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What social media isn't

Over the next few weeks I plan to write about different goals that lawyers can achieve through social media. Each week, I'll focus on a specific goal and offer suggestions regarding ways the goal can be accomplished using different social media platforms and tools.

However, this week, I'd like to discuss what social media is not. Social media is not for everyone. And, it's not a magic bullet.

Social media won't make you a great lawyer. Only hard work and experience can do that. It can, however, make you a better lawyer when used to bring relevant information to you that will help you stay up to date on your areas of practice. Granted, you can accomplish the same thing using other resources, but social media tools are an effective and efficient way to do this.

Next, social media will not increase client contacts for all lawyers. Online marketing campaigns are only effective only if your clients are online, using the same social media sites as you. For some lawyers, such as those who practice criminal defense, it's unlikely that the vast majority of your potential client base will actively participate in social media.

However, for those seeking to expand their criminal defense practice, increasing the strength of your online presence to maximize search engine optimization is a good alternative to spending time interacting on social media sites. While your potential clients may not use online search engines to locate an attorney, there's a decent chance that some of their family members — those who end up footing the bill for an attorney — will search for a lawyer online.

Which leads me to my next point: social media is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. There is no magic formula that will work for every lawyer. In fact, the "formula" of interaction that works will be different for every lawyer. No two social media strategies will be the same because every lawyer's practices and goals are different.

In other words, your social media interaction will necessarily

be shaped by the goals that you hope to achieve. The ways in which you choose to engage in social media will vary depending on your areas of practice, your location and your personality. And, for some lawyers, deciding not to participate in social media is the best choice.

Last, but not least, social media is not a substitute for other, more traditional, forms of information gathering, networking and marketing. Rather, social media is a tool that, when used strategically and effectively, supplements the traditional methods of interaction and outreach. For some areas, like marketing, it can provide you with a more cost effective alternative to certain types of arguably outdated print media campaigns.

Likewise, social media allows lawyers to replace some of the more time consuming after hours networking events with more flexible online interaction. You should absolutely continue to interact with your colleagues and potential clients at face-to-face networking events. And, whenever possible, move your online interaction offline by meeting people that you have met online for coffee or lunch. Face-to-face interaction simply cannot be beat, but social media can help facilitate that process and expand your reach beyond your local area.

So, there are plenty of things that social media is not. It's not magical. It's not going to change your life or your law practice. It is, however, an additional tool to add to your arsenal — and one that has the potential to benefit your law practice in many ways.

*Nicole Black is of counsel to Fiandach & Fiandach in Rochester. She co-authors the ABA book *Social Media for Lawyers: the Next Frontier*, co-authors *Criminal Law in New York*, a West-Thomson treatise, and is currently writing a book about cloud computing for lawyers that will be published by the ABA in early 2011. She is the founder of *lawtechTalk.com* and speaks regularly at conferences regarding the intersection of law and technology. She publishes four legal blogs and can be reached at nblack@nicoleblackesq.com.*



By **NICOLE BLACK**

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