

5 LinkedIn Tips for Lawyers: How to Build and Use an Effective Online Profile for Networking

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This post is written by [Cogent Legal's](#) senior advisor, Kevin L. Nichols, who's assisting the firm in the areas of litigation support and communications. Kevin is the founder of two professional networking LinkedIn groups in the Bay Area with roughly 2,500 members combined.

Engaging in social networking is somewhat of an oxymoron when it comes to lawyers. Maybe it's because it goes against much of what they were taught in law school and what they reassure their clients: that they will neither disclose, break confidentiality nor privilege. Nevertheless, creating and maintaining a social networking profile has become as common as having a cell phone. It's time for lawyers to get off of the sidelines and network where their clients/potential clients are.

Most professionals use LinkedIn to reconnect with people they went to school with, worked past jobs with, share organizations with, just met and want to remain connected with, or to create connections with new colleagues, because LinkedIn is more professional and highly regarded than its counterparts, Facebook and Twitter. In fact, a recent survey of professionals, reported by Mashable, showed that 61% used LinkedIn for professional networking, compared to 22% using Facebook and 4% using Twitter (13% answered "none").

Whatever your reason is, while using common sense and exercising moral character, here are five tips on how lawyers can get more out of using LinkedIn:

1. Engage Frequently

Although I do not expect you to scour LinkedIn like a raven (like I do), you should spend 10 to 15 minutes each business day checking on your network and participating in groups. You may find that your classmate from law school just became in-house counsel and recently updated his/her profile accordingly, and by doing so, you may have a new client or referral soon thereafter. In addition to reading and commenting in LinkedIn Groups, there is a wealth of information that can be found using LinkedIn Answers from experts from around the world regarding such topics as the best calendaring tool or time keeping software for solo law firm management, as well as best experts for witnesses. If you have had positive experience using a particular software, vendor, etc., you can also share your experience to help others seeking the same information and create legitimacy your self as an experienced lawyer who utilizes tools to better represent his/her clients.

2. Complete Your Profile

LinkedIn gives you suggestions of what percentage your profile is of completeness. 100% completeness includes a picture (a must have, even if you use your firm's headshot), a summary, where you went to school and worked, and recommendations from colleagues and service providers. This will maximize your ability to reconnect with people whom you once were affiliated with and share the experience that you have acquired over the years.

3. Build Your Network

It's so easy nowadays to send referrals that once your profile is complete and people can see what you do, they can send business your way. However, if no one is connected to you, no one will ever know what you do or how you do it. This is one reason why it is important to build a strong network of connections, ideally with people you know and trust, and join LinkedIn Groups related to your legal practice. Be careful whom you add to avoid conflicts of interest or ethical concerns. But it's wise to connect with people—including competitors—so you can follow what they are up to and know where you both stand or measure up to one another. Knowing that there is a distinction on how you do business versus how they do it can be valuable.

4. Participate Across Many Platforms

There are numerous ways to share information on LinkedIn and to sync your updates with other networks—not just Facebook and Twitter, but other specialty apps. You can post your travel plans that alert colleagues in the cities you will visit via TripIt, or share books that you are reading via Amazon. If you won a favorable outcome on a filing, wrote a stellar article that was published on your blog, in a magazine, or newspaper, why not share it via LinkedIn using JD Supra? The more you share, the more you get out of it, and you never know what will come back to you. What really matters is that you are your own unique person, and you're developing your own "brand" by participating in social networking. Once you develop your voice, people will follow you because they like what you say and vice versa.

5. Update Frequently

Whether you get a promotion, change firms or read something that you would like to share, update your status and your profile regularly. Upload your latest newsletter or law article. Post an update about a verdict or settlement, or let your colleagues know about an amicus brief you wrote. People are watching, and seeing your updates may jog someone's memory who wanted to reach out to you for a consultation, referral or another opportunity.

LinkedIn's 100 million users shrink the professional world from six degrees of separation to about two to three degrees. Social networking is a way of life, so the more involved you are, the more you will get out of it.