

SEEKING THE CYBER LIFE

By Steven A. Meyerowitz



Web sites and other online destinations are becoming a modern 'downtown' for lawyers

Nowadays, people looking for a place to live, a car or a job might very well turn to the Internet. Many of those who do so — about 15 million per month — are likely to visit www.craigslist.org, which describes itself as a “community” with local classifieds and forums for 450 cities worldwide. Craigslist, of course, is not alone among Web sites that can be considered a cyber community. Look at www.match.com, characterized as “the world’s largest online dating service.” Filling out a simple form on the home page with answers to four questions (your gender, the gender of those you would like to meet, your age range and your ZIP code) leads to other screens with pages and pages of photos and people to contact.

Certainly, lawyers can and do participate in these and other similar Web sites. But there are also targeted Web sites dedicated to lawyers, especially those seeking to get involved in one way or another with other lawyers or with those who work in the law field.



Click Here to 'Mingle'

Consider www.lawbby.com, which promotes itself as “a place for legal professionals to actually hang out.” Its home page says lawyers can “[k]ick back, relax, make friends and speak your mind.” At www.lawbby.com, lawyers “can easily find and meet other people in the ‘legal world’ in just a matter of clicks.” Moreover, you can “create your own profile,” “write your own blogs” (which are Web sites where bloggers regularly post thoughts or other information that the public can read and comment on), “start your own groups” of lawyers with similar interests (such as groups on legal issues for patent lawyers or family law practitioners or on subjects not at all related to the law, such as amateur radio) and “place job postings and relevant ads for FREE.”

At Your Service

Then there are “listservs” to consider. A listserv is a computer program that automatically broadcasts e-mail sent to it to all others who have electronically subscribed to the listserv. Typically, a listserv focuses on a particular topic or is directed to people who share similar interests or characteristics. Listservs can be beneficial for both professional and personal purposes.

Listservs offer a
“real sense of community”
and “real usefulness.”

Mark Merenda, the president of a law firm marketing consulting company based in Naples, Fla., believes that, for lawyers, there is a “real sense of community” and “real usefulness” in listservs. He is active on a number of listservs, including the listservs of WealthCounsel L.L.C. (www.wealthcounsel.com/listservs.aspx). WealthCounsel’s listservs include ones that are open to estate planning professionals (attorneys and non-attorneys) for the specific purpose of exchanging information related to estate planning, another open to attorneys and non-attorneys for the specific purpose of exchanging information related to technology and another dedicated to practice building. Merenda also participates in the listservs of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys Inc. (www.naela.com/professionals/whyjoin.htm) and the Academy of Special Needs Planners (www.specialneedsplanners.com/listserv/listServ.asp). “On these lists, I can interact with my clients, potential clients, my fellow marketing experts and so on. For my clients themselves, the listserv functions as a law library, a means to co-counsel, an after-hours drinking club and who knows what else,” he explains.

Numerous other listservs are attracting lawyers and law-related professionals, including the first and longest-running online community for lawyers, the LawMarketing Listserv (www.lawmarketing.biz). Started in 1996, it has been in continuous, uninterrupted operation for 11 years. Larry Bodine, a law firm marketer based in Glen Ellyn, Ill., who oversees the listserv and an associated law-marketing portal, says that the purpose of this listserv “is to compare notes and exchange information, so that we can be more effective in our jobs of promoting law firms. This is the place where you will find the newest ideas and most seasoned insight on every law firm marketing topic under the sun.”



Blogs are a way
of developing
a cyber community.

Lisa Solomon, a New York-based attorney and writer, finds great benefits from her involvement in a Yahoo! listserv that discusses marketing ideas for small law firms and sole practitioners (<http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/solomarketing/>). She also participates in the American Bar Association's listserv for solo practitioners (www.solosez.net), a self-described "worldwide community of more than 1,800 solo and small firm practitioners." According to its Web site, Solosez participants "share and obtain information on a wide range of personal and professional subjects: legal questions, client referrals, topical issues, practice technology problems and solutions, travel information, jokes or just to gloat about a court victory or vent about a local judge."

The Blogging Community

Blogs are a way of developing a community even without associated Web sites or having to rely on a listserv provider. A

lawyer who sets up a blog that attracts attention and comments from visitors and who regularly posts on the blog will find that people return to it often, resulting in the creation of a cyber community.

Kevin O'Keefe, the president and founder of LexBlog, a provider of marketing blogs to lawyers and other professional service firms, is, naturally, a strong supporter of blogs. He believes that online communities created by bloggers "are stronger, more robust, informative and provide greater networking and PR opportunities" than other forms of cyber-communities.

Where to Begin

Suppose an attorney wants to join the cyber life. How should he or she begin?

The first step is to have a goal. A lawyer might decide to meet other lawyers for purely professional reasons, perhaps to discuss legal questions that they all might face or as a way to meet colleagues and

find referral sources. Alternatively, a lawyer might decide that he or she wants to meet other lawyers or others working in the legal field for personal reasons.

Once the rationale is set, the lawyer can find appropriate Web sites or listservs by using a search engine, such as Google. A recent Google search for "law listserv" resulted in about 1,080,000 hits. Narrowing the search cuts the number of sites to review. "Law listserv Pittsburgh" led to about 199,000 sites. About 82,800,000 sites turned up for a "law blogs" search, but that included www.lawblogs.com, which separates law blogs into different categories and makes it easier to find an appropriate blog.

Of course, lawyers can easily start their own blogs, with information available at a variety of Web sites, including www.blogger.com/start?utm_campaign=en&utm_source=en-ha-na-google&utm_medium=ha&utm_term=how%20to%20

tart%20a%20blog&gclid=CKr5u5T694wCFQ1dPgodwFPHDA and www.sixapart.com/typepad/whytypepad?s=google&var2=how+to+start+a+blog&SiteID=4042892. If a lawyer does so with the intent of starting an online community, the lawyer has to find an interesting topic and has to post often. People stop checking blogs that contain only dated information.

Conclusion

The Internet has brought with it many opportunities that, in the past, people had to seek out and, ultimately, find in public. It's the new "downtown," a place to meet others and discuss work and personal matters, albeit through a keyboard. While lawyers can participate in the opportunities available to all, it's nice to know that there is also a part of the Internet that is targeted only to them and that it is easily accessible. ☼



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THE DREAM TEAM

LIST 10 LAWYERS YOU KNOW (INCLUDE YOURSELF) TO CREATE THE PERFECT LAW FIRM, SPORTS TEAM OR GOOD TIME GROUP:

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2.
3.
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THE NATIONAL AVERAGE FOR THE DISEASE OF ALCOHOLISM/ADDICTION IS NEARLY 1 OUT OF 10. ANYBODY YOU KNOW NEED HELP?

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