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## Creating an effective online presence for lawyers, Part 1

I'm going to be speaking about lawyers and social media at a number of conferences over the next few months in Rochester, New York City and Los Angeles.

For that reason, this topic has been on my mind recently.

From past speaking engagements, I've learned lawyers are becoming increasingly curious about social media, but know very little about it. Most law firms understand the importance of having an online presence, but are wary of "social networking" and, as a result, have only a static Web page for their law firm.

I want to share how a firm can expand its online presence by using free Web directories and networking sites. Next week I plan to tackle how to determine whether it makes sense for a firm's attorneys to participate in social and professional networking sites and forums, and which ones will help to achieve specific goals.

Lawyers with a static Web site as their online presence are missing out. In just a few hours they could easily increase their reach online by taking advantage of many effective and free online resources, directories and social and professional networks.

The first step is to create profiles for every lawyer in the firm at a number of leading, free online lawyer directories.

The profiles simply are online resumes. By creating online profiles, a firm can piggyback on the larger Web site's SEO (search engine optimization), and thereby appear higher in search engine results, all at no cost to the firm.

The three most prominent directories are Avvo (<http://www.avvo.com>), the Justia and Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School legal directory (<https://lawyers.justia.com/signup>) and Findlaw's attorney directory (<http://flcas.findlaw.com/rpu>).

I regularly receive client inquiries as a result of having an attorney profile on those Web sites. It's free to create a profile and only takes a few minutes to do so. Every lawyer at the firm should be listed at those sites.

Firms also should encourage every lawyer to create and main-

tain profiles on Facebook and LinkedIn. Facebook is a global social networking site that allows anyone to join. Individual lawyers can connect with people they know, including those with whom they have lost contact. In other words, after creating a simple profile in a matter of minutes, a lawyer can connect with everyone from his or her past, including former classmates, long lost relatives — you name it. The platform also is quite good at locating people whom you might know based on the people with whom you already have a connection.

Why is that a good thing for lawyers? Because they have a long lost network that spans the globe! People who know you but have lost track of you over time now will know you're an attorney. You will receive messages from old friends and from relatives seeking legal counsel — either for themselves or on behalf of a friend in your town. Breathing life into those lost connections is priceless, and Facebook is a unique platform that makes it possible. Do not pass up the opportunity.

All lawyers in the firm also should have a LinkedIn profile, simply an online resume that takes only a few minutes to create. The platform then assists in locating professional contacts

Even if nothing else is done with this platform, a LinkedIn profile is a worthwhile addition to a firm's online presence. Each attorney's profile appears near the top of search engine results because of LinkedIn's excellent SEO.

There are several networking aspects to Facebook, LinkedIn and other online platforms, if that is deemed a worthwhile use of time.

Next week I'll share how to determine just what types of online participation will be most beneficial to achieving goals set for you and your law firm.

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