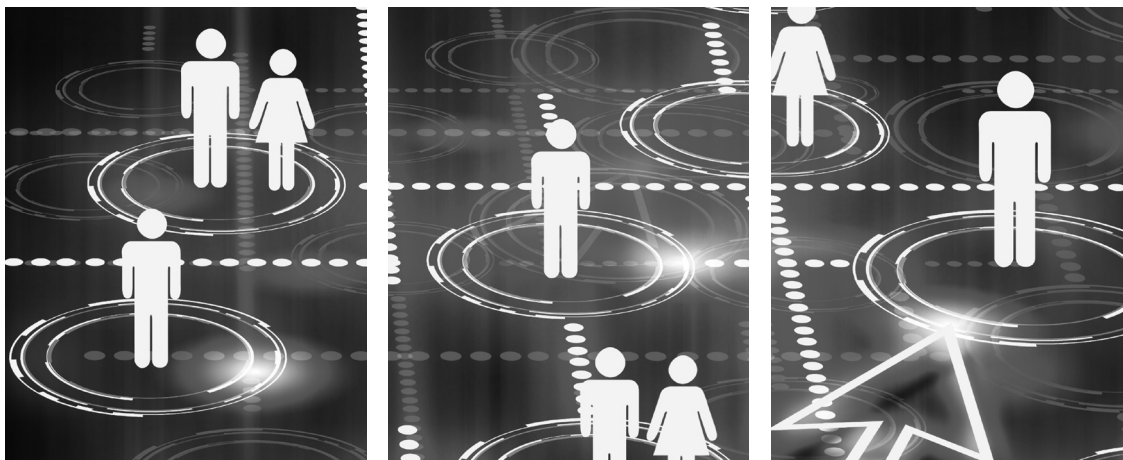


Social Media Marketing for Law Firms

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Chapter 2: The importance of social media for law firms

The changing patterns of client communication and interaction

It would be a mistake to assume that all countries have common trends in client communications. There are subtle differences and some fundamental cultural comparisons. At this point in the 21st century, we must accept that we are working in a global market. From a regional law firm in a small market town in England, to an international firm with offices in New York, Brussels, London, Sydney and Tokyo, there are certain strands of client behaviour which affect both sets of firms. The buyer behaviour is becoming increasingly sophisticated and discerning.

Thirty years ago, firms would still be blissfully complacent – work would turn up at the office simply because it had the word solicitor or attorney above the door and had an entry in the Yellow Pages. Life was good, partners made good money and the industry was relatively light on regulation and red tape.

Twenty years ago, law firms started to become aware that their once loyal and unquestioning clients were starting to morph. Complaints were on the increase and some practices were well advanced with their marketing programmes, even recruiting specialists to manage and market their services.

Ten years ago, the success of the early adopter marketing-led firms created a flurry of activity among those which previously lagged behind, seeing themselves being isolated in this brave new world of

websites, seminars, leaflets, podcasts and blogs. Regulation was beginning to tighten as complaints mounted against firms and the regulatory bodies fought to maintain high practitioner standards.

Today we have intense competitive pressures, the economic growth bubble has burst and professional services have become, to some clients, a luxury and to others a commodity to be bargained down in price. Complaints for some firms have reduced as systems and risk management processes help to manage client expectation, whilst for others they continue to rise. As a consequence, compulsory professional indemnity insurance premiums have escalated, with a number of firms failing to obtain cover. Marketing is now accepted as a key discipline within firms, although it is true that some partners still consider it to be a practice they would rather do without. Fortunately, the archaic views surrounding marketing are fast disappearing as those who hold sway with such thoughts find their practices failing and falling prey to larger, more swiftly moving competitors.

There also exist some marketing bloopers that, in some cases, can be costly and can undermine the public's trust. Examples include personal injury cases where lawyers pay clients upfront to take on their case, sit in hospital waiting rooms looking for likely candidates, employ clipboard-wielding canvassers to stop people in the street and broadcast adverts that do nothing but make a mockery of the profession.

There have also been high-profile collapses of firms which have sucked the profits out of questionable business models and left many employees, suppliers and clients out of pocket and unhappy.

Your firm may not be recognised in this timeline, but you will be able to see the trend and identify the overall shift in client behaviour. What has caused this shift? Access to information, education and an increasing realisation that those who practise law are fallible. Not only does the hard-pressed lawyer now have to worry about promoting themselves to compete with fellow professionals, but also, they have to repair the reputation damaged by years of negative media coverage broadcast to an eager audience. There's something about the human psyche that enjoys seeing others fail. It's an unpleasant but true fact and a reason why certain newspapers and TV programmes are successful.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the legal profession maintains a high level of integrity, provides first-class service in 99.9 per cent of cases, brings about the right result for the client and the lawyers delivering are sometimes not as well paid as many may think.

The playing field is now more level between lawyer and client. The client knows more about the legal process they're involved in than at any other time in history.

And where does social media fit into this evolution of client behaviour? The social-media savvy client will use their networks and connections to ask questions and obtain as much information as possible to ready themselves for a meeting where they may have to pay a significant sum for the time of a professional. They trust their networks and they trust the recommendations of those closest to them and so for law firms, being part of those conversations can represent a business opportunity.

As statistics show, people like using social media and it has become an accepted forum of communication in most developed countries. Law firms are not unique in the business world; they are not exempt from the similar competitive pressures faced by retailers, manufacturers and other service-based companies. The successful firms have understood the importance of effective marketing for quite some time and have adopted strategies to harness the power of social media. Some law firms have identified the opportunities represented by social media but they are in the minority, with most being concerned over the risks rather than seeing the bigger picture.

Looking at a worst-case scenario. If a client is going to make negative comments about your firm, wouldn't it be better to have sight of posts at the earliest opportunity? In all effective complaint management, it's the swift, direct and well-articulated responses that dissipate negativity and often turn clients around 180 degrees. Without this engagement, firms are blind to possible feedback – good or bad – and leaving the field open for competitors to capitalise on such opportunities as they arise.

Client communication – Top tips

Subscribe and regularly check sites that monitor keywords, phrases and firm names on social media. An example of such a site is <http://whostalkin.com/>.

Check for mentions and direct messages regularly. Set e-mail alerts to send a message when your firm is mentioned.

Examples of other sectors' usage of social media

Before we explore how law firms can capitalise on the opportunities that exist within the realm of social media, it's worth looking at some alternative sector examples.

Global brands and a few small companies identified quickly how they could make the new medium work for them.

Where many law firms and managing partners struggle is in determining the return on investment of social media activity. The fact is that it is a communication medium first and foremost, and not a primary sales channel. Find a way to connect in a meaningful way with your clients and the results will follow.

The following case studies share some interesting and creative solutions to promote and improve upon existing business models using social media.

Best Buy – Improving customer experience

Best Buy is one of the world's biggest technology retail chains with outlets in the US, Canada, Mexico, China and Europe.

The company generates more than US\$45bn in annual revenue and includes brands such as The Carphone Warehouse, Future Shop, Geek Squad and Napster. The business employs around 180,000 staff in retail outlets, call centres, web support, product delivery and online communities.

Best Buy decided to use Twitter to engage with potential and existing customers. This didn't happen over night. Strategically the business had worked on the development of a community forum to support the growing volume of technical queries. The forum known as 'Best Buy Community' was partnered with Lithium, the social networking software and online community management solutions provider. This community was built by monitoring blogs, creating its own content and having a public face on the company website and Facebook page.

In July 2009, Best Buy launched its 'Twelpforce' Twitter account. Its objective was

to respond to queries on products or general technological issues. With the huge proliferation of traffic and likely volume of enquiries, Best Buy recruited its own staff across all locations to join the '@Twelpforce'. Currently 2,600 staff members are available to offer the benefit of their knowledge and experience to help resolve customer queries. Staff have the tools to respond in real time, at a point when they may not be serving in store, for example. This has been a huge success.

One of the unexpected but welcomed benefits is that the internal network has proven to be a big hit with staff who feel valued and part of a genuine supportive community. The PR generated has also been a powerful boost for the business.

In a typical quarter, the team handle 600,000 queries. The immediacy of response and obvious technical knowledge of the staff have seen this initiative add a reported US\$5m value back to the business (source: <http://www.lithium.com/pdfs/casestudies/Lithium-Best-Buy-Case-Study.pdf>).

This is a good example of how Twitter has been used not in an overt, direct sales-led initiative, but to help improve the customer experience. The company's initiative has attracted positive comment from across the web and won several awards. The company is seen not only as a leader in customer service delivery, but as an example of employee engagement and satisfaction.

Old Spice – Promotional opportunities through social media

Customer service is an effective way to use social media, but this medium offers direct promotional opportunities too.

One of the more recent success stories resulted in the revitalisation of a long-established brand in the perfume and toiletries sector. Old Spice took centre stage

with a memorable campaign featuring a little known ex National Football League practice squad footballer turned actor, Isaiah Mustafa.

The adverts, first shown online in the lead up to the Superbowl, proved a hit almost immediately, creating on the first day alone over six million YouTube views, a figure higher than that for Barack Obama's victory speech, George Bush dodging shoes and Susan Boyle's introduction to the world.

The advert was creatively clever in engaging both men and women and bringing the brand very much to the fore amongst its key target audience. The campaign continued with the creation of subsequent similarly-styled ads, but it took on a life of its own with competition to replicate and add more humour on homemade videos via YouTube.

The ad agency Wieden+Kennedy filmed over 180 videos in two days in response to fans and celebrities, and posted on its YouTube channel. This practical real-time response created a level of interactivity not witnessed before, and is regarded by many as one of the best social campaigns to date.

The following are a few more facts regarding the social media ad campaign:

- YouTube – Old Spice became the most viewed channel;
- Facebook page 'likes' grew by 29,000;
- Twitter followers rose from 8,000 to 66,000 in just two days;
- Oldspice.com website traffic was up 300 per cent; and
- The campaign increased sales by 27 per cent over six months.

The campaign made good use of the various social media sites, notably YouTube but also Facebook and Twitter, providing a consistency and immediacy of message.

In simple terms, the campaign captured the imagination of the public and caught on in true viral style but through careful stage management by the company and ad agency. The interest has been cultivated to put the brand ahead of its competition.

Danone Activia – The ad campaign

Global foods brand company Danone coordinated and launched a Facebook campaign in 2010 with the aim of targeting women in Slovenia, aged between 20 and 50. As with most campaigns, the ultimate objective was to raise brand awareness, with a specific brief to highlight the Activia drink.

Competitions are always a good vehicle to generate interest and help spread the word, especially if the task is reasonable and the prize attractive. The campaign centred on five challenges presented online, with the final stage becoming an offline event:

- Describe the Activia drink;
- Draw the Activia drink;
- Create a pantomime around Activia;
- Take an interesting picture of you and your Activia drink; and
- The Activia cocktail – 'live' event.

The key tools used were TV, leaflets and in-store displays looking to direct consumers towards the Activia Facebook page for details of how to enter the competition.

As part of the challenge, entrants could 'like' the specially-created Facebook page and begin to accept the staged challenges.

The campaign took on a life of its own with entrants asking their own groups of friends to support their campaigns and vote for them.

The winner won an organised trekking trip to Indonesia for two, but the campaign continued as she reported back on her adventure via blog posts.

Commercial and private client scenarios

We will examine strategy planning in Chapter 3, but before we set those plans, it's worth having a first run at the two main areas of legal service and their respective approaches to social media.

The legal sector is becoming aware of the power and reach of social media sites, but there are as yet few examples of firms which have taken an active lead and harnessed its potential. Certainly the commercial sector has been rather slow to awake to the medium's remarkable reach.

Before launching headlong into a firm-wide engagement with social media, it is worth taking time to consider a few fundamental questions:

- What are the firm's key marketing objectives?
- Who are the key targets?
- Which services are you wishing to promote?
- What marketing tools do you currently employ?
- Who would be responsible for taking on the social media project? and
- What level of understanding does the firm have of social media? Have you provided training?

And perhaps two of the biggest issues that often prevent the best-laid plan being activated are not having considered the time required and not having willing contributors.

In short, if this is to work and be an effective marketing communications project for the practice, it needs to have ready resources and a consistency with the other marketing messages you're putting out to your commercial clients.

We've reviewed several positive examples of social media but there are countless

additional examples of poor practice. You must avoid:

- Putting the responsibility of the project in the hands of someone who is not aware of the firm's strategy;
- Undermining the brand, for example discounting fees and appearing low cost when all other promotional communications attribute quality and expertise to the brand;
- Constantly sending sales messages and alienating potential followers; and
- Appearing lightweight in posting domestic minutiae and trivia.

While we discuss in detail the strategic approach in Chapter 3, it is worth considering the previously-stated factors when we look at the application of social media to our chosen service and target audience. Audience is a very important word in this field, one that is often overlooked or re-termed, 'followers', 'likes', 'connections', 'groups' or 'circles'. They are all your audience and it is the understanding of how your own objective relates to the audience that will shape the content, style, frequency and tone of your message.

One analogy to consider is that of comparing social media to a variety of broadcast channels. YouTube is obviously close to TV but Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and even LinkedIn offer broadcasting opportunities that can deliver your message farther than you had previously imagined. If you were charged with managing the broadcast, what programmes would you wish to produce?

Scenario one: Commercial – Legal services for business

You're the managing partner of a medium-sized practice with a strong commercial

focus offering a wide variety of legal services to the small to medium sized business community. Your major strengths are in employment and mediation but you've seen a growth in intellectual property enquiries and have recruited two young lawyers to pick up and grow this area for the firm. You have 25 partners who all understand social media as a concept but only five admit to actively using it in their personal lives. You currently have no Twitter accounts and you have taken down the Facebook page after security concerns raised by your IT support team, but you do have 18 individuals using LinkedIn. Unfortunately those using LinkedIn have all connected to each other and have only limited contacts outside of the firm.

As managing partner you face increased competition from three strong regional firms and a number of national firms, all of whom appear to be well ahead with their social media strategies. They all have Twitter accounts, some with several thousand followers, glossy websites promoting links to YouTube vodcasts and many hundreds of LinkedIn connections and Facebook friends.

At a recent partner meeting, it was suggested that your firm catch up quickly as clients are starting to ask why the firm isn't using LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. You know the client in question is actually an internet company that's angling to set up all the accounts and the business owner is a good friend of the senior partner, but you concede that it's time the firm had a social media plan.

Here are some possible solutions:

- A) Have a meeting with the web design business, brief them to get the firm up and running with social media and ask that they train key staff;
- B) Have an internal meeting with department heads, ask each of them

to come up with specific plans for their areas of work and nominate a champion to front their social media efforts; or

- C) Work with your marketing manager to look at the competition with fresh eyes, monitor the output and their responses by randomly checking in and using monitoring tools to assess the accounts. Prepare a report based on competitor social media activity, messages, followers and friends and responses – both positive and negative. Set out how you propose to set the firm apart.

There is no one ideal answer as all the suggestions have merit, however, you can significantly help the situation by setting out a clear process of actions in a logical order.

To explain the reasoning behind these suggestions, fact finding is an essential first step towards setting any meaningful plan. Once you have the necessary data, you can present the findings at the meeting and, without being prescriptive, you can engage others to take on board the intelligence you've gathered and to find solutions for their own specific markets. Working to an overall plan will be critical, so ensure that in delivering the outcomes of the research there is, at the very least, a reference to the overall business plan and core firm objectives.

Finally you will need technical assistance; it may not be the senior partner's friend, but you will need to have professionally-designed sites to convey the right brand message to clients. Look for an agency that has a true understanding of social media and one that takes the time to understand your business.

Scenario two: Private client – Personal legal services for individuals and families

You're the practice director of a 15-partner firm with three offices. Historically your

client base has been middle to low income, blue-collar families seeking help with house purchase or sale, divorce, crime, personal injury and medical malpractice issues. You have a strong will bank, but as with most areas in the firm, a declining level of instructions.

Your firm is perceived as traditional and safe, if somewhat old fashioned. The senior partner is new to the role and keen to make her mark but is struggling to get her fellow partners to adopt new initiatives. She is a big fan of social media and has attended several courses on the subject. The first of her many marketing projects involved setting up a YouTube channel and hiring a professional video company to film all partners who were to give three-minute introductions to their work. Only five partners agreed and the results were so poor that they didn't make it onto YouTube. The subsequent efforts have been met with similar indifference with the most commonly-held response being, 'We know our clients and they know us, if they need us they know who to call'; or, 'Our phone book directory adverts have always worked for us, I don't see why we need to bother with untried and untested marketing schemes.'

You sense that the senior partner's patience is running out but you are aware that new regulations in the legal sector will open up competition and put increasing pressure on the firm. Income is down by 20 per cent but marketing costs have risen through an uplift in directory advertising, the last throw of the dice from the outgoing retiring senior partner.

What advice would you give to the senior partner?

- A) Over two, two-week periods, undertake an in-depth analysis of the reasons why clients selected your firm. Present the findings to the senior partner and

suggest that you both give a presentation to the partners, explaining the reality of where the practice is financially, client perception and the likely future if it doesn't change. Conclude with a series of initiatives that use low-cost but impactful marketing methods centred around social media promotions and client service;

- B) Take a fresh look at your client base and those who have recently instructed competitor firms. Commission research to find out the reasons why they chose the new firms. At the same time, seek unprompted awareness views on firms in your area; or
- C) Look for a new firm and when you find it, could you offer me a job?

There is no single appropriate response, but C really should not be an option, since you have a challenge to overcome. It may, however, be your opening line to break the ice with the senior partner and start subsequent discussions.

When costs are an issue it can be difficult to persuade a senior partner to spend more on research, but it will be worthwhile if it helps to highlight the reality of your firm's situation. The advantage is that it is from a trusted and respected research company and not anecdotal comments from friends, family or odd clients.

Buy in to new ideas is clearly an issue in this firm and often a hangover from having a somewhat less than democratic regime running the show in the past. Partners they may be but they probably don't feel confident in marketing themselves or their capabilities, and it will take time to develop this confidence and trust in the new management style.

Start with small steps. The research is a wonderful opening and can lead to

a collective understanding of what the clients think. Ensure that this piece of work is not isolated. Put in place regular research campaigns and look at existing client satisfaction measuring methodology. Consider calling clients at the end of matters rather than sending questionnaires, and ensure any negative or particularly positive feedback is circulated.

As with scenario one, you need a clear plan that speaks of your firm and the culture within, but equally has a firm view to where the practice needs to be. This should be understood by all partners, lawyers and staff within the firm.

And what about social media? As the senior partner is enthusiastic about all aspects of social media, you can use this to create accounts on sites such as Twitter that allow her to connect with your client base. The accessibility of someone so senior in an organisation can be a real plus point and

create greater trust and confidence in the firm. As you work with the senior partner, seek out other early adopters such as fee earners and get them to build their online presence.

Applying social media in legal services

– Top tip

No two firms are the same but whilst it would be a mistake to try to replicate another firm’s marketing campaign, you can learn a great deal by watching how others use social media to promote and support their business, and it doesn’t have to be the legal sector.

Profiles, networks, circles, groups, friends and followers

Profiles

Each social media platform presents its own unique method for you to organise your information. What most have in common is probably the most important

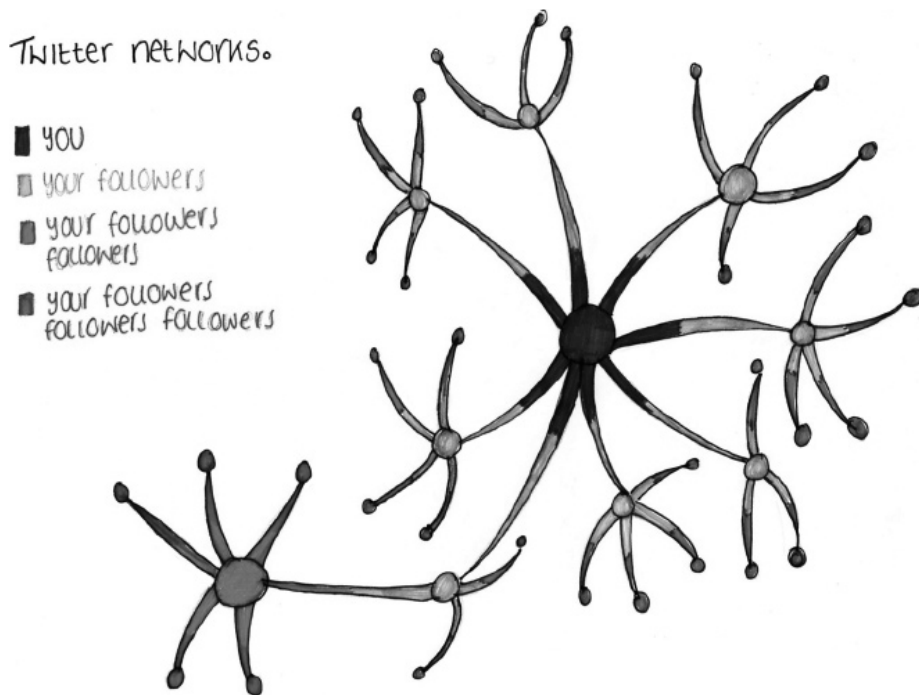


Figure 1: How the Twitter network extends

aspect of your account – your profile. A quick browse of Facebook, Google+, Twitter and LinkedIn will provide you with an indication of the variety of styles and personalities on display.

Your profile is usually the first thing a visitor will look at. If your tweet is re-tweeted, it can travel far beyond your own network of followers.

With this in mind, an account created for your firm will need to be presented as professional and consistent with the firm's brand and marketing strategy.

Twitter

You are limited on space – only 140 characters, same as a tweet – so keep it to the point and feature the key points you wish to convey. Remember Twitter is about personality so don't be too corporate or you'll not attract many followers. The key information to include is:

- Your interests;
- Your role;
- Specialisms;
- What sets your firm apart;
- Include keywords such as 'divorce' and 'law' so that search engines can scan for keywords as will other users; and
- Don't forget the personality.

Include your location but if you practise globally, then mention this in your profile. With Twitter you can choose from a variety of templates or you can create a personalised design for the background. The recommendation would be to create your own firm-templated background featuring services, contact details and your logo.

Facebook

As a business page, the profile needs to speak of the firm but appear friendly and

fun. People use Facebook for social reasons and won't expect or appreciate a hard sell. There are a number of useful examples of business pages that convey the right message to their target audience. In Part Two, a case study from Houston firm Doyle Raizner looks at how it has structured its business page on Facebook and presented the firm's profile and individual lawyers within the firm.

The following are some statistics and limits for the Facebook fan page:

- Facebook profile/fan page image: up to 540 pixels long by 180 pixels wide;
- Front-page box under photo: 242 characters to write a brief description – it's a good idea to use keywords here;
- Status update: 420 characters;
- Facebook events: unlimited;
- Website: 720 characters. That's a little generous for most businesses but if you have a number of sites, be sure to include each one on a separate line and include the full URL;
- Company overview: 840 characters; and
- Products/services: 600 characters.

It's early days for Google+ but as it is primarily aiming at the Facebook level of interaction, it would probably be a good idea to set a simple Facebook-style profile whilst you get to grips with the new site. Links to the Picasa photo album can enable the upload of photos, which can help to bring life to your profile, but make sure the photos portray the right image.

There are fewer limitations on characters within Google+ but in some areas you will see that your details are truncated to assist the look of the page. For example, under your name you can provide an introduction – try to get the key message within 90 characters as this is what will appear permanently. You will have more space

which can be highlighted by hovering over the line of the biography section under your name. We suggest using this to feature your key service areas and add some personality to the profile.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn has a helpful meter that measures your progress in profile completion. Relatively straightforward, it does offer the potential to have an extensive or brief précis of a profile. The best advice is not to go overboard but consider the key points which would make you someone of interest to a target contact.

There are limits to the information you can put in each profile category on LinkedIn. The figures are all a number of characters and this includes spaces and punctuation, such as:

- Company name: 100;
- Professional headline: 120;
- Summary: 2,000;
- Specialties: 500;
- Position title: 100;
- Position description: 200 min and 2,000 max;
- Interests: 1,000;
- Skills: 25 skills, 61 characters each; and
- Status update: 700 unless you link to Twitter updates at the same time, then you're limited to 140.

Know your audience by platform type

Having established the profile, background, look and feel of your firm's pages, it's time to meet, greet and connect with your audience. We will explore the strategic approach in the next chapter but here we will consider a few simple techniques that you may wish to employ once you have your social media plans in place.

What does this mean? As an example, Facebook users will be using the site primarily for social interaction; it is not heavily used for business-related communication. Posts are personal and mostly targeted at close friends and family. Businesses which are successful on Facebook tend to connect to communities and associated groups as a starting point to build a fan base. It is becoming quite popular to cross over to another social media site to invite your followers to take a look at and 'like' your Facebook page. While there is no harm in this, we wouldn't recommend over using it as it will annoy your network members on the alternative platforms.

Google+ offers an excellent opportunity for you to classify connections by type within circles. You can use the Google suggested categories but no doubt you will wish to create your own that reflect the types of connections you have built. Examples may be friends, family, fellow lawyers, colleagues, clients, referrers and accountants. As we've stated, it's early days for Google+ so feel your way with the connections by starting with those you have regular interactions with on other platforms. That way you can build confidence in communication and knowledge that the individuals you are inviting into your circles are trusted and communicative.

Twitter follower counts and the obsession with numbers gets in the way of making the site work effectively for many. There is a body of evidence building that suggests an account with 200+ followers but not many more than 1,000 is a better candidate to select as a follower than one outside of those numbers. Why? Consider the Twitter account with only a dozen followers: how active are they? Unless they are just starting out, it is unlikely that they are actively using their account and also unlikely to follow you back. On the other end of the scale,

an account with 10,000 followers looks impressive but they will have an extremely busy timeline and anything you tweet is unlikely to cut through the noise generated by their large following. Therefore the conclusion is that having 200+ but not over 1,000 makes you active, engaged and likely to notice your followers' tweets. The other statistic to bear in mind when looking at who to follow is of course followers' own activity. You can't always assume an account with several hundred followers is active. They may have acquired the following via promoting the account on another website.

With LinkedIn it is relatively simple to identify those with whom you would like to connect by looking at past colleagues, current colleagues, industry experts, thought leaders, clients, etc. The search facility within LinkedIn is useful, providing the opportunity to search by name, company or group. If you're struggling to find connections within a specific sector, joining a group and posting a few questions or comments can open up the possibility to link to the right people and have the added benefit of judging the value of their contributions.

Growing your networks – Top tips

Scientific research by leading anthropologist Professor Robin Dunbar has identified that humans have limits to the number of truly effective connections/contacts they can maintain. The average is 150, although some can maintain just over 200. Social media websites are a great tool in helping to organise our network, but fundamentally we are limited to a finite number that we can truly call our own social network. Consider this when setting your strategy for followers and friends.