

SOCIAL NETWORKING: OPPORTUNITY OR FAD?



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The growing influence of Social media continues to capture more spheres of public and professional life as ever before. Users' connections established through the Social media encompass not only the private contacts but also become a powerful tool in dealing with colleagues, clients and partners. This causes the line between the private and professional/commercial use of Social media to blur.

According to the research "Global Social Media Check Up. Summary Report" made by Lexis Nexis Martindale-Hubbel 77% of law firms are registered in LinkedIn, 32 % uses Twitter as a broadcasting channel, 11% places their video on YouTube for the purpose of graduate recruitment, thought leadership and promotional marketing, and although only 7% of law firms use blogging and social media integration.

Possible perspectives on further use of social media for legal business: 1) effective exchange of experience and knowledge with the colleagues; 2) maintenance of contacts with clients, partners, target groups; 3) establishment of reliable relationships with clients, involvement of clients in the development of law firm; 4) usage of social media as a channel for distribution of information regarding law firm, its services, lawyers, successful stories, publications, corporate news and events.

Threats for legal business in usage of social media for: 1) disclosure of confidential information and trade secrets of law firm and its clients; 2) unfair competition; 3) damage to the goodwill of the law firm; 4) disclosure of personal data and information about other lawyers and employees; 5) breach of intellectual property rights.

Where is a balance?

- 1) For the purposes of promotion of law firm, its brand and goodwill only the professional Social media and forums (LinkedIn, Xing, etc.) should be considered as appropriate.
- 2) In order to prevent damage to the goodwill of law firm it is essential to ensure that only the non-confidential information would be placed in the Social media. It is worth to mention that placement of any information should be monitored in order to prevent possible damages. However this approach suits small law firms the most.
- 3) Although medium-sized and big companies should focus on adoption of local corporate rules prescribing the usage of social media. These measures should also establish the responsibility of the staff for misuse of social media (e.g. termination of the employment contract if applicable).

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