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Is the Party Over for Social Networking?

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Law Technology News
April 18, 2008

What if you gave a party, hundreds of people showed up, but almost nobody talked to each other? That describes the state of social networking for lawyers on sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace and the new Plaxo Pulse. The masses get the idea, but only the evangelists are using it.

At the American Bar Association's [ABA Techshow](#), held March 13-15 in Chicago, social networking was on the agenda (as a side note) on only one of 60 programs. "Online social networks are a poor substitute for in-person networking," says John Kinas, IT Manager at District of Columbia Bar. "They are no replacement for meeting a person for coffee or a beer."

According to [Nielsen Online](#), as of December 2007, the top online networking sites were:

1. MySpace.com: 60.1 million audience members.
2. Facebook: 22.6 million.
3. Classmates Online: 10.7 million.
4. Windows Live Spaces: 8.9 million.
5. AOL Hometown: 6.9 million.
6. Club Penguin: 6.4 million.
7. LinkedIn: 4.8 million.

The ABA has an ongoing Young Lawyer Social Networking online survey. As of March 14, 2008, a total of 2,786 people have responded -- and it shows that lawyers don't network online:

- 91 percent said they spent 25 percent or less of their online time, excluding e-mail, per week on social networking sites.
- Only 8 percent said it was "very important" to network with legal colleagues via online social networking.
- Among the few that did find online networking "very helpful," 9 percent chose Facebook, another 7 percent chose LinkedIn, and only 3 percent chose MySpace.

Take the survey [here](#). See the [latest results](#).

LINKED IN?

Mind you, these are young lawyers -- not the often-tech-laggard baby boomers who run law firms. Lawyers interviewed at ABA Techshow uniformly said they used [LinkedIn](#), headquartered in Mountain View, Calif., for professional purposes, and [Facebook](#) for personal or social purposes.

Among professionals age 25 or younger, Facebook is the choice to establish online relationships with office co-workers, according to my 23-year-old son, Ted Bodine, a benefits analyst for Fidelity Investments in Chicago. He recalls getting a message from a guy he knew in high school who offered his services as a financial planner. But he doesn't use LinkedIn -- "That's for older people."

[Tom Mighell](#), the ABA Techshow chair, and an attorney/technology consultant at Cowles & Thompson in Dallas, has 166 LinkedIn connections. "It's a great place for professional networking, and I get a lot of benefit from being on the site." As for Facebook, he said, "I'm skeptical whether it's a good place for lawyers to get business from," he says. "Many people join but few do anything with it. I don't spend a lot of time on any of the networking sites."

In contrast, LinkedIn aficionado [Kevin O'Keefe](#), president of LexBlog Inc. near Seattle, has more than 500 connections. He gets multiple invitations from others to be a part of their network daily. O'Keefe started a [Legal Blogging](#) group on LinkedIn and got 200 applications to join within two days.

"I now have a huge knowledge group that will view me as their leader," he said. "People who don't get results from LinkedIn are the same as people who go to Rotary and complain, 'Nobody came up to talk to me.'" O'Keefe says he has generated new business from LinkedIn. "It definitely helps me get work," he says. "And you can't beat the price." (A basic membership is free.)

Internet pioneer [Greg Siskind](#), of Memphis-based Siskind Susser Bland, has 106 connections. He even established a LinkedIn connection with billionaire Philippe Kahn, inventor of the camera phone -- but only after meeting Kahn via e-mail. "It shows there are a lot of very connected people on LinkedIn," says Siskind.

The only ABA TechShow speaker I heard mention social networks was [Toby Brown](#), client relations manager for Fulbright & Jaworski in Houston (he has 87 LinkedIn connections).

"I've moved three times this year, and it's a way for people to keep up with me." He added that an associate at his firm created a Texas lawyers group and in five days had 50 people sign up. "It's a growing and powerful tool."

Other ways to use LinkedIn are to make recommendations and introductions for others, and to ask a question of all your connections.

But there's not much else to do, like "poke" your friends or play Scrabble online as you can on Facebook. "LinkedIn needs more applications so lawyers and clients can collaborate. It's very static," says [Jordan Furlong](#), editor-in-chief of the of the Canadian Bar Association's *National* magazine.

Launched in May 2003, LinkedIn began as a place to look for a job. Employers can post an opening for \$145 per job. "I use LinkedIn to browse for prospective employees," says [Aviva Cuyler](#), a litigator from Marshall, Calif., one of my clients who recently launched [JDSupra](#), a Web-based database of legal documents.

"I have gotten introductions that have led to in-person meetings with corporate executives. As in real life, it's not about how many people you have in your network, it's who's in it."

[Larry Bodine](#) is a business development advisor based in Glen Ellyn, Ill. He has 237 connections on LinkedIn. Contact him by [e-mail](#).

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