

By *Diana L. Martin*
and *Christopher B. Hopkins*

By now you should have at least heard of Twitter, but do you know how to use it in your practice? While lawyers are notoriously slow when it comes to adopting new technology (how many of you are still using WordPerfect?), Twitter has become a social networking phenomenon that is here to stay (even Oprah is using it) and is being used by lawyers around the world. But it can be used for more than social networking; Twitter is also a serious business tool, and one that is free and takes only ten minutes to learn. Read below to learn about Twitter and how using it can improve your practice.

What is Twitter?

Twitter is commonly referred to as a micro-blogging service. After signing up for an account at twitter.com and obtaining a user name preceded by an @ sign, users can send messages (“tweets”) of up to 140 characters (about the length of this sentence). The messages are posted on the user’s twitter.com page and sent to every one of that user’s “followers.” At the beginning, even when a person has no followers, the message will go into the searchable “Twittersphere.” By using www.search.twitter.com, you can search all tweets by keywords (e.g., “Florida seatbelt law June 30”) or search all tweets coming from a specific location (e.g., all tweets within 10 miles of West Palm Beach). Other sites, such as twellow.com and twitterel.com provide alternative search methods. You can also search for other Twitter users by location by using tweetmondo.com or localtweeps.com.

To get the most functionality out of Twitter, some users turn to special software for sending and organizing tweets as well as searching by keyword. TweetDeck and Twhirl are two free programs for computers. Most users prefer to use Twitter on their smartphones using Twitterberry (Blackberry), Twitterfon (iPhone) and Twidroid (Android).

All of these software clients make it is easy to send normal tweets as well as reply to others’ tweets. Unlike a regular tweet, a reply is sent only to the intended recipient and users who follow both the sender and recipient (unless you access Twitter via computer, then all tweets and replies are visible). Additionally, you can send direct messages to specific users. These direct messages are private but, like emails, they can be forwarded to others. You can also “re-tweet” a message tweeted

by someone else by forwarding it to your followers. The original sender of the message will also receive your retweet, notifying the sender that the message was appreciated and forwarded.

Why Should Lawyers use Twitter?

How lawyers are using Twitter to improve their practices:

Micro-blogging—Many lawyers in our community have used blogging to develop their practices and their standing in the professional community. But not everyone has the time or inclination to maintain an effective legal blog. Twitter’s 140-character limit on messages allows users to “micro-blog.” You can send short messages relevant to your practice, or relay a recent success, and include a link to your law firm’s website or blog. Also sign up to be listed on wefollow.com and localtweeps.com for greater visibility. In short, Twitter can drive potential clients and attention to your firm.

- 1. Information gathering** – Using Twitter can be a great way to gather information about other lawyers and activities. For instance, you can follow the President of the Palm Beach County Bar Association, Michelle Suskauer (@PBCBarPrez), to keep apprised of information relevant to PBCBA members. You can follow other lawyers to see what cases or information they have discovered (e.g., @Martin_di or @CBHopkins). You can also follow larger legal information providers such as @westlaw, @fastcase or @ABAJournal. Or send out a tweet if you are looking for the name of a good place for dinner when you are out of town in the hopes that someone can make a recommendation.
- 2. News** – Most major news organizations tweet breaking news. Some good examples are @WPTV (Channel 5), @Palm_Beach_Post or @CNNbrk. Reporters and even lawyers may tweet from inside the courtrooms of notable trials, keeping followers apprised of developments (note: administrative rules prohibit tweeting from inside a courtroom in the Southern District of Florida). You might find it easier to keep up on current events when news is delivered in 140-character messages.
- 3. Marketing** – What lawyers will likely find most appealing is that Twitter can be used to market their practices. Distribute news about your accomplishments and those of your firm in 140-character messages and micro-blog about new developments in your area of practice. Building a presence on



Twitter might lead to new opportunities like speaking engagements, employment opportunities, or even client development.

- 4. Are they tweeting about me?** – Recent news stories have revealed instances where jurors are tweeting about their courtroom experience and developments during trial. Use www.search.twitter.com (by keyword and area) as described above to make sure the jury is not tweeting mid-trial. Or consider signing up on twilert.com to receive an email if someone tweets about you, your law firm, or other important keywords.

Happy Tweeting! @Martin_di is an associate with Leopold-Kuvin, P.A. and @CBHopkins is a shareholder with Butzel Long, P.C.

Be sure to follow the Bar on its Twitter and facebook pages. Go the the Bar’s homepage and click on the icons in the lower right hand corner, www.palmbeachbar.org



MOVING?

Be sure to send your updated address, phone, fax and email information to the Bar at 561/687-9007.