

Social media: a virtual cocktail party?

BY RACHAEL BRECKON

SOCIAL MEDIA is arguably the most abstract of current marketing platforms. It's a soft sell approach focused around visibility akin to physical social networking.

Unlike a fleeting face-to-face encounter at a professionally orientated cocktail function, the work you put into an online presence is permanent and searchable for years to come. If done right it can be an on going database proving a practitioner's skills and expertise.

Take this *LawTalk* article for example. All commentators were found, not through word of mouth or previous professional connections, but through online searches and social media networks.

Could *LawTalk* find you? If not, don't stress. It may not be panic time ... quite yet.

Professional services marketing on social media is still in its infancy according to barrister John Edwards (@JCELaw).

He uses his position on the *New Zealand Herald's* list of the top 50 tweeters to illustrate this: "Everybody is still learning. I am not an expert."

As a specialist in information law, Mr Edwards says he must be on social media platforms to maintain professional integrity.

"Issues come up about social media, so I feel that I need to be there to have any credibility. So I have signed up for everything," he says.

The use of social media has also been a way to market his professional services, and through this forum Mr Edwards is able to paint the picture that he's "a guy that knows about information law".

"I have had tweets turn into news stories on occasion. I have had people 'direct message' me about legal issues," he says.

Barrister Jeremy Sutton from Specialist Family Lawyers (@jeremysuttonnz) says through Twitter you can reconnect to previous colleagues and employers, meet other lawyers and refer clients to each other.

Mr Sutton also uses the professionally

focused LinkedIn (often referred to as an online CV) to advertise for staff and connect with people.

"If you are looking for a candidate, it's not just putting an ad on Seek or Trademe any more. There are a whole range of places you need to be," he says.

He warns not to be fooled into believing social media is enough to build strong relationships.

"I think that even if you have a relationship on LinkedIn that you still meet [that person] for a coffee," Mr Sutton says.

"You need human communication as well."

Cathy Mellett, who manages social media for Quay Law in Auckland, says choosing a platform is about "horses for courses".

Quay Law strategically uses social media to "build rapport" with potential and existing clients.

The Auckland-based firm ensures their content is well placed so existing and potential clients can pick up some useful information, interact and share with the community they are part of.

But, Cathy warns, "you have to have nous as once you have done something, it's out there".

Social networking styles

Below are different ways New Zealand firms and practitioners are using social media to successfully promote themselves in different ways.

Some are chatty and personal while others are more focused on sharing and exchanging professional information. Like people, each one has a different style, feel and network.

One way to approach social media is to look around, get a feel for it, and think about what style would work for you and/or your business. Then plan an approach.

"There is still plenty of scope there for people to develop [social media] and find their own way," according to Mr Edwards.

FACEBOOK PAGES TO CHECK OUT

NEW ZEALAND SUPREME COURT BLOG: www.facebook.com/nzscblog.

WELLINGTON YOUNG LAWYERS COMMITTEE www.facebook.com/younglawyerscommittee.

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON LAW STUDENTS SOCIETY www.facebook.com/VUWLSS.

CHAPMAN TRIPP www.facebook.com/chapmantripp?ref=pb.

SUCCESSFUL LEGAL TWEETERS TO CHECK OUT

JEREMY SUTTON: <https://twitter.com/#!/jeremysuttonnz>.

JOHN EDWARDS: <https://twitter.com/#!/JCELaw>.

QUAY LAW: <https://twitter.com/#!/aucklandlawyer>.

MEDIA ARTS LAW: <https://twitter.com/#!/MediaArtsLaw>.

RICK SHERA: <https://twitter.com/#!/lawgeeknz>.

NEW ZEALAND LINKEDIN GROUPS FOR LAWYERS

NEW ZEALAND BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

NEW ZEALAND LAWYERS NETWORK

THE LAW REPORT GROUP

LAW SOCIETY SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

- www.facebook.com/mylawsociety.
- <https://twitter.com/#!/mylawsociety>.

*** Please note this by no means intends to be a comprehensive guide to legal social media sites in New Zealand. It is a limited collection of a few lawyers using social media in a variety of styles, which may be of interest to practitioners who are interested in embarking on a social media marketing campaign. **LT**