

### SOCIAL MEDIA OPENS UP A VARIETY OF NEW PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS

Stephen M. Nipper  
*Dykas, Shaver & Nipper, LLP*

Back when we were kids, if our parents were asked to define the term "social media," they would have likely come up with a pad of paper used in a game of charades. Not a bad definition, even if it is a bit dated.

So what is "social media?" Wikipedia gives us the general definition of "[s]ocial media is media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly

accessible and scalable publishing techniques." Such a broad definition includes how we communicate, how we collaborate, how we share multimedia, and even how we share information about businesses.



Stephen M. Nipper

For attorneys, one of the most relevant applications of social media is in the "communication" area. For any businessperson (including attorneys), your success is defined by the size of your network. Thus, there is a great incentive for attorneys to examine the possibilities offered by social media. The three social media platforms best suited to this purpose are: LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

#### LinkedIn

Of the three social networks discussed here, LinkedIn (<http://linkedin.com>) is the most "professional." LinkedIn is, in a lot of ways, easiest understood as being your on-line curriculum vitae, much akin to what Martindale-Hubbell does in print (and on the web). LinkedIn is a way for people to build networks by connecting with clients, former employees/employers, and former classmates. LinkedIn even allows your past clients (with your permission) and colleagues to provide recommendations to your services.

One of the advantages of LinkedIn is that it is a closed network: an individual cannot add you as a contact unless they



have your permission first. They can't even initiate the connection process without first demonstrating to LinkedIn that they have sufficient contact with you (e.g., your email address). Through such screening processes, LinkedIn does a lot of the work of eliminating and reducing the potential SPAM that is inherent in social media. Attorneys should remember the model rules as they create their LinkedIn profile, making sure to not define their "specialties" in a manner which would violate the rules. In my opinion, of these tools, LinkedIn is one tool which every Idaho attorney should be using.

#### Facebook

LinkedIn can be used to show your "professional" (work) side, whereas Facebook (<http://facebook.com>) is how you show your "personal" (home) side. While the lines between work and home are not very well defined, both do have a role in a lawyer's social media presence on the Internet. Facebook, at its core, is what the old website Classmates.com should have been, that is to say, a way to connect people online who know one another, whether that be old high school or college classmates. While Classmates.com was around for years before Facebook started, Facebook quickly overtook Classmates.com, likely due to the price (Facebook is free, whereas Classmates.com charges a membership fee). Facebook eventually went beyond the "connection" aspect, evolving into an entertainment platform where friends can connect with one another, play games together, share photos, chat, etc. Recently, the fastest growing group of Facebook users has become the Baby Boomer generation; something has surprised a number of people.

*Attorneys should remember the model rules as they create their LinkedIn profile, making sure to not define their "specialties" in a manner which would violate the rules. LinkedIn is one tool which every Idaho attorney should be using.*

Facebook has recently expanded its offerings to include providing "pages" where businesses (including law firms) can establish a presence on Facebook and connect/engage with their customers. While that function may be terrifying to some attorneys, it does provide one additional venue for lawyers to connect with their clients and stay in touch with what is important in their clients' lives.

While Facebook can be an excellent way to network with your customers, friends and colleagues, it can quickly become quite overwhelming, much akin to trying to drink from a fire hose. One tip I give to attorneys looking at trying out Facebook is to be very, very careful whom you add as "friends" on Facebook. If it is not someone you are close with or if it is not someone with whom you have reason to build a personal or professional connection, you should consider

carefully whether or not you want to add them as a friend. This is due to the fact that every “friend” that you add increases the volume of information which you must filter or sort through in order to have conversations with people. Also, a savvy attorney will make sure to examine Facebook’s privacy options carefully (and regularly) to control who has access to what information you provide.

### Twitter

Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) is the other common social media platform used by attorneys. As of last count, there are about a dozen Idaho attorneys I am aware of which use Twitter regularly. Twitter is a “micro-blogging” platform whereby the blog posts are 140 characters or less in length. The 140 character limitation is imposed because the platform was built to be friendly with cell phone text messaging, 140 characters being the maximum length of a text message. While most people do not use Twitter via text messaging, the 140 character limitation has remained...forcing people to more quickly get to the point (something attorneys tend to be horrible at).

Think of Twitter as tool for facilitating conversations between people on whatever topics they choose: from what they had for breakfast, what they are working

---

*A savvy attorney will make sure to examine Facebook’s privacy options carefully (and regularly) to control who has access to what information you provide.*

---

on at work, to requests for a referral to a local attorney. The local attorney example is true: in the past few months, I have referred a number of clients to Idaho attorneys I know based upon posts on Twitter asking for recommendations. Of course, attorneys whom themselves respond to such inquiries need to remember to follow the applicable model rules, including but not limited to the rules regarding “solicitation.”

As with Facebook, Twitter can itself be rendered useless by the sheer volume of people using it who are connected to you and can insert messages into the stream you are reading. Because of that, it makes sense to limit the number of people you befriend on Twitter, or use Twitter’s “lists” feature to help you filter out the messages of people you truly want to follow the status of, versus the

people you only occasionally have conversations with.

While it is a bit more complicated than charades, all attorneys should be aware of the social media tools their clients, friends and colleagues are using... tools that can be used to find new jobs, meet new clients, stay in touch with your friends and colleagues, monitor breaking news developments in your practice area, and even for simply enriching your social life.

### About the Author

*Stephen M. Nipper is a Registered Patent Attorney with Dykas, Shaver & Nipper, LLP in Boise. If you would like to test using any of the social media tools listed above with Mr. Nipper, you can find links to his social media accounts at <http://iMetNipper.com>.*