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## Social Media for Lawyers: Six Important Principles for Effective Participation

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## Social Media for Lawyers: Six Important Principles for Effective Participation

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## About the Authors

Nicole Black



Nicole Black is the founder of lawtechTalk.com, a company that educates lawyers regarding technology issues and provides legal technology consulting services. She publishes four legal blogs, including "Practicing Law in the 21st Century" (<http://21stcenturylaw.wordpress.com/>).

Nicole has authored numerous articles and spoken at many conferences regarding the intersection of law, technology and social media. She also writes a weekly column for the Daily Record focusing on a variety of topics, including constitutional and criminal law issues and law and technology issues ranging from the use of social media for marketing and networking to using emerging technologies in the law office. Nicole is *of counsel* to Fiandach and Fiandach, in Rochester, New York. Her law practice is currently limited to the defense of Driving While Intoxicated matters. She co-authors *Criminal Law in New York*, a Thomson-West treatise.

Lisa Solomon



Lisa Solomon was one of the first lawyers to recognize and take advantage of the technological advances that make outsourcing legal research and writing services practical and profitable for law firms of all sizes. Through Lisa Solomon, Esq. Legal Research & Writing, she assists attorneys

with all their legal research and writing needs, including preparing and arguing appeals and drafting substantive motions and trial memoranda. Through *Legal Research & Writing Pro*, she shows other lawyers how to start and run successful practices as contract (freelance) attorneys and teaches lawyers in all practice areas how to write more persuasive briefs.

Lisa is the author of many published articles about appellate practice and procedure and has written extensively about the field of contract lawyering. Her innovative law practice has been featured in periodicals such as the *National Law Journal* and the *ABA Journal* and in a number of books about legal careers. She frequently presents continuing legal education courses in legal writing.

Lisa is a member of the Westchester Women's Bar Association (where she is co-chair of the Practice Management Committee); the Westchester County and White Plains Bar Associations; the Justice Brandeis Westchester Law Society; Scribes—The American Society of Legal Writers; and the Legal Writing Institute.

Lisa earned her J.D., *cum laude*, in 1993 from New York University School of Law and her B.A., *magna cum laude* from Brandeis University. She is admitted to the bars of New York, the United States Supreme Court, the Second Circuit, and the Southern and Eastern Districts of New York.

# Add Mailing Lists to Your Marketing Mix

If you don't consider yourself to be particularly tech-savvy, all of the talk these days about "social networking" and "web 2.0" may be a little confusing, even scary.

You may be surprised to learn that there's a simple, easy-to-use social networking tool that has been around since the early days of the internet and that allows for much of the community-building, social interaction, and expertise demonstration that characterize newer tools like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and blogs. Even if all you know how to do on the web is send an e-mail, you can use this tool. I'm referring, of course to the mailing list (a/k/a e-mail list, listserv).

## **Mailing List Basics**

When e-mail is addressed to a mailing list, it is automatically broadcast to everyone on the list. The result is similar to a newsgroup or forum, except that, because the messages are transmitted as e-mail, subscribers receive them in their e-mail inboxes instead of having to log into a forum or discussion board to view them. It's "push" technology rather than "pull" technology.

Lawyers can use mailing lists with different memberships for different marketing purposes. Participating on mailing lists geared to lawyers, like attending bar association events, helps you raise your profile among your colleagues, who may refer cases to you. Other mailing lists can expose you directly to potential clients. These

mailing lists may be focused on a particular business or industry; a recreational interest; a geographic location (such as your hometown), or any combination of these categories.

Traffic on lists can range from very heavy (the Solosez list, discussed in more detail below, fields hundreds of messages per day), to sporadic (with days elapsing between new messages or threads).

Some mailing lists are moderated, with all posts requiring approval before they are distributed, while others are unmoderated. Even if a list is not moderated, however, the community is often self-policing. Additionally, most lists have a list manager who has the power to remove subscribers from the list and block attempts to re-subscribe from the same IP address.

One benefit of participating in mailing lists composed of other lawyers, or devoted to a business or industry, is that the rules for these types of lists often encourage, or even require, posters to include a signature block with contact information in each post. By contrast, on a mailing list that revolves around a topic that is not business-related, it may be uncommon for posters to identify their profession or business in a signature block at the end of each post. Nevertheless, it may be appropriate to identify yourself as a lawyer in some of your posts.

## Effective Mailing List Marketing

Regardless of whether the mailing list on which you're participating is geared to lawyers or non-lawyers, following a few best practices will increase the effectiveness of your marketing efforts.

First, be choosy about the mailing lists you join. If possible, before joining, poke around the archives to make sure that you're genuinely interested in the topics discussed, and that you will have opportunities to add something of value to the discussion.

Second, set up rules (sometimes called filters) in your e-mail program to direct mailing list messages to a separate folder (or folders, if you subscribe to multiple lists) rather than your general inbox. Because the subject line of every message distributed by a mailing list generally contains the name of the list in brackets, this filtering should work flawlessly. Keeping mailing list messages out of your inbox will help you avoid the distraction that a constant stream of new e-mails might otherwise create.

Third, when you join a list, "lurk" for a little while—maybe a few days or weeks, long enough to get a good sense of the etiquette of the particular list—before you make your first post. Remember, first impressions count, and you want to make sure that all of your posts are consistent with the list's character and (written or unwritten) etiquette.

Fourth, once you've taken the plunge and introduced yourself, participate in the

discussion. Remember, simply joining a mailing list without actively participating does *not* constitute marketing.

Fourth, don't be a taker. While it's fine to ask questions, it's important to add value to the list as well. In a related vein, avoid "me too" posts, which do nothing but waste bandwidth.

Fifth, even if a list doesn't have a rule prohibiting commercial solicitation, don't be too "sales-y." You want people to come to like and trust you enough to go to your website (where you can get their permission to communicate with them directly) or call you. Sharing your knowledge is a wonderful way to get people to trust you, and showing your personality—through the tone, language and subject matter of your posts—is a great way to get them to like you.

Sixth, avoid flame wars. Remember the old adage: never wrestle with a pig: you'll get dirty and the pig will enjoy it. Engaging in personal attacks on fellow list members (no matter how justified) reflects poorly on you.

## **Two Things to Consider Before You Hit "Send"**

Marketing by participating on e-mail lists has an underappreciated search engine optimization (SEO) benefit. Because search engines index posts to many lists, each time you send a post to an indexed list with your website listed in the signature block, you create a valuable backlink to your site.

The public nature of posts to many e-mail lists can be a double-edged sword. If you are posting a question about a case to a law-related list, make sure that the question does not have a whiff of malpractice about it. If you're not sure whether a post could get you in hot water with a client or the bar down the road, you may have the option of asking the list moderator to post your query anonymously. Alternatively, a trusted colleague on the list may agree to post it on your behalf.

### **Case Study: Making the Most of Mailing Lists**

I actively participate on four law-related mailing lists, and occasionally post to two lists that are not law-related.

I have been a member of the Solosez mailing list ([www.Solosez.net](http://www.Solosez.net)) for 8 years. During that time, the list—which is maintained by the ABA's General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Division and comprised of solo and small firm lawyers across the country (and even a few in other parts of the world)—has grown from fewer than 1,000 members to almost 4,000. Posts aren't strictly limited to law-related questions.

My active participation on this list has been critical to the success of my practice. Since my practice is focused on providing legal research and writing services to other lawyers, my participation on Solosez raises my profile among both referring lawyers and potential clients. To demonstrate my expertise, I make sure to answer many posted questions that involve legal research and writing, as well as appellate practice and

procedure. Since I'm interested in marketing, I participate in marketing-related threads as well. I post information about, and links to, resources in these areas (such as free e-books available for download, or particularly insightful postings on some of the blogs I follow). I also ask a fair number of technology-related questions. Of course, I don't limit myself to these topics: they're just the subjects I write about the most.

As a result of my participation on Solosez, I have been asked to write for various ABA publications. It started when an issue editor for GP|Solo magazine, who is also on the list, asked me to write an article about appeals; she was familiar with the nature of my practice because I include a brief description ("Concentrating exclusively in legal research and writing, including appeals") in my signature block. The list manager also happened to be the editor-in-chief of *GP|Solo* magazine and edits other GP|Solo publications; she's asked me to write additional articles for the magazine and chapters for two different books, and has recommended me as an author to other editors within the GP|Solo Division.

Solosez has also brought me clients from across the country. Thanks to Solosez, I've worked with lawyers from the Virgin Islands, to California, to New Jersey, and many places in between—places where I don't have an "in-person" presence.

In addition to Solosez, I'm also active on two lists focused on marketing for solos (Solomarketing is a closed-membership Google Group; Sololawyermarketing is an

open-membership Yahoo Group). These smaller lists are much more focused than Solosez, with posts primarily limited (as the names suggest) to discussions of small firm and solo lawyer marketing. Almost all members are lawyers, with a few professional marketing consultants in the mix. These groups are the perfect place for me to share all of my marketing discoveries, and to get great marketing ideas from other list members.

The Solomarketing lists' experiences with consultants is instructive if you plan to join an industry-based list. Those consultants whose posts were too focused on making sales (of either infoproducts or consulting services) have been booted from the lists. Those consultants who freely share their knowledge, and who have shown that they respect and fit in with the list culture, are still around.

Perhaps the most important consequence of my participation on Solosez and the two marketing lists are the relationships I have developed with list members. Lawyers who I first "met" though the list have become close and trusted colleagues and friends.

I also want to mention three other lists in which I participate. The first is the LawMarketing list (run by legal marketer Larry Bodine). Although membership costs \$125 per year, when I signed up for a 30-day free trial, I saw that writers and editors from many legal publications post calls for submissions to this list. Within my first year on the list, one of my articles on appellate practice (which I had written "on spec" and previously shopped around unsuccessfully) was published in the National Law Journal.

Not bad for a \$125 investment.

The second is a Yahoo Group for my small town (Ardsley, New York). Since the list isn't business-related, I don't identify myself as a lawyer in my e-mail signature (which consists of only my full name). Even so, as a result of my list membership, I learned that the Village has a page on its website that lists contact information for local businesses—including lawyers. If I had a very “local” practice (such as real estate or family law), my listing would be even more valuable.

Finally, since one of my hobbies is mushroom hunting, I recently joined a Yahoo Group called NortheastMushrooms. I don't expect to make many business contacts through that list, but I do expect to learn a lot about mycology from the many expert list members.

### **Conclusion: Add Mailing Lists to Your Marketing Mix**

Mailing lists existed long before many of the other online social networking tools that are popular today, and they continue to play an important role in the world of online social networking. So, even if you're a social media whiz, don't discount the value of mailing lists. Although I now actively use Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn; have profiles on JD Supra and Avvo; and am a member of LawLink (a Facebook-type site just for lawyers), I cut my online social networking teeth on mailing lists, and continue to actively participate on my lists on a daily basis.