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*The Whittington Committee is a committee of the Company which arranges social activities for younger members of the Company*

# Social networking: R “tweets” 4 U?

**Increasing numbers of law firms (and individual lawyers) have joined the “Tweeters”, “Facebookers” and “LinkedInners” over recent years, but are they ahead of the game or wasting their time and money on the latest “craze”? As a relative newcomer to professional social networking, James Morris considers its potential for the profession and the risks its use presents.**

## Information Age

We live in an age where the use of Google is often the first port of call for information gathering and research (on almost any topic). This means that a ‘web presence’, regardless of your business type, is essential in terms of visibility and providing information to clients and potential clients.

The utilisation of a firm’s or individual’s web presence is important but the manner in which this is managed is changing. A website alone is now, arguably, insufficient in a world where many clients use the latest so-called web 2.0 technologies for their own businesses. These web 2.0 technologies (i.e. web applications facilitating participatory information sharing like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to name a few) allow vast content found amongst a number of websites to be pooled in one place with a “feed” of all the relevant information the user opts to subscribe to. This can be an incredibly useful tool for clients as it enables them to keep up to speed with the latest developments. Indeed, some clients prefer to receive headline legal updates via this form of media with links to a more detailed article.

## Listening and Network

It is a common misconception that the web 2.0 technologies are only concerned with the user broadcasting their views to the world. Many adversaries of social networking state that they have no interest in the inane musings of celebrities and on that basis refuse to join the likes of Twitter and Facebook. That, of course, misses the point of the interactivity of the web 2.0 technologies and the equal if not greater benefit of “listening” (called “following” on Twitter) and networking that the technologies allow. It is certainly “tweets” and “posts” that will develop the user’s web presence, but web 2.0 networking can also achieve that end. The advantages of listening and networking via these media are all too obvious and can equip the user with a wealth of information in one place that it would otherwise take it hours to find in various different places.

The web 2.0 technologies used to proper effect are undoubtedly an increasingly useful way

to observe, network and interact with clients, contacts and competitors.

## The Future

Over the last decade, the web has moved from desktop computers on to TVs and mobile phones. In the last few years there has been a surge in the use of smart phones which support the web 2.0 technologies and make their use easier and even more instantaneous as individuals and businesses “tweet” or “post” immediately on receipt of information. This demonstrates the speed with which technology advances and how easy it is to fall behind the curve if developments in the way clients and other professional contacts use technology are ignored.

## Risks

But are the web 2.0 technologies appropriate for use by lawyers and law firms? The reaction often encountered from speaking to other lawyers about the use of social networking by law firms is one of derision. This reaction seems to be supported by the experience amongst the web 2.0 professionals that suggests law firms are generally slower to catch on to advances in technology and fail to appreciate the bigger picture. However, any delay in the use of web 2.0 technologies by law firms is probably due to a legitimate concern as to the uncontrolled nature of the web 2.0 technologies and time spent considering the necessary policies and guidelines that are required. That concern is understandable given that “posts” and “tweets” are public and any statements made can reach a wide audience very quickly (as the recent “super-injunction” debate demonstrates).

Obviously, each of the web 2.0 technologies has their own problems and limitations in terms of their business appeal and usage and it is important that the quality of “posts” and “tweets” are monitored closely so as not to negatively affect either the firm’s or the individual’s professional reputation.

The technologies are clearly not a substitute for traditional face to face meetings and presentations, or for that matter, other forms of marketing, which remain imperative. However, if they are used wisely there is little doubt that their potential for lawyers to promote their businesses is rather exciting for the future.