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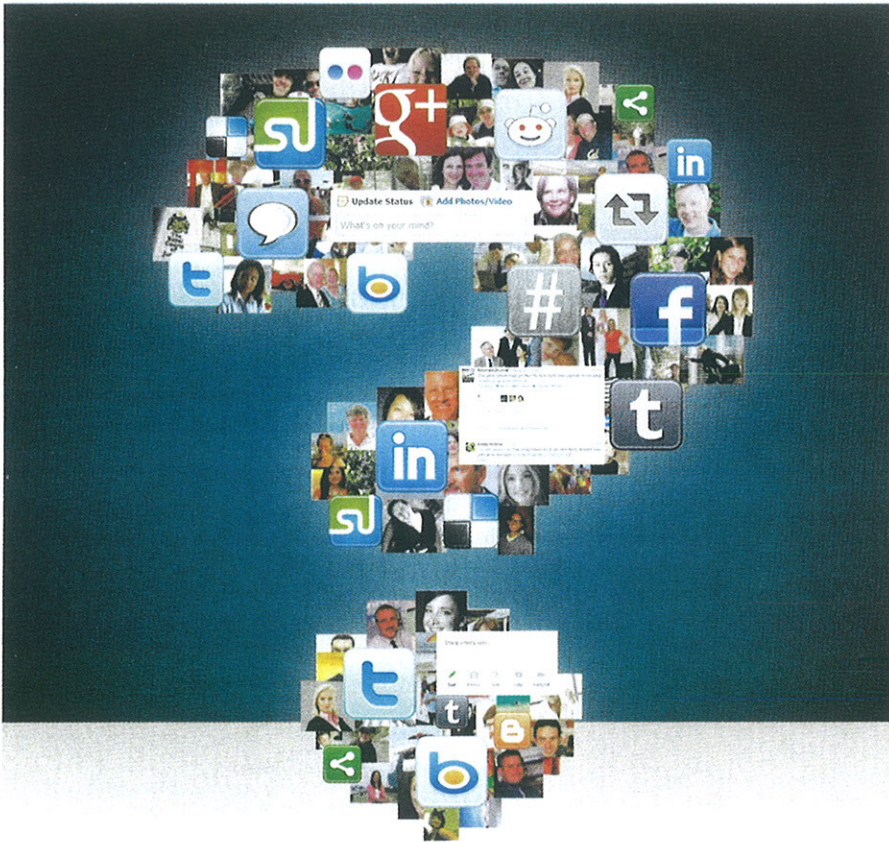
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Time to get linked in?

It is time for solicitors to join the social network, asks

Caroline Newman



“What’s the point of using social media?” “I am not getting any new business out of it.” “It just seems like a lot of noise.” “I am wasting valuable fee-earning time.” “If I let my solicitors use it they will spend too much time on it or they might expose the firm to risk.” “They might breach client or firm confidentiality.” All comments made by solicitors about social media and networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn. To gauge the extent of legal reluctance to embrace social media, Core Legal commissioned IRN Research to carry out a survey into the use of these sites by solicitors in relation to their work: 140 interviews were carried out earlier in the year with solicitors in law firms of all sizes. The key results are:

- ▶ A significant majority of solicitors use at least one site and by far the most popular is LinkedIn, the only site used by a majority of solicitors (56%). No

“Some firms (notably Clyde & Co and Eversheds) have been investing in educating their lawyers on how to get the most out of social networking sites”

- ▶ Most users of these sites are mainly reactive users rather than pro-active users, ie they are more likely to be looking at content on these sites rather than adding content. For example, just

many (74%) look at content once a week or more. Another 33% only add content a few times a year.

- ▶ Various themes emerge when interviewees comment on the value of social media sites for their work but the most popular answers re-enforce the point that many solicitors are turning to the sites to find content rather than to add content. The top three answers are: obtaining information from specialist groups; looking for information; researching individuals/organisations.

Some firms (notably Clyde & Co and Eversheds) have been investing in educating their lawyers on how to get the most out of social networking sites. This is an attempt by firms to become more focused in their marketing and business development activities.

However, our study suggests that almost a third of solicitors do not use any social media or networking sites in relation to their work. But in these tough economic times, does it not make sense to make use of this “free” resource to assist with ongoing business development?

Solicitors need to invest time in understanding social media, learning what to do and how to do it. The investment in time in building these relationships can pay dividends in the future. The power of sharing information and re-tweeting for example cannot be underestimated.

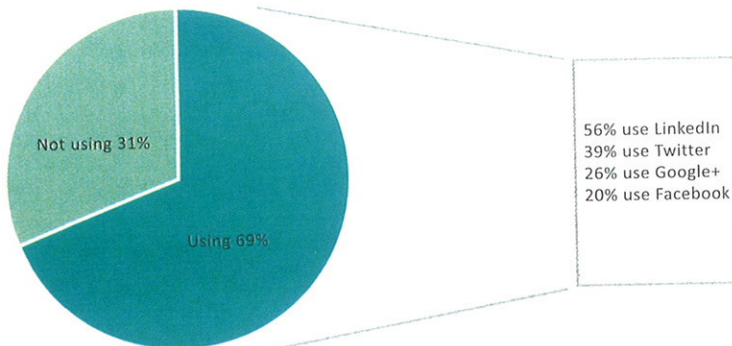
Why are they so reluctant?

Respondents cited concerns over confidentiality as the main reason for not using social media. They also stated that they do not have time to invest in social media, that they could see no value in using it, or did not understand it.

However, it is essential that solicitors embrace or at least recognise the importance of social media for their firms. They need to become aware that there are tools that can help them to make it easy and fast so they and their people can get on with running their business and dealing with client matters. Things are looking up though. Of the people who say that they do not currently use social media for work, 16% state that they are likely to use it in the next 12 months. Another 40% say they may use it although 40% say they have no plans to use it.

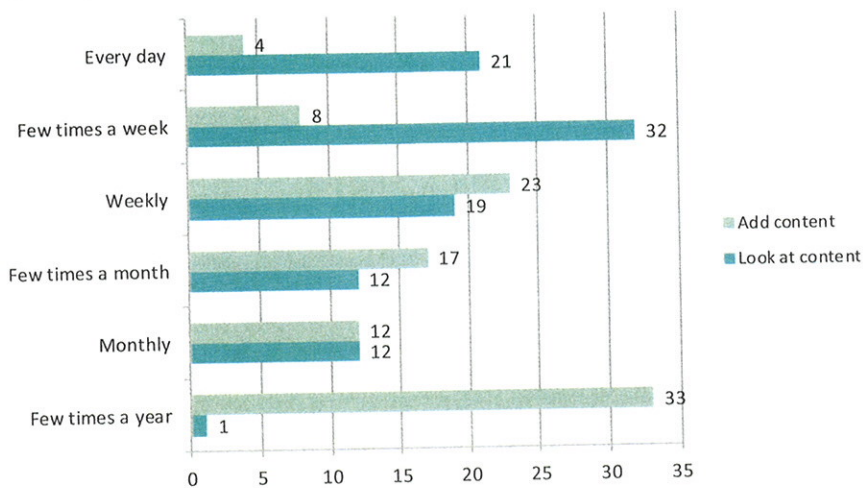
Solicitors have historically received some of their work through referrals from past clients, family and friends. The fact is that today these “friends” are increasingly online friends, who you often never meet in “real life”. But people don’t make that

Fig 1: Use of social media & networking sites by solicitors (%)



Source: Core Legal/IRN Research Social Media Survey, March 2013

Fig 2: Frequency of using sites for adding content or looking at content (numbers)

Note: based on 97 using social media
Source: Core Legal/IRN Research Social Media Survey, March 2013

If you are in business then you want people to be talking about your business online. And they will be talking about you and will continue to do so whether or not you join in the conversation. However, if solicitors join the conversation and begin to recognise what their clients are saying, they have the power to guide the discussion.

How sites are used

Most solicitors who use social media sites use these reactively rather than pro-actively. They are still "observing" rather than getting stuck into the conversation or even starting a conversation. Only just over 12% of solicitors (12 out of 97) add content to sites more than once a week while 33% of solicitors add content only a few times a year (see Fig 2 above). Given that solicitors are in the problem-solving business and have a great deal of knowledge and information that they can share this is a shame.

The study suggests that few are using it

to target specific groups. Does it not make sense that if they are the ones providing the information they are more likely to attract the business from those who are looking for that information?

The future

Solicitors have several options.

- If they have not started to use social media, they could choose to just not bother and carry on with their current business development activities.
- If they have made an attempt, eg by setting up a LinkedIn account, they could just keep that account up to date and do no more.
- They could hire someone to do the posting and updates and outsource the firm's social networking activity.
- Senior management could instruct all fee-earners to embrace social media and open a variety of accounts, and post content as they feel fit.
- Or finally, solicitors could choose to



consistent approach and use the most appropriate platforms for that firm.

It is tempting to stick with options (i) or (ii). But with so many people, businesses, clients and competitors actively involved on social networking sites how much longer can solicitors simply continue to not be involved?

Most platforms require a personality behind them and getting someone else to post content may be a good way to get started but people want to connect with an individual and you will soon be found out if you are not there in person.

As a leader you cannot just expect your staff to just get on with it in a vacuum. The result may be inconsistent messages. Worse still your fee-earners may engage with reluctance and without effective training, plans or analysis. This may cause a feeling of confusion and may ultimately damage your carefully created brand.

Firms may be frustrated by the lack of response to initial efforts but they should keep calm and carry on. Social networking is unlikely to deliver a "quick fix". If you want to grow a trusted network you have to roll up your sleeves and get personal; there are tools that can help you to streamline the process and it need not take more than 30 minutes a day to stay connected. **NLJ**

Caroline Newman is a non-practising solicitor, founder of Lawdacity (www.Lawdacity.com) and a member of Core Legal. A free copy of the full survey is available from the Core Legal