the free directories, Korotkin's blog is linked to his pages on Facebook and LinkedIn. He does not yet Twitter, however.

"I occasionally read some of the feeds. My question is more, whether anyone really wants to read what I might be twittering about," he said.

Korotkin said he knows he has a discreet audience for his family law blog. Using Yahoo's tools and Google Analytics he can determine how many page views his site and blog receive on a daily basis. Since the beginning of February, his site had about 1,000 in-state visitors, including 129 from Rochester and another 110 to 115 from towns nearby.

"Potentially that means there's a thousand set of eyes that look it over and have some interest in the topics that I am writing about," Korotkin said.

By comparison, Black said 2,139 people were following her on Twitter Wednesday afternoon. She estimated that 1,000 of them are lawyers. Based on her total Web presence, including LinkedIn and Facebook pages, she said she receives about five inquiries a week from people looking for lawyers in New York.

"I would have a lot of potential clients out there," Black said.

Assistant Monroe County Public Defender David Abbatoy maintains a blog that provides summaries and some analysis of recent criminal case decisions in the Fourth Department as well as the New York State Court of Appeals and occasionally federal or other court decisions. The blog, Indignantindigent.com, actually was started by another public defender in 2005.

"Hits go way up for the days after we write," said Brian Shiffrin, the former first assistant public defender, who now blogs for his new criminal defense law firm, Easton Thompson Kasperek Shiffrin LLP. He said his site receives between 800 and 1,000 hits in a typical month, he said.

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Shiffrin said his firm has received more than a few clients via its Web site and blog.

The New York State Bar Association last week launched new blogs on several legal issues and created a Twitter feed to share breaking news and issues of interest for association members and the media.

A spokesman for Harter Secrest & Emery LLP said the firm encourages its attorneys to look at LinkedIn as “a good place to network with their associates, their law school classmates, things like that.”

Spokespersons for Nixon Peabody LLP, Phillips Lytle LLP and Harris Beach PLLC declined to comment.

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