

## Social Networking in the Legal Industry

**Lawsuit Financial**

**By Mark Bello**

Web sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and blogs have quickly opened up a whole new world of networking opportunities for all communities -- the legal community is no different. Lawyers can benefit greatly from networking and enhanced visibility when participating in different types of media. And, the results are often even better than expected; yes, you can obtain new clients as a direct result of authoring or posting a blog.

As a business owner, blog author and contributor, I would like to share my experiences; writing about hot legal topics in your industry and your areas of expertise can open doors for professionals. If you haven't already -- it is time for you to get involved in social media activities. It is easy -- and the rewards are greater than you might imagine.

Let's begin with the basics - social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. I have no doubt that these sites are familiar to you, but, have you taken the time to create a profile and learn how to use them? If not, I would recommend that you choose at least one and create a profile as soon as possible. Navigation and profile creation is easy; you can now connect to the people you know -- past and present. How far back in your life would you like to go? When you open an account on Facebook you will be prompted to answer some very general information about yourself, only answering what you want. You may choose to enter the law school you attended; if you want to connect to the more distant past, enter your high school, middle school or grade school. The system will automatically send you the names of other people you may know who went to that schools in the same years you did. This allows you to connect to people from the past. And who knows -- maybe new doors will open simply by contacting someone who is familiar with you and may be interested in your product or service. You can also choose to create an account for your business -- another great way to share company updates and information with your contacts.

Another vital online networking tool is blogging; I began writing a blog for my business a couple years ago. I regularly write on hot topics facing the legal funding and legal industries; I offer my own opinions on current events, trends and issues facing our community. This "blogsite" is a secondary business site; I also maintain a primary company Web site. The company site is my business address in cyberspace; a place for people to learn more about me and my company, what we do and how we do it. My blogsite is a place for people to gain insight about hot topics in the industry, to take advantage of my expertise and to hear my opinions on various legal issues. Expressing opinions as an "author" about issues that you are passionate about is a labor of love. The icing on the cake is that my company is getting significantly increased visibility while I educate the public about "my" issues.

I am seeing rewards from my blog activity that I had not even thought possible. My blog posts are constantly picked up by new alert sites and reported as "news;" I am amazed to see my posts following a post from CNN or Newsweek. Because of RSS feeds that are housed on my blog site, my posts have been picked up by additional Web sites and posted as "features" on their sites. My blog entries obtain a longer life span and are being seen by new and varied audiences. Because my blogs normally contain information about a new and hot topic, my name comes up more in regular internet search engines about those topics; as a result, I have seen new business, new contacts and increased visibility in the legal and professional marketplace and beyond. If you place optimized,

business friendly, key words or word combinations in your blog posts, those will come up in public or professional searches for companies like yours.

A short time ago, I was looking for some case law on the Web and came across a Web site that was pulling each of my blog entries and posting them as content on their site. My company name and my name were removed; do I care? No! My message is being delivered in cyberspace, my content is optimized and my blogs have numerous links and references to pages on my company website. Besides, one of my core missions is to better educate the market about my industry, my service and my business. While I accomplish this in numerous ways; strategically linked blog posts are certainly effective in providing education while, at the same time, introducing new clients to my vital, professional, service. I understand my market and I consider myself an "expert" in the field. If I can educate the public and the legal professional, this will convert more business for me. I am educating the populace, creating opportunities, and reaching out to as many people as possible.

It may or may not surprise you that clients are reading blogs and participating in social networking sites. Why? Because it is quicker and cheaper than traditional research tools. Industry experts report that, in 2008, the number of blog readers in the U.S. was well over 50 million people. Growth of social networking companies like Facebook and LinkedIn were in the triple digits and Twitter's growth was over 1000%!

If you are deciding, for the first time, that blogging is an activity that you would like to try, here is a simple tip for finding material to blog about. Subscribe (it is usually free) to news alerts. Google has a great news alert tool as does LexisNexis. Choose some keywords that are relevant to your business or practice; register them for alerts on these or similar sites and you will receive emails, at chosen intervals, with articles and other subject matter that make use of your chosen keywords. A divorce lawyer may want a Google News Alert on "Matrimonial Litigation" or, simply, "Divorce." A consumer advocate may want "Consumer Protection," "Safety," or "Consumer Litigation." You choose the word combinations that fit your needs; you choose the frequency with which you receive the alerts, and, best of all, this tool saves you the time of searching the web for topics. They are sent to your desktop, as often as you like, to accept or reject, in seconds. You can also subscribe to sites like My Yahoo or Google Reader, under specific topics, or, subscribe directly to blog sites that are of interest to you and your business. Again, the "news" is delivered to your desktop or to your BlackBerry or iPhone.

If you have business clients, find out if they are using social media and networking; you can easily determine if they have company and/or personal Twitter, Facebook, My Space, LinkedIn, Plaxo, etc. accounts and you can easily discover what they like to see and read. Get to know your clients' online habits. What sites are they visiting? What are they reading? Are there similar sites in cyberspace that you can recommend to them? Do they have a blog? What are they passionate about? Are they involved in a charity or cause? Where can you make a donation in their honor? Showing this kind of interest in your client and your client's causes will go a long way in developing a solid, long-term relationship.

LinkedIn is more "business to business" than Facebook or MySpace. But, you can get valuable information from this site on your clients, your clients' competitors, professional groups that may be of interest to your clients, causes that may be of interest to your clients, and educational and professional backgrounds on clients, prospective clients and competitors.

Likewise, Twitter can also be a valuable business tool. This networking site is what one might call a "mini-blog;" the "Tweeter" is limited to posting messages that are 140 characters or less. If your client or prospective client has a Twitter account, you can gain significant information about them, their industry, and their competitors by "following them" on Twitter. You can also find out what others are saying about your client, his industry and his competition. And, the information is not historical; it is current and immediate. In litigation situations, most, if not all, information posted on these sites are discoverable, thus, you can use them against the opposite party in litigation. More importantly, you can use your newfound social networking prowess to counsel a client on what or what not to post at these types of sites. If you don't want millions of people to know or see something; don't post it on a social or business networking site.

If you are looking for a relatively inexpensive and easy method of getting your message to more people in the legal industry, social networking and blogging are definitely outlets you should explore further. Use them if you are looking to better understand your client's industry and/or social interests; or, if you are looking to provide more informed professional advice to your client. As you see from my experience, the rewards can be significant. If increased visibility, new clients and new contacts are priorities for you and your business this could be a good strategy to embrace. Sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and blogs have provided my business new and exciting opportunities -- they can do the same for you.

*About the Author:*

*Mark Bello is the owner and founder of Lawsuit Financial Corporation ([www.lawsuitfinancial.com](http://www.lawsuitfinancial.com)) which provides cash flow solutions and consulting when necessities of life funding is needed during litigation. Mr. Bello has thirty-three years experience as a trial lawyer and twelve years as an underwriter and situational analyst in the litigation funding industry. Mr. Bello is a Sustaining and Justice Pac Member of the Michigan Association for Justice, Member and PAC contributor of the American Association for Justice, Business Associate of the Florida Justice Association, and a member of the Michigan and American Bar Associations. Mark writes regularly for the Lawsuit Finance blog ([www.lawsuitfinancialblog.com](http://www.lawsuitfinancialblog.com)) and is a guest writer for many other blogs in the legal industry.*

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