

Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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Questions About Social Media?

With social media being such a new phenomenon, and social media tools a new technology, it's reasonable to expect that there are a lot of questions surrounding them.

During the ILN's 2010 Regional Meeting of the Americas, I got a question from an audience member that I thought I'd repost here. One of our attorneys wanted to know if a distinction is made between blogging and social media, and also, how it's possible to keep employees from using social networking tools at work.

I explained that some people do make a distinction between blogs and social media, but I consider them to be the same thing - my reason for this is that the main idea behind social networking (effective social networking, in my opinion), is that it's supposed to be social. So when people are commenting on a blog post you've written, it's important to be paying attention to these comments and interacting with the posters.

As my ILN audience knows, and this blog audience may have guessed, I believe that social networking CAN be a professional, as well as social, tool. I've said before, if people are using social networking tools at work,

for personal purposes only, that's a human resources problem - those people looking for something else to do during work time are going to be the same people making personal phone calls or emailing joke forwards.

It's difficult to block social media at work, since so many people have smart phones and can access Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and more - I think this is certainly the case at law firms, where smart phone are a necessary tool for business these days. Over time, it will be less and less possible to stop people from logging on, so as others have said before me, the solution is education.

Firms can sit down with their attorneys and other employees and explain to them that they expect them to be brand advocates. Everyone at the firm who blogs, tweets, or facebook and mentions their affiliation with the firm (and [in some cases, even if they don't](#)) is making themselves a representative of the firm.

This can be done in a professional way, so it's important to educate them about the firm's expectations.

Additionally, if a firm is monitoring their employees' use of social media, it's fairly easy to see whether it's being used for professional or personal purposes. If law firm management is actively using social networking



tools, they'll have an understanding of how much time it should take to be blogging, updating Twitter, etc., and will be able to judge whether their employees are abusing this or not.

Stuart Gerson of Epstein Becker & Green added that his firm has found a social media policy to be helpful in educating the members of the firm about their expectations. He added that they've been asked by a number of clients to consult on developing social media policies, and even have an attorney in their New Jersey office who specializes in this.

Stuart offered to share the firm's policy, and also recommended that the audience look to [IBM's research and policy](#) for assistance as well. I mentioned that we have a post with links to [sample social media policies](#) here at Zen Legal Networking, and also said that the recaps from the Social Media Risks & Rewards conference that I attended recently might be useful in identifying some areas of concern (they can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

Although there are some concerns about the time investment for social media, I pointed out that people handle it in different ways - some will log on late at night after all their other work is finished and others will give themselves thirty minutes in the morning to do all their social media connecting. It's a very flexible medium, which is one of the reasons that I like it.

As our Executive Director said at the end of this question and answer period, social media is an ongoing, evolving area, and I'm sure the questions will only continue. But I'm excited to see what's coming next!

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