

**Those who understand how to use Twitter productively will enjoy the spoils of a valuable and differentiating skill. Becoming knowledgeable in Twitter and having the ability to formulate and execute a Twitter strategy is a considerable career advantage.**



A TweetDeck installation, showing all friends, groups and mentions of the user's username.



## THE PARALEGAL'S GUIDE TO TWITTER

LARRY PORT

By now you've undoubtedly heard of Twitter, and you may have even toyed around with it a little. But even for social media fans, Twitter can be a puzzle. It's not like Facebook, where you can view a person's detailed profile, see what they are up to, and participate in groups and fan pages. And it's not like LinkedIn, where you can post your work experience and conduct a professional dialog.

Twitter is a unique social media tool that involves "microblogging," a fancy way of saying that each user must announce his or her thoughts to the world in 140 character posts or less (140 characters is about enough room for one sentence). These posts are called "tweets."

Like Facebook and LinkedIn, you build a

virtual network of people. With Twitter, you gain followers (similar to friends on Facebook) and you follow people whose tweets you wish to read, based on subject matter or shared interests. For example, you might follow other paralegals, paralegal sites, legal research sites, paralegal associations or paralegal publications such as Paralegal Today magazine ([sallyannekane@twitter.com](mailto:sallyannekane@twitter.com)). You can determine who to follow through the user's profile (which is limited) and the substance of their tweets.

Dialog is one of Twitter's primary values and Twitter is one of the most effective ways to broadcast information to a group of like-minded people (your followers). Imagine a large

cocktail party where you briefly meet and chat with people from all over the world. Twitter is a massive, real-time conversation between all users across the globe. Contrary to what critics claim, traffic on Twitter is not comprised of what people are eating for lunch. You'll find people stating opinions, sharing useful articles and information, participating in movements, asking and answering questions, and a whole lot more. From a paralegal's perspective, you'll find people tweeting about legal research, writ

ing, technology, career opportunities, legal news and other topics.

## Using Twitter

Before you can use Twitter you must sign up for a Twitter account at Twitter.com. Usernames, such as "janedoe," are commonly comprised of a user's first and last name. Small firms and businesses should choose a name as recognizable as possible. As Twitter grows in popularity, unused Twitter usernames are becoming harder to secure, so you will need to check to see if your desired username is available.

Next, you should download a Twitter desktop application, which you will find more helpful than using the Twitter.com website for sending and composing tweets. One of the most popular applications is TweetDeck ([www.tweetdeck.com](http://www.tweetdeck.com)), which runs on both Macs and PCs. TweetDeck will allow you to quickly categorize your followers into groups, resend (or retweet) messages, shorten web addresses, and search for keywords.

Once you establish a Twitter account and install a tool like TweetDeck, your next step is to start sending and reading tweets. Twitter has its own unique language. Below is a brief overview of a few common Twitter conventions:

**Usernames:** Tweets will commonly mention one or more Twitter usernames which are always preceded by the "@" symbol. For example, "Appreciate the RTs! @janedoe @pollyparalegal". When you incorporate someone's username into a tweet, the mention will show up in TweetDeck and in searches, and you will grab that person's attention.

**Retweets:** Tweeting another user's post is known as "retweeting". To retweet a post, you must type RT @username to share the tweet with your followers and credit the source. It's good practice to retweet others since it is considered a form of flattery and encourages others to retweet you, helping you to expand your network.

**Hashtags:** A "#" sign in front of a search term is called a hashtag and allows users to find or categorize tweets. For example, Follow Friday is a Twitter custom in which users send out tweets on Friday suggesting others to follow some of their favorite Twitter friends. These tweets are preceded by a "#ff" or "#followfriday." For example, "For #followfriday, @paralegaljane, @johnsmith have great ideas". Examples of paralegal-related hash tags include #paralegal, #law, #legal and #NALS. Users attending conferences often add a hashtag to their tweets. If you can't attend a conference in person, contact organizers to determine what hashtags will be used so you can follow the conference virtually.

**Shortened URL's:** Since a post is limited to 140 characters, long URL's for articles, products or

blog posts typically gobble up an entire tweet. Free URL shortening services such as [tinyurl.com](http://tinyurl.com) or [bit.ly](http://bit.ly) can help condense a long URL. For example, the Wikipedia URL for Twitter is "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>" but the service [bit.ly](http://bit.ly) reduced it to "<http://bit.ly/KBgHG>". Tools like TweetDeck automatically integrate with URL shorteners, and [bit.ly](http://bit.ly) offers the added advantage of counting the number of times people click the links you tweet.

While Twitter is useful and a lot of fun, it can eat into productivity. Since Twitter offers a constant stream of dialog, if you're not careful you can spend too much time on Twitter. You might want to limit your Twitter usage to once in the morning and once in the afternoon – or whatever works best for you – using search to find information that interests you and using those intervals to tweet, retweet and propel your career.

## Networking on Twitter

When you sign up for Twitter, Twitter will search your Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail or other e-mail accounts for other Twitter users and you can choose to follow these people if you wish. Often, when you follow someone, they will follow you back. Following in Twitter is a lot less personal than it is in Facebook or LinkedIn. In more cases than not, users have never met the

other people they are following.

Searching on Twitter is extremely important for networking. The Web site [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com) allows you to dip into the real-time conversation and see what people are discussing. If you're interested in a legal topic or a paralegal conference, for example, odds are someone in the Twitter world is talking about it. Using search, you can find these people and follow them.

If you tweet about a particular area of interest to someone, you may gain some followers of your own. For example, let's say your username is "@janedoe" and you send out the following tweet: "Great article! Writing Paralegal Resumes for Experienced and New Paralegals <http://bit.ly/er8yd>."

Your followers may spot this message and retweet it to their followers: "RT @janedoe: Great article! Writing Paralegal Resumes for Experienced and New Paralegals <http://bit.ly/er8yd>."

Now, all of your follower's followers will see your username and may decide to follow you. Also, anyone searching Twitter for "paralegal" or "resumes" may discover you and decide to follow you as well.

## Advancing Your Career Through Twitter

Twitter has broad reach yet, paradoxically, is difficult for many | **continued on page 52**

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**continued from page 27** | people to grasp. Thus, those who understand how to use Twitter productively will enjoy the spoils of a valuable and differentiating skill. For this reason, becoming knowledgeable in Twitter and having the ability to formulate and execute a Twitter strategy is a considerable career advantage.

For paralegals, one of the key uses of Twitter is to stay current with industry trends. Since it serves as a kind of collective consciousness, the most useful and interesting articles and blog posts bubble up through repeated tweets. The Web site [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com) tracks the top subjects of Twitter discourse, known as "trending topics".

If you have a flair for marketing, Twitter has powerful branding potential. If your username reflects your firm or your attorney's name, every time you send out a tweet, that brand gets blasted to all of your followers. Moreover, if your followers retweet it, all of their followers (and then their followers) see the brand as well. Therefore, sharing anything of interest - such as a press release, a new blog post, or any other idea with value - will help you gain followers, expand your network and build your brand.

You can also win points with the partners by watching for mentions of your firm and its attorneys, peers and competitors. By using [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com) or a monitoring tool like TweetBeep ([www.tweetbeep.com](http://www.tweetbeep.com)), you can keep tabs of who's talking about your firm and whether the comments are positive or negative. This practice is common among service companies; customers who have complained on Twitter about their airline or utility experience have been contacted by representatives of those institutions.

### **Finding Jobs on Twitter**

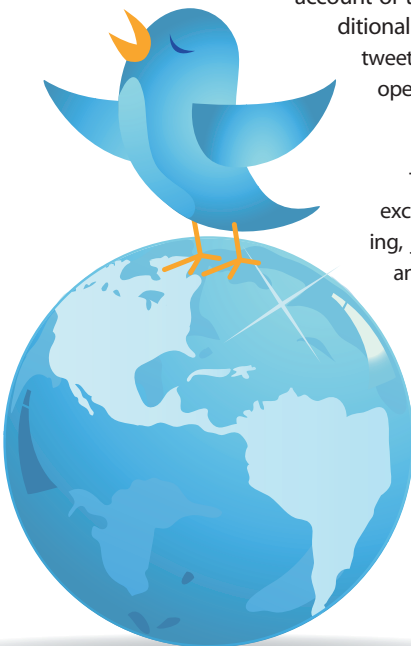
If you have your own individual Twitter account, one of the most powerful things you can do to advance your career is to establish yourself as an expert. Perhaps you have a specialty in legal research, technology or a specific practice area. Sharing what you know with others will garner their attention and open up conversations with new people.

One of the most powerful trends in personal marketing is developing a personal brand. Corporations devote considerable resources to develop their image and so should you. Twitter is an effective way to build your brand, since it allows you to share what you know, spread information you find useful and present yourself as a multi-dimensional person.

Although Twitter connects people over great distances, one of its greatest abilities is to facilitate in-the-flesh meetings. Events called "tweetups" are springing up even in the smallest of cities. Tweetups are happy-hour or dinner events where local Twitter users gather. Since you already have established a virtual relationship with these Twitter users, the in-person meeting is that much more enriching.

Twitter is a great networking tool before and during conferences as well. Before you attend your next paralegal event, determine what other Twitter users are going and arrange to meet them in person. When you arrive at the event, use Twitter to locate your Twitter contacts in these chaotic environments. And if you tweet during the conference, those who could not attend may follow your account of the event, helping you to gain additional followers. The bottom line is that

tweeting will help you meet more people, opening further opportunities to you.



### **Take Advantage of Twitter**

Twitter is more than a fad. It is an excellent tool for professional networking, job searching, career development and information gathering. Now may be the time to add Twitter to your social media arsenal. o

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