Humans Seek Connections:

The case for online social networking for law firm marketing and business development.

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Introduction

It's been said before but bears repeating: online social computing is accelerating—rapidly. In fact, while you are reading this paper, new networks, blogs, and services are being launched, established networks are growing, next generation applications are being developed.

It's not about the technology, per se, but rather what is happening because of it. Participation is evolving rapidly, too. Early adaptors are now gurus. Evangelists of social computing gather thousands of followers who—with or without their business case yet defined—are investing their resources in this new space with fervor.

People from all stations in life are moving to social computing in droves. The popular social networking site Facebook reports more than 80 million active users:

- An average of 250,000 new registrations per day since Jan. 2007.
- An average of 3 percent weekly growth since Jan. 2007.
- Active users doubling every 6 months.[1]

It took LinkedIn over 400 days to recruit its first million participants, and only 19 days to gather its 20th million. [2] LinkedIn, which sells access to professionals for recruiting and networking, began offering corporate profiles in March 2008. It reports that all of the Fortune 500 companies already maintain individual profiles at the director-level, with over 160 corporate enterprise-level profiles on the site. [3]

Every major media outlet today—the *Wall Street Journal, New York Times,* BBC, ABC, NBC, PBS, and more—has launched functionality that accommodates reader comments, social bookmarking, RSS (Real Simple Syndication), and opinion blogs. World-class brands such as BMW, Coca Cola, Hewlett Packard, and Proctor & Gamble host corporate "white-label" [4] networks attracting both enthusiasts and critics of their products and services, built with the promise of brand transparency. Your clients are probably there. Do you know about their online presence?

Blue-chip investors are diving in and iconic organizations are buying up online property in transactions ranging from several million dollars to, potentially, billions. In 2005, Rupert Murdoch bought MySpace for $580 million. According to data released by Dow Jones VentureOne and Ernst & Young, venture capital investment in Web 2.0 companies rose to $464 million in the first half of 2007. LinkedIn landed a fourth round of venture funding in June 2008 -Bain Capital, Greylock, Sequoia, and Bessemer Ventures—four very savvy venture firms—invested $53 million—that pegged its value at $1 billion. [5] Unlike Facebook, LinkedIn is already profitable, and they took capital to grow faster. [6]

Only twelve years into the Web era, advertising on the Web generally has reached $14.6 billion in the U.S. and £7.5 billion in the U.K.

Research organizations devote legions of resources trying to get their arms around the most recent trends in order to forecast the future of what social computing means to advertising, consumer behavior, and media relations. Corporations add positions such as Community Manager and Director of Web Strategy to their payrolls. [7]

And perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this groundswell[8] might very well be that we—both marketers and organizations—don't yet quite understand how these conversations yield to actions measured by revenue. Unlike traditional media which is measured by Cost per Thousand (CPM)—where advertisers buy the idea that share of voice equals share of mind equals share of market—we accept the economy of social media, at this point, as a necessary investment in future growth and profitability based on "touchy-feely" things like giving rather than getting, goodwill, word of mouth, community, causes, opinions, and customer feed-back. Yet still we forge ahead.

On any given day you can open a newspaper, magazine, online discussion, e-newsletter or blog and find yet another article or conversation describing features and benefits of specific online social networks, how to make use of the various communities and which networks or social media sites are appropriate for this or that. In fact, the legal-marketing industry has published several informative white papers on social networking, the most recent to cross my inbox were from Duo Consulting[9] and another on Web 2.0 from Jaffee Associates.[10]

It is not the intention of this white paper to regurgitate information published elsewhere by offering a list of sites, benefits and features, or a how-to guide. Rather, it examines some facts, trends, ideas, and case studies, and gazes a bit into the crystal ball in order to explore the question that begs to be answered: does a plausible or profitable business case exist for joining the social online movement? We attempt to pres-

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ent here a holistic look at what being social online means to legal marketing and, perhaps, foment an ongoing discussion for the business case in law firms.

BACKGROUND

Anthropologically speaking, humans seek connections. Connections traditionally found in family, neighborhoods, interests, sports, schools, social clubs, and the marketplace are not going away. Still, the technology that enables global transactions—and aspires to become not only a transactional tool but also one that enables global interactions allowing people to connect to one another—is not a mere passing trend either. Through applications such as instant messaging, email communications, photo-sharing, blogging, networking, and consumer feedback sites, just to name a few, the world is becoming smaller, more accessible, more transparent, and more conversational. And where there are conversations, the marketplace surely follows. I can think of no business that has ever been transacted without a conversation of some sort .

The Pew Internet Project reports that what first brought Internet users online still is going strong on the Internet today:

> "Then, it was bulletin boards; now, it's social networking sites. Then, it was the adventure of exploring the new cyber-world; now, it's upgrading to broadband and wireless connections to explore even more aggressively. Yet there are changes in activities and motives. In the early days, most Internet users consumed material from Web sites. These days they are just as likely to produce material. One common refrain is that they think more change lies ahead and they are eager to watch and participate."[11]

In other words, how we all use the Web goes through cycles of adaptation. A new idea such as putting credit cards on the Web, storing data on the Web, or using Web-based applications like Google Docs can take several years to become mainstream. Yet, as more people move onto the Web—generally due to the increase in Broadband connectivity—the applications that make the Web a rich environment also makes it more ubiquitous, and the adoption gap is closing rapidly.

TOOLS

How will the tools you use to create social media—blogging, podcasting, video, social networks, etc.—help you build po-

tential relationships, grow community,[12] serve an audience, enable people to find your law firm, or lead to new engagements? The answer is not found under the HELP tab. Social media tools alone are not especially built to carve out more productive customers on their own. That still requires a business strategy, and surrounding marketing, to help convert segments of the community into potential business customers and enthusiasts for your services. This is the case both for the individual as well as the enterprise looking to exploit the technologies of the social Web.

If your business strategy isn't delivering on your promises, if you don't follow through with exceptional service or if you can't differentiate your expertise, all the social computing in the world won't help. There is no short cut. The world really, truly hasn't changed in that regard. Best practices in successfully sustaining any business or service organization involve the 4 P's: product, pricing, placement and promotion. However, marketing practices that support this strategy are moving into an additional medium—with a few adjustments. Primarily, one must dispel the mindset that marketing is a one-way conversation with a controlled message.

With the proper due diligence, creativity and resources in hand, social computing gives you the ability to have two-way conversations with your referral sources, prospects, clients, co-workers, alumni, and friends, as well as with their referral sources, prospects, clients, co-workers, alumni and friends, and so on. Thus eliminating the "head-banging" involved in devising marketing methods filled with adjectives and legal disclaimers and shoveling them into the foreheads of people who just don't want them.

But before you invest your time, it is wise to build your strategy by completing some basic due-diligence. Make sure that your prospects, clients or referral sources are online now or are moving in that direction. In the bricks-and-mortar-networking world, you wouldn't join the Association of Pipe Fitters International if you didn't have a legitimate reason to believe your clients might be there. You wouldn't take the time to read the WSJ if stories about your clients or their relevant issues weren't being printed there. (Well, maybe, but you get the idea.)

This intelligence can be gathered both online and offline. One likely place to find it is in your law firm's Web site statistics. What are the referring URL's? Who is visiting your site? Search the Web for your key clients using multiple search engines. Try, at least, Google, MSN and Yahoo!. What do the search results tell you? Do any of your clients have a blog? Do they

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belong to online social networks? Do they have a profile on LinkedIn or Facebook? Your search will tell you. Or, ask them next time you see them. Survey them. Include questions in client interviews.

Just as important, where are they in the mix? How do they participate—or don't they? Social technographic profiles,[13] identified by Forrester research group, may offer insight to help you understand your desired audience and facilitate the conversation. Are they *Creators, Critics, Collectors, Joiners, Spectators* or *In-actives?*[14] Creators publish blogs, Web pages, upload video, photos and music, write articles and post them. Critics post ratings and reviews of products or services, comment on someone else's blog, contribute to online forums and collaborative Web sites set up to allow user editing and adding of content, such as a wiki. Collectors use RSS feeds, tag Web pages or photos, and vote for Web sites online. Joiners maintain a profile on social networking sites and visit social networking sites. Spectators read blogs, online forums, reviews, and customer ratings sites; watch videos; and listen to podcasts. What are the social technographic profiles of the clients you want to engage?[15]

The Social Technographics Profile of Online U.S. adults
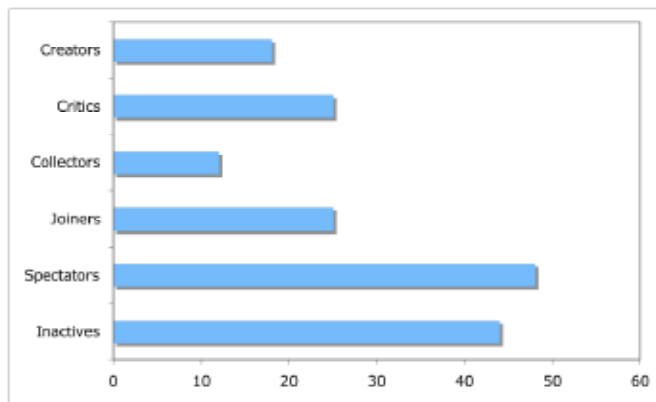
Base: Online U.S. adults. Note the percentages add to more than 100% because the groups overlap.
Source: Forrester's North American Social Technographics Online Survey, Q2 2007.

Select a social-computing activity that allows you to interact with your desired audience. If your audience is more *Spectator* than *Creator,* the initiative you deploy will be different. *Specta-*

tors prefer to simply read, watch or listen to content rather than create content, such as comment on a blog or chat on a social network. So, if your audience is primarily made up of *Spectators,* put your effort into producing content for them to read and watch rather than try to build a social community that requires a significant amount of *Creator* members to keep it alive. Spectators are easily engaged on Facebook, LinkedIn and other business networks, where there is relevant content. You and your law firm can provide that. Alternately, a topic blog(s) written by your law firm or sponsoring an online industry-specific review site (yes, this is an interesting option that a law firm might consider) could be a better choice. There your audience could comment or simply read content that you or other creator types produce. Or consider sponsoring a community site for a charity or cause that your law firm supports. There the activists produce the content, your *Spectator* clients get the benefit of their creativity and you get the credit.

On any social computing application, to execute well you must develop and foster community-centered content and activity, be prepared to participate and measure success based on new criteria. Whatever tools you choose, keep in mind that social computing is not a transactional proposition. It is a two-way, conversational, user-to-user environment. And that is where, rightly or wrongly, law firms may not welcome such transparency, and therefore keep them from meaningful participation.

STRATEGY

Further, your strategy must attempt to define the desired outcome of your social-computing activities. Although you may find that elusive and difficult at first, planning is key. At what point in the marketing funnel do you want to join the conversation?[16] Do you want to get exposure, promote an idea or expertise, build a pipeline, influence consideration, close a sale, or generate loyalty? It makes a difference. Framing the desired outcome and determining the socialtechnographics of your audience should help you determine which social-computing tactics are most likely to succeed. Whatever you decide, the activity should be factored into your marketing plan and your budget just like a golf outing or sales training. And, with smart choices and some creativity, you may find your outcome exceeds your expectation.

Being Social Online for the Individual

Every networking tactic doesn't work all the time, nor for everyone. Time limitations restrict the places that an attorney can network—bricks and mortar or virtual—and smart choices must be made.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

For as long as attorneys have been practicing law, the development of their practice has been built upon discovering, nurturing and exploiting their connections. In law schools, courtrooms, boardrooms, and the marketplace, the economy of law is dependent upon people and relationships: people who know people and people who know people-to-know. Actively working social connections is one way in which attorneys generate awareness of their expertise, reputation and service credo. In fact, an attorney's social capital is probably the most valuable asset for sustaining their practice.

An attorney's social networks include varied people and relationships—some of their contacts do not use the Web most likely and most are not members of the same services. In the realm of social computing, every person has a social graph, and parts of their social graph[17] may be represented within various online social-networking applications. Because the social graph in its entirety cannot be encompassed in any one tool—it is too rich, broad, and open for that—[18] the individual attorney, like the law firm's marketing program, must have a plan that covers various applications.

THE PLAN

In its most basic form, social networking online can be reduced to this simple concept: people connect with people who care about the things they care about, and strive for meaningful interactions. In the online networking space, people come to participate and create, not to be broadcast to, which is a departure from traditional law-firm communiqués such as newsletters, annual reports and advertising. As in the offline business community, the more you can assist people in connecting with others to transact a deal, share something relevant or solve a problem, the more favorably you will be received in these new online influential social circles.

It used to be that the business web was hidden inside people's heads and their rolodexes. Today, however, a lot of it is out there in the open—inside digital business-networks such as LinkedIn, Plaxo Pulse, and Facebook, to name just a few, as well as in other, more legal-specific, peer-to-peer networks focused on corporate legal departments, substantive areas of practice such as patent law, or referral networks for the small firm or solo practitioner.

An attorney may go to an online network, for example, to expand geographic reach, to compensate for time restrictions—you can network online when the family is in bed—to move into new circles, to get introductions to hard-to-reach decision makers, to reach entrepreneurs, to increase awareness of a niche expertise, to scope out the competition, or to share industry knowledge and experience with other attorneys, just to name a few options. The opportunities far surpass the bricks and mortar world in many regards.

What does this mean to a lawyer who is considering joining the social networking online community? It means that with limited time, attorneys (and anyone) should strategically choose where they want to participate.

1. The space should be compelling enough that you want to participate; otherwise, you won't go back.
2. Joining too many social networks is like mental overload. It will simply feel like a bad idea and a bad experience; e.g. "I just can't keep up with it."
3. If it doesn't bring value to your life, either personal or professional, skip it for now. But stay tuned. Most spaces are changing and improving every day.

How one participates in social networking is important. Savvy participants learn how to create a media-rich dashboard of sorts that helps them tell their story and spark conversations. The profile, mini-feeds, status updates, Q&A, interest groups, etc., shine a spotlight on activities that not only demonstrate expertise but also how they participate—but keep in mind that participation reflects on character and willingness to embrace community and two-way conversations.

In addition to how one participates, participation can be strategically tied to what place or places in the marketing funnel an attorney desires to make an impact: the big end of marketing funnel is awareness, followed by consideration, preference, and loyalty which leads to a buyer at the small end.

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Here's an example how you might use a social network at the big end: To have a chance at reaching a buyer, the buyer must first be aware that you exist. Lawyers have many professional guidelines of conduct that preclude them from cold calling via phone or email. Therefore, business-focused social networks are a good starting point for a warm introduction, and a satisfactory way to work within the rules. Say you're interested in talking to Acme Co. about your services related to a new piece of legislation. You log into LinkedIn, Facebook or any other such business network and search for people who work or worked for Acme. Then you will see if and how you are connected to them. Perhaps a connection is just one or two degrees away. Hopefully you have someone in your first-degree connections who is connected to the person at Acme to whom you are seeking an introduction.

If you craft your request for an introduction thoughtfully, several things can occur. One is that you give your first-degree connection a reason to "ping" or communicate with their connection, thus helping them stay top-of-mind with someone in their network. And, if there is a way to integrate a benefit for your connection into the request beyond the "ping," that can be very powerful.

For example, I read a well-written article about my area of expertise and thought it would be beneficial to both the reporter and myself if I were able to help them with background or a quote on the topic in the future. I searched for the reporter on LinkedIn and found that they were a second-degree connection. I then jotted a note to the connection we had in common, who happened to be a public relations professional, and asked for an introduction. I framed my request as an opportunity for my connection to converse with the reporter about helping the reporter build their expert database. On my side, in addition to the warm introduction to the reporter, it sparked a conversation with my connection that led to a phone call and a request to present to her Bar Media group. My connection request allowed her to get that chore off her plate and create goodwill with both a resource [me] and a reporter. It was a win-win situation for all of us.[19]

An introduction received via LinkedIn is much warmer than a cold call, because it comes with a bit of trust. You are no longer a stranger trying to sell things that no one needs. Instead you come with a recommendation, however light, from a person that the receiver is connected to and theoretically trusts. And even if you can't find a path to connect to someone, you have the option of sending a direct message via the social network that is likely better than sending a cold email. Your email communication via LinkedIn implies business context, and so the person you're trying to reach likely is not going to be as surprised or angry about the unsolicited ping.

While it's important to continue to build your network within a service such as LinkedIn, if you hit a dead end attempting to get an introduction, consider connecting via his or her blog. (Or other blogs or services where they comment on content— though this information may or may not show up in a Web search of their name.) Blog comments are likely the best way to engage with someone who is difficult to reach.

It is safe to assume that people who blog want to have a conversation. If you engage with someone around their blog and participate in a conversation on a topic that they are interested in, you will naturally connect with them. Particularly if your reason in contacting them is relevant to the topic they are discussing. However, if you try to push the conversation off topic, the person will perceive you as disingenuous and you will lose credibility.

Social networks and commenting on blogs are efficient ways to keep the virtual business-development ball up in the air. You can find many practical suggestions on how to use these tools for business development from other published articles and blogs mentioned in the introduction and found in the bibliography of this paper.

PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT

Peer communities built around a specific profession, industry or discipline share many general social-networking characteristics but often have important differences, such as the size of the community and restriction of membership eligibility.

In the early stages attorneys typically come to legal-centric communities for content. But attorneys get more comfortable with the medium and as the applications evolve, they will find other benefits in participation. Depending on the size and level of trust the community establishes, these benefits may include an opportunity to collaborate via discussions on cross-practice referrals, substantive law, recommendations, vendor reviews, travel advice, or management ideas. In some cases a peer community might offer document sharing, templates and access to precedents or briefs.

The ideal peer-community should give the attorneys access to people, information or dialogue that they couldn't get in their

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regular course of business or that they can't get on a frequent or sustained basis. For example, you can extend the rewards of attending a conference by meeting with your colleagues online after the event. You don't have to wait to stay in contact with those you meet face-to-face only once a year. Online communities, whether they are public or members only, are great extensions of face-to-face networking.

So what are the downsides? In some regard, legal communities will struggle with openness. The most difficult of which is crafting questions or requests for information that don't reveal intentions or compromise privileged information. Before joining a legal community an attorney should consider the membership makeup and the role trust plays in who is allowed to join.

The most successful communities will surround a burning imperative—a driving need—for people to share information and contacts. That need must outweigh any confidentiality issues that are inherent in exchange of information. And it goes without saying that an attorney who is a member in a peer community or any social network must have good judgment of what is appropriate and inappropriate to share.

Because of the conservative nature of the legal practice, you'll likely be seeing more legal networks broken out into segments of users that are senior, junior or adjunct, as well as local, regional or global. Of course you miss diversity or mentoring by segregating the junior from the senior. But again, the mission of the community drives the benefit to the member, and it will surround a burning imperative. There's going to be something for everyone, eventually.

In short, the value of any social-network community can be attractive to an attorney if it helps the attorney to do his or her job better.

GENERATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A law firm that doesn't realize how highly connected the millennial Generation Y is, thanks to their online networking, is missing a very important asset of the young attorneys who join the firm. In any business or profession, such as law, that depends on networks, referrals, conversations, and relationships to generate revenue, it isn't a stretch to say that when you hire someone, you hire his or her network. In today's social online-networking economy this can be a very necessary consideration—for better or worse.

However, it is not enough to judge the worth of one's network by its size. For any number of reasons, some people are not as public with their networks as others—befriending only people they know well. Yet even without 500+ connections they can have access to a much larger network of friends-of-friends. These are acquaintances all within one or two clicks. It's also wise to consider quality and depth. Someone can have a large broad network but not know many members very well nor be able to claim close, trusted relationships. It is incumbent on the young attorney to learn how to choose and nurture connections that have the most potential to develop into trusted relationships.

In this reality there is both opportunity and risk. For example; even if the summer associate is not yet an official representative of the firm, they are likely to indicate that they are related to the firm on their Facebook, LinkedIn profile or blog. Official or not—as soon as they self-identify their employer they become a representative. Law firms can choose to train, trust and empower employees to behave online just as they would in the workplace. Or, they can do nothing and trust that the employees will separate what they do online from their law firm, and that they will always behave in a positive manner. There are a number of sample guidelines and policies on social media, social networking and social computing available on the Web that you can access via a search to help you organize your thoughts and intentions. Alternately, a training session on reputation management can be very effective.

Being Social Online for Law Firms

MARKETING OVERVIEW

The Internet is different. It is the first mass media not supported by advertising revenue. Newspapers, radio stations and TV networks live and die on corporate-supported advertising; therefore one could say that their job is to make the marketer happy. Unhappy marketers don't spend on more advertising. But conversely, as Seth Godin points out, "the Net [sic] wasn't invented by business people, and it doesn't exist to help your company make money."[20] While there are plenty of opportunities to use the Internet for marketing, the Internet doesn't owe marketers anything. It will exist with or without advertising revenue. Marketers don't get a say in whether or not customers erect spam filters or block pop-ups.

The social Web is not interested in broadcast messages. The

social networking community does not welcome one-way, push messages, whether in an advert, blog comment, or wall post. Period. The social Web, as stated earlier, is about the groundswell: a social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than from traditional sources—institutions such as corporations. Even an enduring Web enterprise like Google says it's having a hard time monetizing social networks because the use case is completely different. Members of social networks aren't seeking information as they do on a search engine. Instead, they are communicating with each other and receiving value from self-expression and word-of-mouth recommendations.

According to BusinessWeek.com, "Marketers say as few as 4 in 10,000 people who see their ads on social networking sites click on them, compared with 20 in 10,000 across the Web."[21] Mark May of Needham & Co. contends that the jury is still out on social networks as an advertising platform. "Social networks today, much like e-mail, are utility-like and often used as a communications platform. These types of channels have never monetized well with advertising," he says. "This will improve but it will take a lot of time." [22]

This leaves marketers with the question: "How are the people I need to reach, interact with and tell stories to going to use the new power found in the groundswell, and how can I help them achieve their goals?" The answer, again, is not found under the HELP tab. It is found in a conversation marketers need to have with their team: their management group, their practice partners, and yes, clients and friends of their firm!

LinkedIn is now part of our vernacular. However, many still believe it is a fad that will simply go away or have little bearing on them personally or professionally. Yet 500 of the Fortune 500 companies have director-level profiles on LinkedIn. Barack Obama recently teamed up with LinkedIn to reach entrepreneurs, small business owners and executives, asking them very pointed questions regarding their needs from the next U.S. president. These are just two examples of organizations recognizing the power of social networking to achieve their goals, whether they are securing employment, venture capital or political clout. They demonstrate, perhaps, that the exchange of information can raise the organization's profile and even create enthusiasts.

STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS

Organizational mission statements, vision and strategy proclamations, values or belief statements wallpaper leadership circles and boardrooms. But the business case is not found in those instruments. More likely it is found in the two most valuable assets a law firm can claim: human capital and strategic relationships. What can law firms do to capitalize on these assets with the help of new technology?

The technology and applications that power online social-computing are also instrumental in bringing our enterprise relationships into an effective marketing strategy. Not only by way of connections on popular business or legal social networks, but also within one of the most powerful networks a law firm owns—the one that exists on the law firm's secure servers. Developing your law firm's relationships, just like personal-relationship development action-plans, produces strategic relationship outcomes.

One application that has hit a home run with law firms who view their social networks as an asset to be guarded and mined is Contact Networks. According to Geoffrey Hyatt, founder of Contact Networks, the technology they offer is a mash up of social networking and search technologies. It uses a complex classification system that sorts through a law firm's electronic network and an algorithm that figures out work-related relationships all within a secure and manageable environment.

Currently Contact Networks reports that 38 law firms, plus many investment banks, consulting firms, etc., use their application to leverage strategic relationships. Those law firms include very large, multi-office, international firms such as Skadden and Weil Gotschal as well as many other AmLaw 100 and 250 firms, including Mintz Levin in Boston, Duane Morris in Philadelphia, Kilpatrick Stockton in Atlanta, Winston Strawn in Chicago, and Wilson Sonsini and Sheppard Mullin in California. The smallest law firm using Contact Networks has 80 attorneys; the largest has over 2,000 attorneys.

Contact Networks is an "introduction finder," which is considered a type of social networking since it leverages your network. It is also an enterprise-search solution that uncovers the pre-existing professional relationships that your lawyers have with clients, referral sources and others. Yet, it is different than Facebook or MySpace, where you have the conversation online in a public sort of way. Contact Networks more closely resembles the private messaging of email, LinkedIn, Plaxo Pulse, or even Match.com.

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Hyatt explains: "We are exactly like LinkedIn - you get your introduction via technology, then you move your conversation pretty quickly to email or phone. It doesn't take place within the application."

To demonstrate how a strategic relationship "net" functions in a marketing context using Contact Networks, the company has posted a case study on their enterprise Web site that tells of an Atlanta-based firm with more than 500 lawyers scattered across nine offices. "One morning before work, a lawyer at the firm saw a TV news story about a food company blamed for selling a tainted product. As soon as he got to the office, the lawyer logged into ContactNet to find out who at the firm knew people inside the food company. By the end of the day, the [firm's] litigation unit had signed up a new client," says David Gregson, the firm's Chief Information Officer. [23]

Figure 4: Improved Performance in Key Social Media Metrics

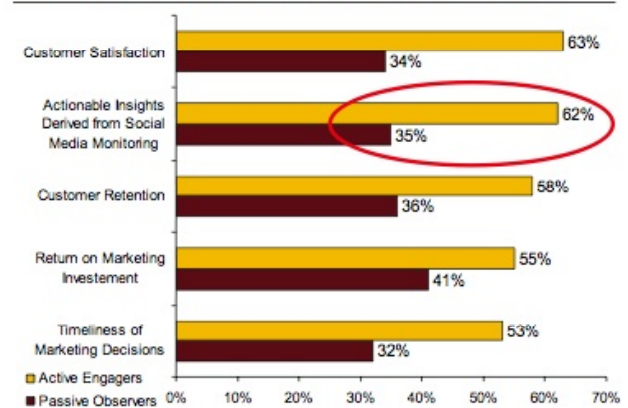Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2008 [26]

WEB SITES AND WHITE-LABEL SOCIAL NETWORKS

Corporate Web sites in their current form are in their last throes, according to one savvy blogger, soon to evolve into something greater, where the focus is on customers and community rather than solely on products or services. [24]

Social media is making an impact on all aspects of business communications, including the sacred corporate (and the law firm?) Web site. As people rapidly migrate to social computing, social media outlets will likely become the dominant channel through which vendors deliver their messages to the market-place. Companies like GM, Microsoft, Intuit, and Starwood are successfully using social media and white-label networks [25] as marketing strategies to understand and engage their audiences more deeply— with demonstrable business results.

The following chart shows results of over 400 companies surveyed about social media monitoring. Some 62 percent of "Active Engagers"—those companies who participate in social computing and monitor activity at an enterprise level, compared to those who merely monitor their reputation passively among social media—reported improved performance in key metrics such as customer satisfaction, actionable insights, customer retention, return on marketing investment, and timeliness of marketing decisions.

As major companies are increasingly coming to realize, consumer voices (G.C's?) can wield enormous influence in shaping the opinions of other consumers—and, ultimately, their loyalties and purchase decisions. Another Aberdeen survey of over 250 organizations revealed that the business case for social media participation could be related to such things as improved product marketing, communications, market research, customer support, brand reputation protection, competitive intelligence, and new product development activities.

Perhaps the law firm Web site can become more than merely a domain name used after every marketing communication or email. Perhaps in the near future it will contain more than tired happy-marketing-speak, stock photos of smart looking dudes or minority women crowded around the computer or conference-room table, positive press releases, out-of-context case studies where no client ever loses, rows of executive portraits, boasts of donations made to disaster relief, enthused summer associate testimonials, and well, where the one-sided view never ends. Or maybe not.

Furthermore, the business case for the law firm Web site is no longer only fought within Google search results and on the corporate domain, whether you participate or not. It has spread to many other areas where conversations occur: social networks, rating sites, chat rooms, and even blogs. People get ideas about products and services on consumer rating sites, from directories and from their peers, offline and on-line. They use instant messaging, Facebook and other social networks. When making a purchase decision, people rarely directly type in a domain name to a corporate or law firm Web

site as first step. Why? Because doing so, they know they will find only one perspective, the way the corporation or brand wants you to think about them, and the way they think about themselves.

In response to a growing content-centric social-networking community, companies are starting to build social-enabled white-label sites around content areas—such as sites that sell cars, share about medical conditions, or travel plans. These are not micro-sites that retain the transactional Web 1.0 attitude. These sites, in the Web 2.0 context, add the social layer to content-driven resources. This is an extremely important trend—in the future, all of our content sites will have social characteristics. Sites that move in early and implement well could very easily steal a large audience-pool from established transactional content sites.

If adding a social layer is in the tea leaves for law firm Web sites, being a pioneer is not for the unimaginative or lazy. Here are some things law firms will have to consider.

1. Humanizing the organization: blogs and social networks permit a human-human interaction. Presenting a completely human side to law that corporate law firm Web sites have NEVER been able to achieve will require sensitivity to the professional and confidentiality issues. That's a challenge.
2. Enabling conversations: Blogs allow the blog post author (lawyer, paralegal, client service manager, IT Director, etc…) to chat directly with the prospects, friends, competition, etc. of the firm in a public forum. That's scary!
3. Providing up-to-date and easily-refreshed data on the law firm: Web sites take time to update— lots of approvals and channels to pass through. On the other hand, blogs are as easy to update as writing an email and social networks depend on user-generated content. That's very scary!
4. Developing brand leadership: Have you ever thought of establishing your law firm as a leader in an industry space? Imagine writing blog posts on all the latest topics that are then easily indexed and searchable. That's brilliant!
5. Client feedback programs. Sure law firms want to know how they're doing. Many spend a lot of their resources to interview clients and use the feedback to adjust their programs and service delivery. Imagine that data or any bad news being shared in the public space on an unhappy client's blog or the law firm's social-enabled Web site? Ouch!
6. Promoting a client mindset: If a law firm truly understands the client's business—enough to be a trusted advisor as

many claim—then it must immerse itself in the same rapidly changing social ecosystem that is becoming essential to their client's brand to survive in the marketplace. Should a law firm mirror their client? You decide.

A WORD ON LAW FIRM BLOGS

Blogs can affect a more open and direct view than traditional channels such as the law firm site or an e-newsletter. They are also usually based around one of a growing number of excellent blogging applications, making them easier to update than the law firm Web site. A good blog not only gives users a reason to re-visit the site, but also helps improve search-engine optimization by adding fresh content. If it links in and out of the enterprise site, and that site is packed with relevant content, all the more benefit.

In many cases corporate blogs are becoming an extension of the enterprise. They are popular for a number of reasons. While service organizations will still maintain a flat Web site as an address marker, those who invest their resources in social media and social networking services give themselves a more informal, user-friendly channel for communicating with their clients and other interested parties, interacting with the target market on a more personal level. This is not the solution for every practice area, law firm or individual attorney, yet it must be considered broadly and fearlessly. Several blogs that do this considerably well are the Wall Street Journal Law Blog, Marketing Nirvana[27] (LinkedIn corporate blog), Micro Persuasion (Edleman Public Relations)[28]; and tons of others. It is important to note that in the spirit of social computing transparency, bloggers who are employed at a corporation (or law firm) or have a relationship to a sponsoring organization should fully disclose their relationship in their profile, with a disclaimer that content is not necessarily the opinion of the organization—unless of course it is.

COLLABORATION –
PRIVATE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Web 2.0 technologies, when implemented to create private social networks within an organization or among client organizations, encourage individuals to freely collaborate and to take an innovative approach to achieving both short- and long-term organizational goals. Rather than applying a highly regulated hierarchical system—such as is found in a traditional intranet or extranet, where all interaction is controlled by the admin-

istrator and is limited to specific types of information—social software works bottom-up and affords individuals the opportunity to affiliate through choice and their own actions.

Individuals in a groupware setting are fractured into a number of non-integrated personas. Whether they are involved in other groups or have a long history with others in the groups is secondary to the fixed purpose of the group, whatever it may be. While groupware was a step in the right direction, the model denies the organization the ability to "self-organize" and unnaturally compartmentalizes insight from, for example, multiple counsels, cross-departmental teams and support staff. Groupware limits the flow of institutional knowledge and diversity in interaction, thus locking out beneficial resources.

Conversely, social networks, by design, inspire affiliations that enable groups to form and self-organize rather than be confined by an imposed structure or organization. And if sensitive information needs to be exchanged on a specific matter, or if more senior-level discussions need to occur, sub-groups can be set up by invitation only. But overall, social networks realize their best potential when members practice collaboration and reasonable transparency–a self-directed, balanced portfolio with some assets protected and some shared.

Generally speaking, social networking reflects the "juice" that arises from people's individual interactions. It's not about control; it's about communication technologies being used to achieve shared outcomes through personal contact and interacting towards common goals. Through influencing each other and educating each other they make the "we" become better than the "me." Unlike groupware, there isn't a single, clearly defined project but many projects, as well as a sprawling, tentacled world where dealings are inductive— going from the individual, to a group, to many groups and, finally, to the benefit of the client corporation or the sponsoring organization.

Private social networks start with individuals, just like LinkedIn, Facebook, Flickr or Plaxo Pulse. Members begin with a profile that tells the story of their own interests, areas of expertise, industry knowledge, education, and connections, and these become reflected in social- and work-oriented relationships—interchanges from which a network of groups emerge. Furthermore, social networks are based on open-source programming-code, not proprietary code or software, and thus features to support group-interaction continue to evolve and become available with little or no cost. Private social networks

can be housed on enterprise servers or the Internet for easier access, either option produces predictable security expectations.

To succeed within the social networking model, it's not sufficient to simply modify management strategies. Rather, leaders need to think differently about how to compete and be profitable by harnessing collective capability to spur innovation, growth and success. Mature organizations such as Boeing, BMW, and Procter & Gamble are adapting collaboration and self-organization to cut costs, innovate faster, co-create, and bring their organizations into the twenty-first century business environment.[29] In all cases, social networking, both private and white-label, require an organizational culture shift, not unlike the first time the managing partner found a PC on his desk one morning and began receiving messages from that mysterious beige box.

Gazing Into the Crystal Ball

What does the future hold for social computing? Here are a few trends not quite in prime time yet but that will likely have relevance to law firms in the near future.

ADVERTISING

Advertisers realize that ads are becoming less effective— even when they're entertaining. Social media guru Stowe Boyd suggests that vendors will offer their products and services to highly trusted advocates acting on behalf of the community, who will experience their product and chronicle its use. This of course would not be the case for the law firm, with its heavily regulated code of ethics—as it should be. It is, however, apropos to vendors and clients of the law firm. Again, a trusted business-advisor must be very aware of the trends and competition facing the client and it is incumbent on the law firm to recognize the stressors that social computing has placed on the client's operations.

SHOPPING

Social networks may well become the center of online commerce. The Web 1.0 metaphor of wandering around in a warehouse, putting gear into a shopping cart and then heading for a checkout counter may not disappear immediately. But even-

tually, buying behavior will be guided primarily by sites that host people's reviews, recommendations and pick lists. Reference the recent announcement of Amazon and TiVo joining forces to provide purchasing power related to TiVo content. Several legal directories already make this their business case, using peer reviews and facilitating comparison shopping; e.g. Martindale Hubbell. I expect to see more of this. Several social networks such as LinkedIn, Naymz and Plaxo Pulse allow you to "recommend" others in your network by writing a short paragraph about their merits which gets posted to their profile. Although verification is dubious and its very easy to solicit recommendations quid pro quo, the practice seems to be taking hold and may carry some weight in business decisions. Martindale Hubbell Connect will be launching later this fall and while I don't have any inside information on what features the social network will offer, I wouldn't be surprised to see real time peer review capability.

SPONSORED AGGREGATION

WTMI—way too much information. News, blog and now social-site aggregators are necessary for anyone who is tapping into social media. Extremely popular, these dashboard types of applications are becoming the only way to manage the information overload. Expect aggregators to evolve into something else that will allow our online lives to become even more manageable and personalized. Sponsoring an aggregation application or site is a formidable option for law firms, particularly if it answers some industry-focused challenge.

I can see where LinkedIn might start leveraging the wealth of data they have in a similar but different way. LinkedIn is on its way to becoming one of the largest "expert" databases. Firms that sell deep expertise, such as Gerson Lehrman, may have to reckon with LinkedIn as a threat to their services. Consumer surveying corporations such as Nielsen may also need to pay attention. Social networks have millions of consumers - business consumers — that can be questioned and will provide perhaps the largest, most dynamic consumer panel.

Social networks will start to experiment with delivering connections visually. LinkedIn, PlaxoPulse and others are becoming more valuable than a stack of business cards or an address book. There are probably not enough miles in your shoes to produce the same number of contacts in the bricks and mortar world as you can collect in a few hours on a business social networking site.

OPEN ID

To many, OpenID seems to embody the next great technology to improve our online lives, by offering a free and easy way to use a single digital identity across the Internet.[30] OpenID is a community foundation formed to provide a legal entity and stewardship for the open source community by providing infrastructure, promotion and support. Now, after just a year-and-a-half, it is estimated that there are over 160-million OpenID enabled URIs with nearly 10,000 sites supporting OpenID logins.

Security has been the top concern in its development, but it seems the Web gods have smiled down on us (or at least we've been told), and our online lives are now scalable, secure and simplified, providing much-needed sanity to the increasingly complex Web. OpenID eliminates the time-sucker of filling in endless profiles, e-commerce forms and status updates. Currently in the adoption stage, OpenID can be found on many popular services, such as AOL, Blogger, Flickr, LiveDoor, Orange, Technorati, Vox, and Yahoo!

In July of 2008 Facebook announced Facebook Connect. It extends the Facebook experience to third-party developer-sites, including white-label networks and enterprise Web sites. The ascent of Facebook Connect predicts the inevitable. Law firm sites will become more social. If not for their client base, then at least for their recruiting efforts.

Facebook Connect allows for authentication on third-party Web sites. Users can visit third-party sites, login with their Facebook ID, connect with their friends and update their Facebook news page—all without visiting Facebook.com. This "passport" system (much like what Microsoft tried to do) will let members leave comments on third-party sites—as well as identify their friends on these sites—when a small piece of code is embedded on the site.

Brands that have Web sites with social actions (such as buying a product, rating, ranking, or leaving comments) should keep this in mind, as they can now extend the actions to Facebook streams. For example, a site like Citysearch, which already has reviews and rankings, embeds the code, then, when a Facebook user logs in looking for a hotel or restaurant, Citysearch will link up reviews from their Facebook friends.

Your logins could become less relevant if Facebook adoption continues to take off in particular markets. Tim O'Shaughnessy, CEO of Living Social, agrees this is a big change coming soon.

Facebook Connect is just one more player in a trend which is taking off. OpenID is now on MySpace; Google has Friend Connect; LinkedIn ties with *BusinessWeek;* and in mid-July 2008 LinkedIn announced a deal with the *New York Times.* These examples show how our social graphs (activity on multiple social applications) are evolving; leaving the social network and spreading to third party sites.

Reading between the lines, it seems apparent that as social networks evolve, people will want more from social-networking sites than the ability to browse friend's profiles. The social-networking sites of the future—and now is the future—will be useful, entertaining, engaging and bring scale to online living.

"SOCIAL NOT-WORKING"

Social networking is distracting and disruptive. Law firms should be concerned about the time wasted in managing social network profiles. But banning their employees from Facebook participation will seem as ridiculous as not giving email privileges to legal secretaries, which was the case less than a decade ago. Companies, organizations and individuals who do not train employees in netiquette and appropriate business uses for social networking—including creating tailored, positive, focused guidelines that foster community behavior—will find themselves surrounded by 'social not-working' behavior. Twenty-first century organizations must not shut out social computing, but rather must take creative steps to integrate it into the business case and the culture. The benefit will rise to the top.

COMMUNITY MANAGERS

As mentioned in the introduction, corporations are adding full-time social computing roles to their employee ranks. As this trend gains traction, these roles are becoming better defined. While many titles and functions exist, for brevity's sake this section will look at the role of a Community Manager as outlined by Chris Brogan in his post titled "Essential Skills of a Community Manager."[31] This job description can apply to a community manager of a white-label social-network, an internal collaboration-network, or, eventually, the enterprise Web site.

The best community managers are like a good party host mixed with a fine restaurant host. I make a distinction because a party is more personal and a restaurant requires their host to think with a business mind. Community managers need both skill sets in equal [parts]. A party host will connect people together, praise incoming guests appropriately, maintain conversations throughout the event, and see everyone safely off with a smile and a wave. A restaurant host must be certain the ambiance is just right, know that the kitchen is functioning appropriately, and help the rest of the staff pull off a flawless dining experience.

Community managers must be experienced communicators. One thing a communicator needs to do well is LISTEN. Part of that involves building sites and community spaces such that people have a place to engage you directly, and part of that means using listening tools to understand what's being said about you elsewhere. Upon hearing and understanding, a community manager should engage with his or her own authentic voice, not with a marketing message.

Community managers are ambassadors and advocates in one. This is complex, but a community manager's first responsibility is to her employer, and yet, she must convey the voice of the people (customers and other stakeholders) such that the company fully understands the mood of the marketplace, the needs of the people, and the customer's intentions. Further, the community manager must clearly understand the community's position in the marketplace and communicate that in such a way that customers don't feel they are being fed a line.

Community managers are bodyguards and protectors. Some communities find a bad apple in their midst. A solid community manager will understand the difference between a vocal critic and a curmudgeonly troll. Knowing when to remove someone politely and quickly from the party is an important matter. The rest of your guests will appreciate this. Just be sure that you know the difference.

Community managers must build actionable reports. It's not good enough to send emails to your leadership saying, "We had 54 comments on that last blog post." Metrics and reports appropriate to your organization are necessary

to weigh the value of these efforts. Understanding the goals of your organization's use of social media, and especially the relationship marketing expressed within having a community manager position in the first place are the key to understanding what to measure. [They will differ.]

Community managers cultivate internal teams for further support. As community managers are the face of the organization (or "a" face) to your online customers, being sure to promote internal champions, leaders, and other teammates becomes important. One reason is that you want your customers and stakeholders to realize the humanity within the [organization]. Another reason is more for the [organization's] benefit: should the community manager leave the organization, some level of continuity might be salvaged.

An Internet search on the topic of Social Media roles within organizations will lead you to more ideas on the type of staff you will be adding to your marketing departments in the near future.

CONCLUSION

The business case for social networking in law firms is still being defined. As some larger law firms have already discovered, the power of the citizen journalist and the larger online social community is significant -just browse the archives of blogs such as Above The Law to see a few examples of the good, the bad and the ugly. The Internet has sparked several revolutions in the way law firms go about their business: research, filings, public disclosures, public relations, document management, contact management, email, marketing, advertising, and—now we must add—social computing.

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Jayne Navarre, has over 13 years of experience working in law firms with lawyers and marketers leading marketing departments and directing strategy, business development and communications. She understands the way lawyers work, think, and communicate with clients and the media, and how to help them build an exceptional client base. In addition to providing core services as a traditional business development coach and marketing communications specialist, Ms. Navarre has achieved a leading position in helping lawyers and law firms put new social media tools to work for them. Her holistic approach improves not only the way in which law firms communicate to various constituencies, but also targets the content of their messaging. More information about Ms. Navarre and her consulting enterprise, LawGravity LLC can be found at www.lawgravity.com. Feel free to contact her at 786-208-9108 or jln@lawgravity.com.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Business, like life, is a never ending series of lessons and learnings which enrich individuals, teams, and entities. Over the years, I have been the beneficiary of much information that has been passed along to me by other professionals; particularly those in the legal industry. Because of the generosity of others, and years of trial and error, I now have a deep and varied wealth of knowledge that feeds my passion for discovering new things; especially those that make our professional lives better and more complete. It was in that spirit—of community, discovery and sharing the wealth—that I undertook the challenge to present this paper to my valued colleagues of the Legal Marketing Association and other interested parties. I am indebted to the LMA Resources Committee for allowing me to present this paper on an exciting topic. Thank you.