Web 2.0: What's in It for Lawyer 1.0?

by Amy Wharton

IF YOU TWINGE at the mention of Twitter and hide your face from Facebook, you may feel a bit like Lawyer 1.0 caught in a 2.0 world. If so, help has arrived.

What's Web 2.0, and whatever happened to the first Web?
Web 2.0 is a name that artfully, if somewhat misleadingly, expresses how the Web's capabilities have advanced since its origin twenty years ago. As it was introduced, the Web (Web 1.0) was a collection of read-only pages. Information flowed only one way — from publisher to reader. When software applications were developed to allow pages to include read-write features, readers became copublishers. Web 2.0 was born.

Web 2.0 does not mean that Web 1.0 is obsolete. Not all information on the Web is read-write, nor should it be. Look for a way to edit most government Web pages and you'll see that the read-only Web still thrives. Yet Web 2.0 has definitely changed the world we live in. The change is not about new software, but about facilitating human interaction across space and time. The extent to which interaction is unfettered varies widely across sites. Web 2.0 sites such as Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org), Facebook (http://www.facebook.com), Twitter (http://www.twitter.com), and YouTube (http://www.youtube.com) thrive on content posted by strangers; their owners impose few barriers to authorship. Site owners who need close control over content limit authorship to people they trust.

The legal profession has barriers to entry, and many law-oriented sites likewise impose barriers to authorship. Authors usually need to establish their legal credentials with managers of those sites before submissions are accepted. For law firms, the most popular use for Web 2.0 technologies may be behind the firewall, with access granted only to the firms' lawyers, clients, and outside counsel. Microsoft's SharePoint, which has been adopted as the information sharing platform of choice for many law firms, employs Web 2.0 wiki (basically, a document-editing tool for groups) and blogging applications. *The Lawyer's Guide to Collaboration Tools and Technologies: Smart Ways to Work Together*, by Dennis Kennedy and Tom Mighell (American Bar Association, 2008), discusses how Web 2.0 technologies are boosting collaboration in law practice.

Only half of Web 2.0's success is owed to read-write capability. Readers' willingness to contribute is the essential other half. You can gain expertise, current awareness. and competitive intelligence by being an avid reader of blogs and wikis. By becoming a contributor as well, you can share your own expertise with a large audience.

What does it take to become Lawyer 2.0?
Becoming Lawyer 2.0 first requires awareness of practical considerations about online publishing, many of which are unique to the legal profession. Virginia Continuing Legal Education recently addressed these issues in its seminar, "Entering the Fray: Online Social Media's Benefits, Pitfalls, Risk Management, and Ethical Concerns." (Audio is available at http://www.vacle.org.) Full awareness of these issues before you begin is critical. Once you're ready to move forward, starting as a "read-only" user is a good strategy. You can use your browser's RSS feed subscription feature (a little orange button that lets you feed updates to your browser or e-mail client) to track blawgs and Twitter feeds of interest. Monitor the traffic. When you see an interesting blawg post, jump in with a comment. Before long, you may be tweeting alongside your kids. Get out your video camera and you may soon have your own YouTube channel.

Useful Web 2.0

Google Docs (http://docs.google.com) and **Google Calendar** (calendar.google.com) — Share documents and calendars among open or closed communities. Google Docs is essentially a wiki.

LinkedIn (http://www.linkedin.com) — Targeted toward business connections. Post your business profile, connect and share professional activities.

***ABA Journal*'s Blawg Directory** (http://www.abajournal.com/blawgs/) — The ABA's listing of Law Blogs, or blawgs. Add your comments to others' postings, or start your own.

Martindale-Hubbell Connected (http://www.martindale.com/connected), **LegallyMinded** (http://www.LegallyMinded.com), and **LegalOnramp** (http://legalonramp.com) Legal social networking and information-sharing sites.

Lextweet (http://lextweet.com) and **Justia's Legal Birds page** (http://legal-birds.justia.com) — Legal tweets ranked by popularity and category respectively. (Tweets are short Twitter posts of up to 140 characters, often used to distribute links to Web pages or blog postings.) A mix of personal and professional postings is common.

Wex (http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex) Cornell University Law School's legal dictionary and encyclopedia wiki.