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Introduction: What are social networking tools?

What are "social networking" tools, and why should lawyers care about them. Wikipedia, itself built on social networking software, notes that social networking refers to a category of Internet applications to help connect friends, business partners, or other individuals together using a variety of tools. These applications, known as online social networks are becoming increasingly popular. This phenomenon is also known as Web 2.0. Jack Maness, a librarian at University of Colorado at Boulder, defines it as, "not a web of textual publication, but a web of multi-sensory communication ... a matrix of dialogues, not a collection of monologues. It is a user-centered Web in ways it has not been thus far." In Web 2.0 the end user – you – is (or at least has the option to be) an integral part of the data. Some of the social networking tools you may or may not be familiar with are: Blogs, Wikis, RSS Feeds, Tagging/Bookmark sites, Podcasts and Vodcasts. I will discuss these tools, how to find them, how to use them, and their possible relevance for lawyers and for legal research.

Blogs/Blawgs

What is a blog?

What exactly is a blog? Blog is a shortened form of weblog. It actually is what it sounds like, a log or journal of an individual's or institution's postings available on the Internet. Legal blogs are often referred to as Blawgs, to reflect the law focus of their content. Blogs or blawgs include a variety of articles such as philosophical reflections, opinions on social issues, or lists of the author's favorite web links. Blogs are usually presented in journal style with the latest entry at the top of the page. Some bloggers

post multiple times a day and others less frequently. Blogging has become very popular for disseminating information because users do not need any technical knowledge of software in order to create and update a blog on the web. Adding content to a blog is as easy as writing an e-mail. Blogs are a social networking tool because in addition to the writer sharing his information – the reader can also add his opinions, or information, by commenting on the original blog entry.

Blogs are ubiquitous. It is almost impossible to run a Google search without finding a blog reference in your results, and it has been theorized that blogs are the future of journalism. The most important aspect of a blog is their capability for delivering the very latest opinions and news. Bloggers can publish opinions and commentaries instantaneously, thus when a controversial legal issue erupts, bloggers are the first to provide reactions.

Legal blogs or Blawgs may cover a single legal practice area, such as intellectual property, or they may cover a broader topic, such as how to manage your practice. Many respected blawgs are maintained by lawyers who are experts in a particular area of practice and use their blawgs to track pertinent case law and legislative and regulatory developments, while others are written by journalists, librarians, or vendors with a particular area of interest or expertise.

There are millions of blogs in existence and reading them can be very addictive. However, you must keep in mind that there is no peer review of the published opinions so using good judgment and critical thinking skills to evaluate the blogs that you choose to read is a necessity.

How to locate and navigate Blogs

How does one locate legal blogs. I've included a list of a few general purpose recommended blogs, as well as some websites that list blogs you might want to read. In addition I will highlight some search engines specifically tailored to finding blogs. Once you have found a blog of interest they are easy to navigate. The most recent post is at the top and there is usually a sidebar on the left or the right with links to other blogs, the archives or earlier posts from the blog you are reading, and more information about the authors of the blog.

Some Recommended Blawgs or Legal Blogs

WALL STREET JOURNAL LAW BLOG

http://blogs.wsj.com/law/

The Wall Street Journal Law Blog was launched in January 2006 with much fanfare. WSJ.com's law blog focuses on law and business, and the business of law. The lead writer is Peter Lattman, who has worked on Wall Street for Goldman Sachs, been a writer for Forbes magazine and litigated at a New York law firm. The blog also includes contributions from reporters and editors at The Wall Street Journal and Dow Jones Newswire. Lattman states that the mission of the blog is to "write about industry news and legal trends, with a sprinkle of good old-fashioned gossip." So far the blog has lived up to its promise by offering timely stories with insightful and witty analysis.

MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT

http://www.mayitpleasethecourt.com/journal.asp

A weblog of legal news and observations and a 2006 Blawg Review Awards Winner. Some recent posts have included: Injured Skiers Don't Seem to Get the Message when they Sue Ski Resorts; Yes, Goddammit, You Can Curse In A Public Meeting; and, California Supreme Court Slices Through Privacy Rights, Opens Corporate Records To Class-action Counsel. The author of this blawg is J. Craig Williams whose practice focuses in the areas of complex business litigation with emphasis on environmental, real estate, land-use and computer matters and their respective insurance coverage and related tort issues.

SCOTUSBLOG

http://www.scotusblog.com/movabletype/

This blawg focuses on the Supreme Court of the United States. It received the 2006 Blawg Review Award for best case law coverage. It is written by the law firm of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld which specializes in Supreme Court practice. It includes a post of what's going on at the Supreme Court each day, a brief round up stories, as well as longer articles.

ERNIE THE ATTORNEY: SEARCHING FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE (IN AN UNJUST WORLD)

http://www.ernietheattorney.net/

Written by Ernest Svenson , a Business Litigator at the Svenson Law Firm, Ernie the Attorney comments on a variety of law and technology issues, including copyright, patent, trademark, and Internet law matters. Recent posts addressed the citation to Wikipedia in judicial opinions, and how to get out of a Verizon wireless contract without paying.

LEGAL BLOG WATCH

http://legalblogwatch.typepad.com/legal_blog_watch/

Legal blog watch aggregates the blog postings from over a hundred popular legal bloggers.

ROBERT AMBROGI'S LAWSITES

http://www.legaline.com/lawsites.html

This blog is particularly appropriate for this continuing legal education topic as it tracks "new and exciting web sites" for the legal profession. Robert J. Ambrogi is a Massachusetts lawyer, writer and media consultant. He is author of the book, *The Essential Guide to the Best (and Worst) Legal Sites on the Web*. He also writes the blog Media Law (http://www.legaline.com/medialaw.html), co-writes Legal Blog Watch (http://legalblogwatch.typepad.com/) mentioned above, and cohosts the legal affairs podcast Coast to Coast.

Directories/Lists of Blogs

These are just a few of the many blawgs available. Once you have gotten your feet wet and have read a few legal blogs, you will want to find new blogs of particular interest to you. One method for locating new blogs is to visit sources that aggregate descriptions of new blogs such as the ones listed below.

THE BLOGS OF LAW: A COMPREHENSIVE INDEX OF LAW-RELATED BLOGS

http://theblogsoflaw.com/

This site offers a list of law-related blogs arranged topically. The site can also be keyword searched. For example: under the topic of state specific sites there are currently two blawgs listed for Georgia.

BLAWG: YOUR SOURCE FOR LEGAL BLOGS, PODCASTS AND NEWS FEEDS

http://www.blawg.com/

Blawg maintains a list of legal-related blogs. It also includes more than 800 blog links divided into more than 150 subject categories. Blawg lists the top 30 most popular blawgs as measured by clickthroughs as well as a list of recently listed blogs.

BLAWG REPUBLIC

http://www.blawgrepublic.com/

Blawg Republic monitors the legal blogging community by hourly checking all of the blawgs in its database for updates. You can get a feel for various blogs by reading the entries on Blawg Republic's page. Blawg Republic's Blawg Directory lists blogs in more than 40 standard legal subject areas. Blawg Republic also includes a Trend Analysis section which lists the top 20 most popular items.

LAW PROFESSOR blogs

http://www.lawprofessorblogs.com/

While this website is designed to help law professors in their scholarship and teaching, it is also beneficial for practitioners. Numerous law professors have started blogs on subjects such as elder law, land use, state and local government law, family law, and products liability. While the name of the blogs sound as though the discussion will

be related to academia, most of the blogs are very helpful to a legal practitioner interested in keeping up to date on a particular legal practice area.

Another method of locating interesting legal blogs is to check out the blawgs linked to in the side bar of the blog you are reading. Most blogs provide these which are often called blogrolls. You can also follow the links in blog comments. When people comment on a blog they often leave a link to their blog. Follow that link and see what types of things they are saying. Finally, you can always run a Google search for the word **blog** and other keyword for the subject you are interested in.

Blog Search Engines

While the simple Google search mentioned above often gets you what you are looking for. It is possible to do a more targeted search for blogs, using some of the search engines specifically for locating blogs.

GOOGLE BLOG SEARCH

http://blogsearch.google.com/

Google has created a separate search engine to locate information posted to blogs. The interface looks just like the regular Google interface and also includes an advanced search. Results can be sorted by relevance or date. The standard Google Search limiters are supported in their blog search, and in addition this search offers the search limiters unique to blogs such as: inblogtitle, inposttitle, inpostauthor, and blogurl.

DAYPOP

http://www.daypop.com/

Daypop is a search engine for blogs and traditional news sources. This search engine covers over 41,000 blogs, and crawls each of these sites at least once per day to index the newest content. Daypop allows you to keyword and phrase search all these sites at once. You can also use Daypop to track specific words or phrases that are currently appearing in many blogs (Word Bursts), or view a list of the most linked-to Web sites from those monitored by Daypop, among other things. For example, you could search for your clients' names and product names regularly to see what people are saying about them. The advanced search feature allows you to limit searches to a particular language or country or time period.

Podcasts and Vodcasts

What is a podcast?

2005 was dubbed the Year of the Podcast, but how many of us know exactly what podcasting is? The word podcast was created by combining the words iPod and broadcasting. Podcasting is defined as placing sound files on the internet similar to radio broadcast format which users can download and listen to via an iPod or other MP3 player. Podcasts have been described as Tivo for you iPod. Although the name implies that only iPods can listen to podcasts, in fact any MP3 player of MP3 playing software such as Real Player can play a podcast. Podcasting is easy and inexpensive. All you need is a computer and a microphone to record a podcast. Like blogging, it breaks down communication barriers. Anyone can broadcast a radio-like program using podcasting. Others can listen for free – thus podcastings place as a social networking tool.

Podcasts and the busy practicing lawyer

How can podcasts be useful to a busy practicing lawyer? Perhaps you do not have the time to site at your computer and listen to a podcast. Maybe you do not own a portable MP3 player. You still have options for listening to podcasts. Just like books on tape allow you to "read" a book while driving, you can burn a podcast to a CD and listen to it on your automobile stereo, thus making drive time more useful. In the legal arena, some lawyers are creating podcasts for marketing purposes and to educate clients and potential clients on a variety of topics. As listeners, legal professionals can use podcasts to get up-to-speed or keep-up-to-date on numerous legal and non-legal topics. Some even offer CLE credit!

Sources for Locating Podcasts

How do you find legal podcasts that might be of interest to a legal practitioner? A simple method is to type "podcast and law" as a Google search. You can also try a Google search for "podcast" and an area of the law in which you are interested. For example you could type "podcast and bankruptcy." Another alternative is to visit one of the online directory sites listed below.

PODCAST ALLEY

http://www.podcastalley.com/

Podcast Alley bills itself as, "the best place to find all information relating to podcasts and podcasting." They are striving to develop the biggest and best directory of podcasts available on the Internet. You can browse Podcast Alley by genres or search by keyword. It is also possible to browse a list of top ranked podcasts by genre or just in general.

http://podcasts.yahoo.com/

Yahoo! Podcasts enables you to listen to and subscribe to podcasts. You can read and write reviews of podcasts here too. The reviews and star ratings of podcasts can be very helpful by steering you to podcasts that are tailored to your interests. By searching for the terms "law" or "legal" I located many podcasts. A sampling of titles includes:

- Law in 10: Episode 1 -- Criminal law Professor Justin Brooks, also director of the California Innocence Project, discusses media coverage, false confessions, and DNA testing concerning the 10-year-old JonBenet Ramsey murder. Professor Marilyn Ireland, a long-time San Diego resident and First Amendment specialist, talks about the ongoing San Diego Mt. Soledad Cross controversy.

- Advocating for Human Rights in Trying Times -- Barbara Frey, Director of the Institute for Global Studies at the University of Minnesota and international human rights law consultant, presented her views on "Advocating Human Rights in Trying Times", at Hamline University. This is part of a podcast series: Conversations in Law.

APPLE ITUNES STORE

http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcasts.html

Apple Itunes online music store now lists **free** podcasts. Again, the Itunes store implies that you need an iPod to take advantage of the store's offerings, but that is misleading. Anyone can purchase an "itune" and burn it to a CD. Although the majority of music listed on the Apple site is for purchase, the podcasts are free. The Itunes store

currently has more than 20,000 free podcasts available ranging from ABC news
Nightline to the ESPN Radio Show. Once you've downloaded the iTunes software to
your computer for free and clicked on the podcasts icon you can either keyword search
or browse podcasts by categories or featured providers such as NPR and the Wall Street
Journal.

2005: YEAR OF THE PODCAST

http://www.law.com/jsp/legaltechnology/pubArticleLTN.jsp?id=1133517911750

Though now a year old, this post from Robert J. Amrogi's Law Technology News
Blog reviews ten law related podcasts and provides links to ten more popular podcasts.
Ambrogi cautions that this list is not a "top ten", but is a sample of the type of quality
podcasts that are available. I checked all the links and the most of them are still valid.

The site Blawg, mentioned above – also lists legal podcasts.

Vodcasts?

Now that broadband and technology have come of age, it has been predicted that
video or vodcasting will surpass podcasts. Vod is shorthand for video on demand. And
it is the same concept as podcastging only video rather than audio is transmitted via the
web. In fact, the term vodcast has not been fully settled upon. Some other terms in use
for the concept of sending video over the Internet include: videocasting, videopodcast,
vid pod, and videozines. This technology is still emerging, and as yet there are few law-
specific vodcasts. However, their time is coming. In fact, American University Law
School has announced its intent to make vodcasts of classes available to students. They
already make podcasts of clases available. They also offer podcasts of other Law School

events to the public on iTunes and I would not be surprised to see these in the form of vodcasts as well. Meanwhile you can search for vodcasts either with a simple Google search for vodcast or vodcasting and a keyword or try a site like the one below.

VODCASTS.TV: YOUR VODCAST DIRECTORY

http://www.vodcasts.tv/vc.php

Wikis

What is a Wiki?

A discussion of the latest social networking tools would not be complete without a discussion of wikis. So, what is a wiki anyway? Technically a wiki is a method for organizing and propagating information. A public wiki is a website which any new visitor can edit, with changes showing up immediately. The name is based on the Hawaiian term wiki, meaning "quick", "fast", or "to hasten." Hawaiian airport shuttles were called wikis. Theoretically, public wikis depend upon the contributing community to correct any mistakes that are discovered in a wiki. Wikis survive based on the initiative, honesty, and integrity of their users. However, wikis do not have to be public. It is possible to limit who can edit or use your wiki. This software can be used to create a personal tool or a tool for information sharing with a small group. In fact at the site PBWiki (http://pbwiki.com/) you can create your own wiki, either for free or with some enhanced features for a small fee. They claim it is as easy as making a peanut butter sandwich. I found it just a bit harder than that, but not too difficult. You can check out my sample wiki at: http://jimbethmag.pbwiki.com/

A couple of Wiki's to check out

WIKIPEDIA

http://www.wikipedia.com

Currently, the English-language Wikipedia is by far the world's largest wiki and biggest encyclopedia in the history of the world. According to Alexa, a web traffic tracking site, Wikipedia is the 12th most visited website. This compares to Google which is number 3 and Amazon.com which is number 21. As of this writing Wikipedia had over 1.6 million articles in English. Wikipedia notes the differences between a public wiki and a printed encyclopedia on their *About Wikipedia* page: "Because Wikipedia is an on-going work to which in principle anybody can contribute, it differs from a paper-based reference source in some very important ways. In particular, older articles tend to be more comprehensive and balanced, while newer articles may still contain significant misinformation, un-encyclopedic content, or vandalism. Users need to be aware of this in order to obtain valid information and avoid misinformation which has been recently added and not yet removed. However, unlike a paper reference source, Wikipedia can be constantly updated, with articles on topical events being created or updated within minutes or hours, rather than months or years for printed encyclopedias." I find Wikipedia particularly useful for quick information about general topics, but would always verify it if I needed data I could absolutely rely on.

WEX

http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/index.php/Main_Page

Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute launched a legal research wiki called Wex a bit over a year ago. Wex is a collaboratively built, freely available legal

dictionary and encyclopedia, intended for a broad audience of people whom Wex refers to as "law novices" – in Wex's own words law novices at one time or another describes practically everyone, even law students and lawyers entering new areas of law. Wex is much less "publc" a Wiki than Wikipedia. Wex contributors are pre-screened before they can start writing content. By doing so the creators hope to avoid the problem of vandalism and ensure quality/accurate content. Wex has over 300 articles ranging from administrative law to workplace safety.

RSS Feeds

What is an RSS Feed?

RSS is a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated digital content, such as blogs, news feeds or podcasts. RSS formats are specified in XML (a generic specification for data formats). RSS delivers its information as an XML file called an "RSS feed", "webfeed", "RSS stream", or "RSS channel". Programs called feed readers or aggregators use this RSS data to link to various sites and inform the user of the reader/aggregator that the sites they have "subscribed" to have been updated. So, instead of having to bookmark every blog, or podcasts site you are interested in and check for updates when you remember, you can "subsribe" to an RSS feed and use a reader to notify you when the site has new content.

RSS feed readers/aggregators.

There a lot of these reader or aggregators available. Many are free and others charge a fee for added features. If you are just getting started with using "social networking"

tools I recommend trying one of the following free readers which are relatively easy to set up.

YAHOO!

http://my.yahoo.com/

Yahoo! has built a virtual RSS reader into its *My Yahoo!* personalization service. This service allows you to monitor RSS feeds in your browser by visiting a personalized *My Yahoo!* page. In order to access the *My Yahoo!* service you need to sign up for a free Yahoo! account. Once you have established your account and logged in to your *My Yahoo!* page, clicking on the **Choose Content** link at the top of the page allows you to enter a URL for a specific RSS feed or to conduct a key word search to retrieve, select, and display up to 50 RSS feeds. After you select the feeds you are interested in each is displayed in its own box -- labeled with the name of the feed – on the *My Yahoo!* page.

There is no software to download or install to use *My Yahoo!* so it is a good option to start with if you are uncomfortable with those tasks. You might later graduate to another reader with more features. Since the topics and feeds suggested by Yahoo! are very general, you will probably want to go to any of the blogs or other sites mentioned in this paper (such as the Blawg Directory) to locate their feeds or recommended feeds. For more information on locating RSS feeds you can also go to the Virtual Chase Legal Research Guide on Finding RSS Feeds at:

http://www.virtualchase.com/topics/finding_rss_feeds.shtml

BLOGLINES

http://www.bloglines.com/

I have a bloglines account and personal home page and recommend it for its ease of use and the ability to keep track of my favorite blogs, news services, weather forecasts and e-mail newsletters. There is no software to download since it is a web based service. This also means that I can access it from any computer with an Internet connection and not just from my desktop. Anything that you see that has an RSS feed button can be added to bloglines. From the Wall Street Journal Law Blog to the Holmes Family News blog -- my personal blog which I use to share news with my friends and family. Bloglines reports that the average user tracks 20 feeds using their service. As a busy professional using a news reader or aggregator is a fast and convenient way to keep up with lots of information without having to visit multiple web sites.

And Beyond

In addition to blogs, podcasts, vodcasts, wikis and the ability to keep up with all of them through RSS feeds there are other "social networking" tools that could be potentially useful to the practicing attorney – or at least fun to play around with. At the very least some familiarity with these will allow you to communicate with the younger generation. They are all "social networking" tools because they feature user input in the form of tagging or reviews or comments.

LIBRARY THING

<http://www.librarything.com/>

As a Librarian this is one of my personal favorites though I have only had time to catalog a handful of my books. LibraryThing is an online service to help you catalog your books easily. You can access your catalog from anywhere—even on your mobile

phone – and, because everyone catalogs together, LibraryThing also connects people with the same books, comes up with suggestions for what to read next, and so forth. Library Thing allows users to catalog up to 200 books for free, and for only $10 a year you can catalog as many books as you want. Your account can be private so no one can see it but you – or it can be public. You can catalog your books on Library Thing by searching Amazon and some other library sites to find a matching record – or you can create a record from scratch. The information is displayed as a spreadsheet database and can be sorted by various fields. You can also add tags – which can be subject headings or any other category you want to assign. For example I have tagged one of my books "International Adoption" this allows me to both organize my own collection and also to find other books tagged by Library Thing users with these keywords.

DEL.ICIO.US

http://del.icio.us/

Del.icio.us also features tagging. It is a social bookmarking website -- the primary use of del.icio.us is to store your bookmarks online, which allows you to access the same bookmarks from any computer and add bookmarks from anywhere, too. On del.icio.us, you can use tags to organize and remember your bookmarks, which is a much more flexible system than folders because you can assign items to multiple tags instead of having to choose just one folder. Del.icio.us is a collection of favorites - yours and those of other Del.icio.us users. Many sites make it very easy to add them to your Deli.icio.us bookmarks by offering a Del.icio.us logo you can just click on. You can also use del.icio.us to see the interesting links that other people bookmark, and share links

with them in return. If you are looking for websites on a particular topic – try a search

of del.iciou.us tags and see what others have bookmarked on this topic. I tried a search

for lawyers and Web 2.0 and found several interesting things including a blog post

entitled Web 2.0 for lawyers which contained an excellent summary of many of the

things I've been talking about here. Go to:

([http://s2kmblog.typepad.com/rethinking_structured_set/2006/06/web_20_for_law](http://s2kmblog.typepad.com/rethinking_structured_set/2006/06/web_20_for_lawy.html)

[y.html](http://s2kmblog.typepad.com/rethinking_structured_set/2006/06/web_20_for_lawy.html)) to read the whole post. One of the reasons that a search of Del.icio.us leads to

better results is that I am just searching the **favorite** sites of others and not the entire

web.

FLICKR

http://flickr.com/

     While possible not the most useful site for legal research, Flickr is a popular

social networking site. It is for sharing and organizing photographs, and again it works

by users adding tags to their photographs which other users can search to find

photographs of interest. It is easy to spend a lot of time at this site browsing through

photographs – but it could also be useful for locating a photograph of a particular place

or person. A search for photographs tagged with **courthouse** and **Georgia** resulted in

772 hits with the Morgan County Courthouse in Madison at the top of the list. There are

also excellent tools for organizing photographs into virtual albums (called sets). Photos

can also be kept private or only shared with designated friends.

     I hope that I have been able to illustrate how social networking sites can be useful

for keeping up-to-date, learning more about a particular area of the law, finding basic

information, keeping track of interesting web sites, marketing your practice, sharing your knowledge, and just generally networking with others. Now it is your turn to get out on the web and start trying some of these tools out.