



## SOCIAL MEDIA MATTERS FOR LAWYERS

PRACTITIONERS ARE GAINING CONFIDENCE IN ACCESSING THE PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING BEYOND LINKEDIN. **BY KARIN DERKLEY**

Many lawyers are apprehensive about social media, scared off by stories of trolls, the potential for defamation or the perils of over-sharing information. But, used wisely, platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and even Instagram and TikTok can be valuable ways to connect with colleagues, promote services to potential clients and learn from others in the profession.

Head of communications at K&L Gates Jason Silverii coaches partners and others at the firm in how to use social media to promote their practice. It's understandable that lawyers might be nervous about social media, he says. "They're risk averse. They don't feel like they're in 100 per cent control because of the fact that people can comment on it, share it, like it."

But it can be a great medium for communicating lawyers' value and insights, he says. "If you've done the work to connect with the right people – your clients, regulators, decision makers, peers – you can position yourself very effectively as someone who's across the major issues."

Think of any social media channel the same way you would a direct email or a report or an alert that you produce for clients, he says. "Treat it as if everyone will see it, and don't give away client confidential information, or firm confidential information."

LinkedIn is the platform most lawyers feel most comfortable on. It's a polite medium that started out as a professional networking and career development platform. In recent years it's evolved into a broader communication channel where members share work milestones, articles of

professional interest and their own thoughts and insights on particular issues.

The easiest way to start out with LinkedIn is to share your firm's posts, says Mr Silverii. "Every firm has approved content that goes out. So, if you're not confident, that's your starting point." Once confident, lawyers can share and perhaps comment on news about issues relevant to a practice. "You can also share news about conferences or events you've attended or spoken about."

Personal injury lawyer and Brave Legal principal Bree Knoester was already a regular LinkedIn user in her previous positions at Adviceline and Holding Redlich. But she started using the platform more strategically when she set up her own firm last year. "So much of our work relies on referrals from other lawyers. So it's really important that other lawyers are able to get a really good insight into us as people and what our firm stands for and a real sense of our values.

"Ultimately, when you're engaging a lawyer, you're engaging with an individual and that's what people want to get a sense of."

Head of legal operations at MinterEllison Mollie Tregillis says she was initially a passive browser on LinkedIn, but realised she needed to build a stronger reputation when she came into her new role. "I needed to become known in the industry as a go-to person in that area. The work we do is built from relationships."

Initially aspiring to schedule her posts, she says she finds it easier to take a more intuitive approach. "I struggled initially because it didn't feel right to be selling myself. But



**Jason Silverii**



**Bree Knoester**



**Lucy Padula**

then I thought, what if I only write about things I'm interested in? I'm interested in legal ops, I'm interested in the law, but I'm also interested in how people manage work and life. And I'm also against pretending that everything's perfect and putting a shiny front up when life is chaos.

"So, that's the approach I've taken. And it makes it easy to write, because it's about what's coming up in the day or inspiration."

LinkedIn posts work best when they allow a bit of personality to shine through, Mr Silverii says. People will gravitate to those they feel a connection with. "Be yourself and use it to sell yourself as well as your services. Because in the law, you're selling yourself as a person. You're not just a partner or a lawyer, you're a person."

Other firms are using Facebook as a way of reaching potential "mum and dad" clients.

Anderson Family Lawyers principal Lucy Padula says it made sense to have a presence on Facebook, given the increasing number of people seeking referrals there. "On Facebook, you've got all these community groups where people ask: Does anyone know a plumber? Or do you know a lawyer?" Even when people have been given a word or mouth recommendation or found the firm via a Google search, having a Facebook presence gives them a bit more information to "suss you out", she says.

Ms Padula says the firm puts out four posts a week, a mix of promoting an event or service, sharing something of interest or relevance in the news, a post about a staff member and sharing a blog post from the website.

"We're always thinking, what's some information we can share which is helpful and something about us as people that will draw clients to us, and also other professionals? Because we're not just looking for clients, we're looking for referral partners too. We're looking for like-minded professionals we can work with together to help our clients."

As family lawyers, it's not about getting "likes" for Anderson Family Lawyers. "People seeking our family law services don't want others to know what's going on in their life. But I know people are seeing our posts because they say, I saw you on social media or someone referred you to me, and then I had a look on social media."

Sharing the posts of other allied professionals – and having them in turn share the firm's – is particularly effective, Ms

Padula says. "If their followers know and respect that person who is sharing my posts and talking about me, it's essentially an online referral."

TBA Lawyers principal Jacqui Brauman started using social media, and specifically Facebook, after noticing other industries using it to promote their business. "I thought, why aren't we doing this?"

Social media has been invaluable for the firm, based in regional Victoria, to promote its services beyond the towns where its offices are located – Nagambie, Wallan, Romsey and Seymour. "People in these areas often think of lawyers as behind a closed door so this is a really good way of getting past that."

She uses a social media manager who develops and uploads the posts, and provides analytics. It's a careful mix of informational, inspirational or fun posts, interspersed with posts suggesting users download a property buying guide or an estate planning checklist or attend a seminar.

More recently the firm has been putting out live videos where Ms Brauman or one of her other lawyers presents to camera on a particular topic. "That's been great. Each lawyer does one topic a month and we've done it instead of them doing a blog. And then I transcribe that video and turn it into a blog."

Social media presents a great opportunity to promote other lawyers beyond the senior lawyers within the firm, Ms Knoester says. "It's easy for me as a lawyer of 20 years who's worked in the same field the whole time to have a reputation. But you don't often get to know the junior lawyers and other staff working behind the scenes. Senior lawyers can do that by showcasing their work (on social media), and help them to create their own network and build their reputation."

Ms Padula agrees: "Some firms will only put their principals at the front but I think it's really important to share the team, because that's who the client's going to be working with – the team."

Ms Knoester says she also uses the platform to highlight issues within the profession, such as whether firms are properly supporting women taking parental leave, and recognising vicarious trauma in the legal profession.

Collins Biggers Paisley employment lawyer Paul O'Halloran uses LinkedIn and Twitter and says both platforms play an important role in sharing ideas and building his profile. "What



Jacqui Brauman



Paul O'Halloran

I've found really interesting when I joined Twitter is that a lot of clients are on there, a lot of general counsels, a lot of CEOs and politicians."

He likes the discipline that social media imposes on him as a legal communicator. "Lawyers are often criticised for going into too much detail and these forums force you to be succinct and get the message out there really quickly, and I think clients want that in their advisers."

His posts explore various topical areas of employment law he believes will be of interest to readers, including non-lawyers. "Usually they focus on a case I've worked on or a case that is similar to one that I've worked on."

Be careful discussing political issues on social media, Mr O'Halloran says. "With LinkedIn there's a certain professional protocol that you shouldn't stray too far from. Twitter is a bit more edgy, but you can get trolled by people if they don't like what you're saying."

Mr Silverii says lawyers can talk about policy and regulations and what their implications are. "But I would recommend not extending to comments such as 'this government doesn't know what it's doing'."

Mr O'Halloran says he has acquired clients through his posts, and built a media presence as a result of his social media. Journalists have contacted him on issues he has raised or comments he has made on particular matters. "Once you've been quoted in an article then other journalists will also contact you." He has appeared recently in the *AFR*, the *Age*, the *Herald Sun* and on the ABC, and increasingly on TV news.

He encourages other lawyers to use social media if it fits in with their practice. "Our clients, and the people who instruct us are getting younger all the time. They're not reading print media. They're looking at TikTok on the train. They're looking at Instagram, they're looking at LinkedIn, they're looking at Twitter."

"They like quick accessible information and news and I feel to be competitive in that market, I need to get my message out in forums where they feel comfortable."

Marshall Jovanovska Ralph criminal lawyer Felix Ralph almost solely uses Twitter and says its value for him is not so much to build a profile or market his services but as a communication forum and learning resource. "I was on Twitter years before I became a solicitor. I was pretty impressed by the other people on

#AusLaw and I thought it was invaluable to be able to access these people free.

"During the pandemic it was really helpful being able to communicate with other practitioners about what they were seeing or what problems they were encountering with all the issues that were brought up by COVID. And it's a really useful resource in terms of getting exposure to cases you otherwise wouldn't read about. I've built a lot of friendships within the profession from it."

His own posts tend to comment on structural aspects of the criminal law – bail laws or proposed changes to laws and how they relate to the justice system. "I never discuss specific cases, or any criminal law cases in Victoria, because there's a chance that I could be involved in some way."

"I use it to communicate my thoughts and ideas and insights. I think of it more as a town square."

With many criminal lawyers working for agencies that constrain their social media commentary, Mr Ralph believes those like him with more freedom to communicate have a role to play in explaining issues and perspectives.

"If you're in the position to talk relatively freely, it's a vital thing to talk about bad laws when they come up because often these things can otherwise pass unnoticed. It's important for people who work in the field to be able to criticise those laws because otherwise they just stay there. And that is unjust." ■

## TIPS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

- Find a comfortable and consistent posting schedule and include a mix of informational, promotional and entertaining posts.
- Don't be afraid to let your personality shine through. People gravitate to those they feel they have a connection with.
- Consider running your posts by a trusted colleague, partner or communications manager before sharing.
- A social media manager can help with scheduling posts and maintaining a consistent message.
- Promote junior lawyers and other staff as well as partners. They are the people your clients are likely to be dealing with.
- It's best to think of LinkedIn, or any social media channel, the same way you would use a direct email report or alert you produce for clients. Treat it as if everyone will see it, and don't give away client or firm confidential information.
- Avoid overtly political statements.