Web Law Predictions for 2010

Steve Matthews | December 2009

At the end of each year, I try to find some time to consider growing trends and how each might play out the following year. I'm just beginning that process now, and honestly, I'm not even close to a complete list. For those items I do have, however, I thought it might be interesting to present them in the form of predictions. And then with any luck, others here at Slaw might consider adding an item or two of their own!

So here we go:

More Social in our Enterprise Software: We know some of these features are in the works already, including Microsoft's social connector [http://blogs.msdn.com/outlook/archive/2009/11/18/announcing-the-outlook-social-connector.aspx], and rumblings that LexisNexis Interaction is looking to extract more value from LinkedIn and online web relationship tools. This should be a big trend in 2010. Expect a push for 'social' integrations from all types of enterprise software in the legal industry. As the number of lawyers participating in these web communities increases, smart firms will look to cull the data, and get smarter from it.

Real Time Web replaces Social Web: Within our vocabulary, and probably more. Just as law firms & enterprise software are catching onto 'social', expect some early adopters to distance themselves from the term, and proceed to align with the next big thing. The 'real time' web is about instant response and feedback. Launch a product, make an announcement, and then watch the pundits react. Google's addition of popular twitter topics into the search results [http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2009/12/relevance-meets-real-time-web.html] is just the beginning. Every industry, including legal, should expect a bigger 'peanut gallery' of commentators in 2010. The real time web will also push us to publish faster (or at least make us feel like we should). Those with the skill to draft insightful responses quickly, and then push those comments out onto 'the circuit', will see success.

Mobile Web Becomes Important: The mobile web made some major inroads in 2009, but I expect it to become a priority in 2010. By year's end, expect to be sick of iPhone application launches from the legal industry – both from vendors and law firms. Also expect an increase in law firms launching mobile versions of their website, mobile friendly extranets, and hopefully in all this – something innovative and useful! Internally, I'll go out on a limb, and predict that 2010 will be the year a law firm somewhere will declare smart phones to be a security risk, jamming transmission internally or banning usage from inside the firm.

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'Building Web Profile for the Legal Industry'

Mashups Finally Prevail: The more granular published web content becomes, the more I expect (and hope) developers see value in adding context. Last year, I wrote a post on active collections [http://vancouverlawlib.blogspot.com/2008/08/active-collections.html] and got very excited about the concept – i.e. powerful filters that help monitor pre-chosen online sources for a particular subject matter. … So this may be wishful thinking, but I'd love 2010 to be the year that filtered mashups for legal topics finally get some overdue attention.

Real Time Spam Ramps-up Production: As mentioned above, 'real time' is going to be the rage this year, especially with Bing & Google sprinkling social media updates into their results. Obviously, the next step for this mainstream acceptance is mainstream spam. Expect #hashtag search tracking in Twitter to be taken to the next level for formal events. As an example, you may need to be become an approved tweeter before attending a conference and being able to contribute to the comment stream.

The Tablet Web Debuts: If you haven't heard yet, 2010 is expected to be the year of the tablet [http://www.wired.com/gadgetlab/2009/09/apple-tablet-everything/] – think: a 10-inch iPod touch screen. I'm actually putting off buying a new laptop because of it; and expect this to be a watershed moment in computing. Very important to this transition, to me, will be how the web adapts. How will touch technology change web interaction and web design in general? Will new delivery vehicles emerge? Subscription models? Or will the infrastructure of Apple's app store (or the Kindle for that matter) become a revenue replacement for magazine content? 2010 isn't going to answer all these questions, but it is exciting because they're ALL up for grabs!

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