Web 2.0 Tools for Utah Attorneys

by Mari Cheney

You've probably heard people talking about blogs, social networking, and Twitter, but may have wondered how these technologies are relevant to you in your professional life. These online technologies are all part of "Web 2.0," a term first coined to describe the transition from web pages only programmers could manipulate to a web that allows anyone to participate online by publishing and sharing content.

Web 2.0 today generally describes online resources that encourage site visitors to add their own content through interactive features like comments and tags. Tags are user-generated and user-assigned identifiers. If you uploaded and tagged a photo with "Bar Retreat" on a photo sharing site like Flickr, other users could upload their photos to the same site and use the same tags. Then, if you searched for Bar Retreat photos, you would find your photos as well as those posted by others. Some of the common websites associated with Web 2.0 and professional awareness/marketing are free blog creation sites like Blogger or WordPress, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

It pays for attorneys to learn about Web 2.0 tools because they can help you market your services, network with others, and keep current on the law and the legal profession. This article will highlight a sampling of both general and Utah-specific Web 2.0 tools for those who are curious about these technologies and want to learn more.

Online Social Networks
You've probably heard of Facebook and MySpace (known generically as social networking sites) and figured they're just for teenagers and college students. Think again! Specialized social networking sites for professionals are now becoming popular. You can use these sites to market your legal services by posting contact information, areas of practice, and links to your website and blog, if you have either.

It's all about networking. Traditional networking meant you went to bar section meetings, joined the local Chamber of Commerce, and became a member of a civic organization like the Lions or Kiwanis. The goal was to get your name out there so that people thought of you when they needed an attorney. Online professional social networks perform a similar function, except you don't have to sit through dry meetings or choke down the rubber chicken meals.

With over 36 million members, one of the most popular social networking sites for professionals is LinkedIn. You can search for colleagues and classmates by name, company, or school, and import contacts from your email address book. You can affiliate yourself with a variety of networks, including your city, the schools you attended, your employer, the Utah State Bar, and some of the Utah State Bar's practice sections. The more networks you are a part of, the broader your potential for making connections.

Plaxo is similar to LinkedIn, and many professionals have profiles on both sites. Update your profile when you move, and your connections on Plaxo are notified that your information has been updated.

Other online networking sites geared toward lawyers and other legal professionals include LawLink, ESQChat, and LegallyMinded, which was created by the American Bar Association. LegalOnRamp is also an online networking source, but the emphasis is on collaboration rather than the social aspect. Share information with other attorneys, particularly in-house counsel, including forms, answers to Frequently Asked Questions, and information on wikis. (A wiki is a collaborative website, where all users can edit and contribute information.)

Setting up your profile on these sites only takes a few minutes. If you continue to make additional connections, update employment information, and interact with your connections online, your status will often be updated and your connections will constantly be reminded of your name and online presence.

Blogs
When you think of a blog (short for weblog), you may think of a personal online diary. However, blogs also refer to websites that are updated frequently, appear in reverse chronological order, and are often topical. Legal blogs, sometimes referred to as "blawgs,"

MARI CHENEY is the reference librarian at the Utah State Law Library. She has a JD from American University, Washington College of Law, and an MLIS from the University of Washington. She welcomes questions and comments about this article at maric@email.utcourts.gov.

range in content from a specialized topic of law, such as employment, health, or bankruptcy, to law and technology, and gossip about firm mergers or layoffs. Some law firms use both internal and external blogs to communicate information, while other attorneys blog anonymously about their daily lives.

Some Utah law firms and solo attorneys are marketing their services through blogs. Other Utah attorneys post about Utah law and appellate cases, providing current awareness services on a variety of topics.

Don't believe everything you read just because it's online! As with any other information you'll find on the Web, be a cautious consumer. Blogs can provide useful information, but they can also be biased or present inaccurate information. Assess the authority of the author and the accuracy and currency of the information.

The following is a selection of Utah-based topical blogs:

Construction & Collection Lawyer, http://utahconstruction.blogspot.com/

Lawyers of St. George (Business Law), www.sglawblog.com/

LexUtah (Utah's Legal Scene), www.lexutah.com/

Utah District Court CMECF Updates, http://utd-cmecf.blogspot.com/

Utah DUI Trial Lawyer, www.utahduilawblog.com/

Utah Family Law Blog, www.longokura.com/blog/

Utah Insurance Law Blog, http://insurance.strongandhanni.com/

Utah Law Talk (Personal Injury), www.utahlawtalk.com/

Utah Personal Injury Law Firm Blog, www.utahpersonalinjurylawfirmblog.com/

Utah State Law Library, www.utcourts.gov/lawlibrary/blog

Many large law firms with offices in Utah also have firm-sponsored blogs, but are not Utah specific.

Other blogs that might interest Utah attorneys are official and unofficial political and government blogs:

The Senate Site, http://senatesite.com/blog

Utah Amicus, http://utahamicus.com/

Utah Attorney General, http://utahag.blogspot.com/

Utah Bloghive, http://utahbloghive.org

Utah Democratic Party, www.utdemocrats.org

Utah House Democrats, http://utahhousedemocrats.org/

Utah Policy Daily, http://utahpolicy.com

Utah Republican Party, http://leadershipthatdelivers.com

Utah Senate Democrats, www.utahsenatedemocrats.org

Finally, a few lawyers throughout the country have started blogs that discuss the law and technology, both from a policy perspective, as well as technologies attorneys can use in their practice.

Technology and Law Blogs:

Dennis Kennedy, www.denniskennedy.com/

Ernie the Attorney, www.ernietheattorney.net/

Future Lawyer, http://futurelawyer.typepad.com/futurelawyer/

The Mac Lawyer, www.themaclawyer.com/

Technola, www.techno.la/

If you're interested in starting your own blog, there are numerous free sites that can help you get started. Check out Blogger, WordPress, or LiveJournal for blog templates and to set up free accounts.

Blog Reader
A blog reader like Google Reader or Bloglines helps you to keep current with blogs without having to visit each blog individually to see if they've posted anything new. A blog reader collects information about each of the blogs you want to monitor and lists the updates in one place. Blog readers do this by using a technology called Really Simple Syndication (RSS). Most blogs offer this option, which is indicated by an orange icon with an image of radio waves in it ( ) or the acronym RSS on the blog page.

To sign up for a blog reader, select the service you want to use. For instance, if you already have a Google account, sign in with your account name and password and then select "Reader" from the list of available services.

Once you've signed up for a blog reader, just click on the RSS icon that appears on the blog you want to follow and then add the blog to your reader. Or, if you know the URL of the blog, you can add a subscription to blog updates directly from the blog reader.

Microblogging
Microblogging is blogging on a miniature scale. A user can create short posts up to 140 characters, including web links. The most common microblogging tool today is Twitter. Posts can range from

a comment about a news item, the best restaurant in town, or an alert about a new supreme court decision. Some journalists have persuaded judges to allow Twittering (or tweeting) from the courtroom so they can report on cases in real time.

Example of a tweet from Utah Government on Twitter (http://twitter.com/UtahGov):

> RT @utahsenate: Utah Public Notice Website: Senator Urquhart's SB 208 passed the second reading on the Senate f.. http://tinyurl.com/9g3m3d

In the above message, UtahGov was retweeting (RT) a message posted by UtahSenate. The "tinyurl" is a shortened version of the URL where you can go to read more information.

Twitter posts are very brief and are immediate. Many people choose to post and receive twitter messages via their cell phone.

You can use Twitter to post links to law firm press releases and news articles, and direct readers to your blog for more information. You can also read what people are saying about your law firm or vet potential clients. Search Twitter posts at http://search.twitter.com/.

A solo attorney can follow other solo practitioners or law firms on Twitter, see what issues they're discussing and ask and answer questions. It's a great feedback tool, especially if you don't have anyone else to brainstorm with at the office.

Even if you aren't convinced that Twitter is the right tool for you, consider signing up for an account to get the user name of your choice. Then, if you feel it's a tool you could use in the future, you'll have your name reserved.

Podcasts
A podcast is an audio and/or video recording you can listen to online or download to an mp3 player. What distinguishes a podcast from a regular download is that your computer notifies you when new content has been added. Also, if you have set up regular downloads, the computer will automatically download the content.

Just as blogs often focus on specific topics, podcasts generally have a theme, such as legal research or intellectual property. Many law schools that host CLE programs upload the audio from these programs to the law school's website and offer syndication so you are automatically notified when new programs are added.

For example, the Intellectual Property Colloquium hosts IP experts to discuss topics every month. The Legal Talk Network specializes in legal podcasts and produces shows including "Lawyer 2 Lawyer" and "Workers Comp Matters."

You can find other law-related podcasts through the iTunes podcast library, as well as through iTunes U, where law schools often upload their podcasts. Also, visit individual law school and law firms' websites to determine if they are podcasting. If they are, you can stream the podcast from those individual websites if you don't want to download them to your computer or mp3 player.

To search for Utah-specific podcasts, just use a search engine to find them.

Specialized Search Engines
If you don't want to search the entire Internet for information about law firms, check out Fee Fie Foe Firm (www.feefiefoefirm.com/), a specialized search engine that returns results from law firm pages only.

Websites to check out:
Blogger (www.blogger.com)

Bloglines (www.bloglines.com)

ESQChat (www.esqchat.com)

Flickr (www.flickr.com)

Google Reader (www.google.com/reader)

Intellectual Property Colloquium (http://www.ipcolloquium.com/current.html)

LawLink (http://www.lawlink.com/)

LegallyMinded (http://legallyminded.com)

LegalOnRamp (www.legalonramp.com)

LegalTalkNetwork (http://www.legaltalknetwork.com/index.php)

LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com)

LiveJournal (www.livejournal.com/)

Plaxo (www.plaxo.com)

Twitter (www.twitter.com)

WordPress (http://wordpress.org/)