** TECHNOLOGY

TECHGEAR

The Garminfone (price TBA) combines an Android smartphone with a



Garmin GPS navigation device. A T-Mobile exclusive, the phone includes real-time traffic, weather, E.T.A., and gas prices, and has access to downloadable apps from the Android Market.

WEBLINKS



KEITH H. MULLEN is cochair of the Financial Services Industry Group at Winstead, P.C. in Dallas. He uses the web to collaborate and communi-

cate with this industry.

Google Reader (www.google.com/reader)

This is the centerpiece of my knowledge gathering efforts. It allows me to monitor blogs, Twitter, and news on key people, companies, and substantive topics — all in a single place. So, I don't "go to" websites — they literally come to me. For instructions on this tool, see: http://tiny.cc/GReader496. Currently, I have 140-plus feeds or subscriptions.

Association of Corporate Counsel's Value Challenge (www.acc.com/valuechallenge)

This is the ACC's "value challenge."

Real Lawyers Have Blogs (http://kevin.lexblog.com)

This site offers advice on marketing with social networking tools.

Seeking Alpha (http://seekingalpha.com)

This is a good resource for blogs, data, and information on financial markets.

Tough Times for Lenders (www.toughtimesforlenders.com)

I regularly post content on Winstead, P.C.'s legal blog.

Kennedy Mighell Report (www.tkmreport.com)

I often listen to podcasts, like the ones this site offers on technology, in the car.

Facebook for Law Firms

BY JORDAN FURLONG

ike most people, I began using Facebook purely as a social tool, adding friends and family and acquaintances I hadn't seen since high school to my contacts list. About a year ago, however, I began receiving Facebook friend requests from business contacts, which felt a little odd — Facebook was for people I knew well and with whom I was willing to share updates about kids' skating lessons. More distant or professional contacts were more appropriate for LinkedIn or Twitter. So I tried to keep my personal and business lives in separate social media spheres, and I've found that many lawyers have tried the same thing.

Those distinctions are rapidly collapsing, though. Facebook recently passed the 400 million member mark — it would be the world's third most populous country — and that much critical mass means that Facebook is a business tool whether we like it or not. Law firms are coming to this realization as well, and many are dipping a toe in the Facebook waters by setting up a Facebook page, a firm account that provides information about the firm and invites other Facebook members to "like" the page (a designation that costs nothing and serves to indicate support or appreciation for a given company, product, or service).1 Unfortunately, most of these firm efforts are so tentative that they deliver very little value, and most seem to indicate a misunderstanding of what Facebook offers that a website doesn't.

A typical law firm Facebook page merely repeats what the firm already offers on its website, in much less detail. A short description of the firm taken from the website's "about" page, a series of links to press releases taken from the "media" page, and that's about it: Website lite, basically. I won't pick on any firms by linking to their underachieving Facebook page, but if you search for any large firm's presence on Facebook, what you'll find will likely confirm this.

What Facebook offers firms is the chance to tell a different story about themselves, or show a different side of themselves, than what is possible or appropriate through other communication means, such as a website, a newsletter, or a brochure. No law firm is really a one-dimensional creature that can be summed up completely by a corporate website — or if it is, it has bigger problems than social media. Most, if not all, law firms are complex, multi-dimensional communities of service professionals, and some of those dimensions are more effectively conveyed through non-traditional vehicles like Facebook.

For instance, a Facebook page allows a firm to post photos and videos of a staff function, a charity fun run, or a lawyer's TV appearances. It can let a firm start discussions of interest to its followers involving industries or communities that the firm serves. It can showcase upcoming events, either at the firm or in the community (perhaps including events that the firm sponsors). It can incorporate updates from the firm's Twitter account, if it has one, or point to interesting or important developments in the law or with specific clients. Anything that a firm does that could benefit from the interactivity and sense of community



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that Facebook engenders is a good candidate for inclusion on a Facebook page.

Although there are many examples of firms under-utilizing Facebook, there are also a few very good examples of firms getting it right. Silicon Valley powerhouse firm Fenwick & West has a Facebook page worth studying: Front-page updates incorporate the firm's Twitter feed and include profiles of firm clients and their successes, the photo gallery includes shots from a turkey lunch and a LEED celebration, and the documents page links to all the firm's shared documents hosted at JD Supra. Or consider the Facebook page for Wolfe Law Group, a construction law firm with offices in New Orleans and Seattle. Its Facebook page includes photos of employees building houses in post-Katrina New Orleans and downloadable SlideShare presentations by the firm's lawyers. Patton Boggs'

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Facebook page has a detailed biography page explaining its public policy, litigation, and business law work, and a series of links to podcasts and events like local jazz festivals. You can learn a lot more about these firms and how they differ from their rivals from their Facebook pages than you can from their websites.

Facebook has only scratched the surface of what it can offer users, so I fully expect that the number and variety of features and functions available to Facebook members will increase in the years

to come. The important thing to remember isn't that every firm needs a Facebook page — I don't think that's the case but that firms need to find out what social media sites offer in terms of new ways of marketing, new means by which the character and brand of the firm can be communicated, and new opportunities to develop a multi-faceted profile in the online world. Your website can't tell the whole story of your firm, and you don't need to force it to try - there's a world of channels opening up to your firm, and now's the time to experiment and figure out which ones deliver the best results for your marketing, branding, and communications goals.

NOTES

1. Until recently, Facebook pages were known as Facebook "fan" pages, and members could "fan" a page rather than "like" it, as they do now.

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