Introduction

What Is Social Media and Should You Be Using It?
Many lawyers have questions about the new social media phenomena. What is it? Should they use it? What is the best way to make use of it? These are all legitimate questions that I will try to answer in this presentation.

The short answer is that almost every lawyer can benefit from some form of social media. Social media is “social” because it is about relationships. Isn’t every lawyer trying to develop relationships with their clients, prospective clients and referral sources? Social media provides an easy way to do this because it utilizes technology that is used and understood by nearly every age group and social demographic.

Who Is Using Social Media?
While not everyone is using social media, many people, in just about every demographic group are using it. They are using it to reconnect with friends and family and keep up with what is going on. Are they using it to find a lawyer? The answer to that question is, “probably not.” However, they are getting a significant amount of their information from social media and spending a significant amount of their time online doing social media. That means social media is a logical place to try and reach them.

Creating Social Media Content vs. Consuming It
Many lawyers believe that social media has no place in their marketing plans. They are viewing it from a consumer prospective. Reading blogs, following people on Twitter and seeing what your friends are doing on Facebook are examples of consuming social media. However, someone has to create the content that others consume. If you create the right type of content and deliver it in the right way, social media can become a very useful way to market any business, including a law firm.

Types of Social Media
There are various types of social media but, in one form or another, they are all about relationships. Most forms of social media allow you to create a message and deliver it to others. Most also provide a way to follow the messages of clients and colleagues.

Blogging

What is Blogging?
Blogging is a format in which content in the form of articles is delivered via the web (a blog). Unlike a traditional magazine or trade publication, blogs are not necessarily published on a regular basis. Blog
posts are created when the author has something to say. In addition, most articles are short and are often meant to simply “tease” the topic. The author is seeking either comments directly on the blog or follow up contacts from readers whose interest has been piqued.

**Getting Started With Blogging**

Getting started with blogging is very easy. There are free sites that allow you to create your own blog and begin posting almost immediately. (e.g. [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and [www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org)) Wordpress can also be installed at your web hosting company and run alongside your website. Many web design tools (e.g. Joomla!) now include the ability to setup blogs as well. Getting started with blogging does not have to cost you anything but setting one up is so easy that paying a professional to set everything up for you will not break the bank.

**What Can You Blog About?**

There is an audience for just about every type of blog content. There are legal blogs discussing the latest Supreme Court decision, upcoming changes to the tax code, legal implications of current legislation, estate planning tips, etc. There are many legal related blogs on everything from legal technology to law office management.

**Blogging Tips**

You don’t have to blog every day or on any sort of regular basis. Blog when you have something to say. Legal blogging is not about giving legal advice. Interesting commentary that demonstrates your knowledge of the subject matter is just as likely to prompt someone to comment on your posts or call your office.

**Facebook**

**What is Facebook?**

Facebook is a social media website that allows you to post information about yourself and what you are doing and share that via your “Wall.” You also designate friends and can see the posts they place on their Wall. At first glance, Facebook looks like it has no value for business marketing. However, it has several features that allow businesses to establish a presence and allow people to “Like” and follow your business.

**Getting Started with Facebook**

To get your business started on Facebook, you need to get yourself started. A personal “home page” on Facebook gives you a personal news feed with the ability to post photos, links and comments. You can also post personal events. People you know “friend” your personal page. Once you have a personal profile, you can add a “Page.” A page is typically for a business. A business page allows you to post the same things as a personal page. In addition, it allows you to create and moderate discussions. People who are interested in keeping up with your business “Like” your business page. There is no cost to setup either a personal or business page on Facebook.
What Can a Law Firm Do with a Facebook Page?
Facebook business pages have several useful features for any business. The Events feature allows the business to post any activity that they wish to advertise such as seminars, speaking engagements, etc. Discussion boards allow the business to raise topics of interest and invite comments or questions. Even the Wall has uses. You can use it for short announcements or simply link back to your blog.

Facebook Tips
Create a business page to keep business and personal separate. Make sure your personal profile is private and not shared by people who are not your friends. If you don’t follow this advice, make sure you don’t post anything on your personal page that you don’t want clients to see. If a business contact wants to “friend” you, send them to your business page. Use your Facebook business page to link back to your other marketing such as your blog or your website.

Twitter
What is Twitter?
Twitter is like a news feed. More accurately, it is like a million news feeds. Unlike a traditional news feed, which is produced and edited by a news organization, Twitter is produced by its users. Twitter users “tweet” short posts (limited to 140 characters) ranging from comments on current events to where they plan to have lunch. As you can imagine, there is a lot of noise on Twitter but, sometimes, there is useful and interesting information if you can sift through that noise. Twitter is free.

Is Twitter a Useful Tool for Lawyers?
On its face, Twitter is probably the least useful form of social media for lawyers. When was the last time one of us managed to fit anything into 140 characters? Fitting an understandable message into that small of a space is not easy for anyone. On the other hand, Twitter does have a place when it is integrated into a comprehensive marketing plan. For example, it can be used to link to your own blog or others that you find interesting.

Twitter Examples
A quick visit to Twitter.

Twitter Tips
If you want to use Twitter for both personal and business, establish different identities for each. Use Twitter to link back to other marketing efforts.

Linked In
What is LinkedIn?
LinkedIn is a social media concept that allows users to establish relationships through “connections.” In that way, it is similar to other social media sites. However, unlike other social media sites, LinkedIn is
used mainly for business. LinkedIn is not filled with chatter like Facebook and Twitter. You are not going to find out where someone had dinner last night but you will find out when they change jobs or get a promotion. For this reason, LinkedIn is a very useful tool for any business that relies on relationships.

**Using LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is free. The first thing you do when you sign up is to create a profile. Most profile questions relate to employment and education. Once you have completed your profile, use the search feature to find a few business friends or colleagues and ask them to connect. Once you are connected, you will find that others will ask you to connect. Any time you connect with someone, review their connections. You may find someone else to connect with. In no time, you will have lots of connections.

Once you are connected to someone, you are updated any time they connect to someone else, change their profile, join a group or post to a group. In this way, LinkedIn keeps you informed about the business activities of your many connections.

**LinkedIn Groups**

One of the more useful features of LinkedIn is the Groups feature. A LinkedIn group provides a way for members to create discussions, post links and ask questions of other members. Anyone can create a group, set guidelines for membership and invite people to join. Groups can determine who can be a member, so LinkedIn groups can be semi-private. A public group is a great way to get your message out to a lot of people. Everyone in the group sees your message. If anyone replies, everyone they are connected to sees their reply. The way LinkedIn is structured (around business connections), this means your message is getting to a lot of people with interests at least somewhat similar to yours. Isn’t that half the battle when it comes to marketing?

**LinkedIn Tips**

LinkedIn is about making connections. Connect to as many people as possible. There is almost no reason not to connect to someone who invites you to connect. Once connected, look over that person’s connections and invite others you know on their list to connect. Join a group or start one. Create discussions and comment. Most LinkedIn users are business professionals. Use LinkedIn to make a name for yourself among them.

**Google+**

Google+ is a new service released last year by Google. It is similar to Facebook in that you can post information about yourself and follow others. It differs from Facebook in that you can segregate friends into “circles” and decide which ones you want to see posts from at what time. At first glance, it seems that Google+ gives you more control over how you consume social media. In addition, because Google is the leader in Internet searching, using Google+ will probably provide some search engine benefits as well.
Pros and Cons of Social Media

Benefits
With few exceptions, social media is free. If you use it the right way, it is a very cost effective way to get your marketing message out. Blogging and discussion groups allow you to demonstrate your expertise to a large number of people with only a small investment of time. When others find your content useful, they are likely to forward it on to others. When compared to traditional forms of marketing, social media is uniquely personal. It is about relationships. If your business is built around establishing relationships, social media can help.

Negatives
While it is low cost in terms of money, social media can mean a significant investment of time. If used improperly, it can also be a time waster. It is easy to get wrapped up in consuming social media rather than using it to create a useful message.

Conclusion
So is social media a useful tool for lawyers? I believe the answer is yes – with a few qualifications. A blog is a great way to demonstrate your expertise through something you are probably already good at, writing. LinkedIn is a useful tool for keeping track of the comings and goings of others in the business community. That type of information can be very useful to an attorney seeking to build relationships. I am a little less sold on the noisier forms of social media like Twitter and Facebook. Yes, they are free and provide an easy way to get a simple message out. The question is whether anyone will find your message among the noise.