



TECHGEAR

The gScreen Spacebook (\$1,899) might be intended



for design pros, but lawyers will appreciate its dual 17-inch screens while reviewing documents. The laptop comes standard with a core i7 processor, 8GB of RAM, and a 250MB hard drive.

WEBLINKS



RAND ZUMWALT provides legal counsel to Texas businesses and nonprofit organizations on governance, financing, and transactional matters. He regularly speaks to entrepreneurial groups and disadvantaged business owners around Austin. Zumwalt is the author of *Forward Thinking* (forwardthinkingblog.com), providing commentary on law and other issues affecting businesses in Texas.

Greenlights (greenlights.org)

This site is maintained by an organization based in Austin that provides help to nonprofits around the state through training, resources, and grants. For fledgling nonprofits that cannot afford legal counsel, Greenlights can be of immeasurable benefit.

Lawyerist (lawyerist.com)

Of all the legal blogs I have frequented over the years, none has provided quite as much consistently practical advice as this one. From the latest in law firm marketing tools to staff management tips, the posts these folks put out continually reinforce their blog's self-proclaimed moniker as "the lawyering survival guide."

Google Reader (reader.google.com)

There is simply no better way to stay current on a wide variety of issues related to work and play than RSS feeds. Thanks to Google Reader and my iPhone, I have virtually unlimited access to the latest blog postings on topics ranging from startup funding trends to proper dovetailing techniques to woodworking parlance.

Don't Be Late To the Google+ Party

BY STEVE MATTHEWS

Google+, the search engine's recent entry in the social networking sphere, is set to make a big impact on the legal-web ecosystem. It would be wise to jump ahead of the curve and begin testing now, rather than wait to see how things pan out.

Why? Because this time it's different. This isn't Google Buzz, Google Wave, or Google's other social network, Orkut, which remains popular in Brazil. And it's not just Google trying to compete with Facebook or Twitter, as some have speculated. This is an all-out offensive by Google to reinvent itself, and it will work because billions of dollars in Google advertising revenue are at stake.

I know there are naysayers out there: "It's too early to tell" or "These are still early days," they say. But let me say it clearly: They are wrong. I expect Google+ to quickly move beyond just social network status and to socially entangle almost every Google web service under a single unifying umbrella. It will be big and it will affect how every business operates online — lawyers and law firms included.

Why Lawyers Should Care — and Start Experimenting Early

Here are a few factors worth considering that might push you toward becoming an early adopter:

1. Google search affects your business. First, recognize that Google search remains critical to sending traffic to your law firm website. Go ahead and check your metrics if you like, but there are few exceptions. Sharing content on Google+, along with the rising adoption of +1 buttons on blogs and websites, will allow lawyers to leverage their online networks for better rankings and traffic exposure

— the lifeblood of a well-marketed law firm online.

2. Google+ Business Profiles will create a unifying hub. Expect Google+ business profiles (set to launch later this year) to deliver a better context for business searching. Within two years, Google+ will be showcasing most of the commercial services Google now offers. Consider how Google altered local search in 2011 with "Places" — and that happened without a legitimate mobile check-in function. If Google embeds Places listings in its upcoming Google+ business profiles (not to mention the larger Google+ social network), law firm networks (or "circles") will add an entirely new set of metrics for Google to consider — metrics by which Google can gauge online trust and, more notably, rank websites in its search results.
3. Google+ is more "business" than Facebook, more "personal" than LinkedIn, and more "substance" than Twitter. Arriving late to the social engagement party may put Google+ behind with respect to the adoption curve, but there are definite benefits to watching the successes and failures of the competition. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter each have gaps in their coverage or functionality, making their alignment with business interests difficult.
4. Remember the Adwords advantage. Not only does Adwords give Google a proven monetization strategy, it's an advertising method based on sending visitors to business websites. Whether the goal is to increase product sales or to increase exposure for professional services, most mar-



keters will tell the same story — direct website traffic is still the key to conversions. Google isn't going to abandon that philosophy for Google+, and that's good for business.

5. Google will extend "Circles" to target legal audiences. This is one area where I think Google+ could really shine. We often know far more about our existing relationships than we ever document. Midsize and larger firms use customer relationship management (CRM) software to detail client interests, but how do we do this at a personal level? Audience segmentation may require extra work, but the value of sharing the right information with the right groups is invaluable. Google+ Circles simplifies this process better than any of its predecessors, and, like CRM software, it shares the workload throughout the organization.
6. You can gain the first-move advantage. If your firm is struggling to gain "likes" on Facebook or drowning among the Twitter sound bites, you're not alone. As the masses join the latest trendy web service, participants often struggle to stand out. First movers not only get the jump on the competition, but they have more room to experiment, and, just as important, to make mistakes.

Why Google+ Is the "Next Big Thing" (And Where to Start)

Google has wanted to socialize its services for some time now. Early in July, it lost access to its one social toehold: Twitter's real-time feed, along with the embedded links and topic trends. Competitor Facebook has similar contextual data, but Facebook won't be providing that to Google anytime soon. Google, on the other hand, maintains one of the few proven tools for generating business online: search. But it needed to make a play for social relevance. Google+ is that play, and I believe it will have a direct impact on publicizing and marketing lawyers' services online.

So start your experimentation early. Learn what Google+ is and how it works — first as an individual, and later as a business owner or marketer. Google+ is still in limited field trial, but set up your Google profile and if someone sends you a Google+ invite, accept it.

The early days of any web tool are best used to establish relationships and share interests and are non-commercial in nature. During that period, expect Google to integrate business applications slowly. Watch for what vehicles Google provides to distribute content. Law firm business profiles are a given, but what about practice groups? How about online communities for practice commentary? Perhaps Google's web video "hangouts" could serve as an interactive webinar platform? Only the future will answer these questions, but this

much we know: You must participate to find out.

We all keep hearing about the "Next Big Thing" online. This is it, folks. ✪

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STEVE MATTHEWS, founder and principal of Stem Legal Web (stemlegal.com), helps lawyers and law firms gain greater web visibility and effectiveness. He blogs at both Law Firm Web Strategy (stemlegal.com/strategyblog/) and slaw.ca. Matthews is a member of the Attorney at Work Advisory Group (attorneyatwork.com/editors-advisors/).

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