

Twitter and the Law Firm Librarian: To Tweet or Not to Tweet?

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Most of you have heard of at least one social networking site, and may even be a member of one or more. I've been interested in social networking for some time, and have been using these sites for personal reasons. Recently I attended an AALL continuing education webinar on "Social Networking for Law Librarians" given by Sarah Glassmeyer, which got me thinking more about using these resources for professional reasons. Obviously I will not be able to go into much depth in this column, but I would like to share some of the reasons I think law firm librarians might want to use social networking tools, particularly Twitter. I confess I joined Twitter a few months ago, dabbled a little, but could not see why I should be interested in it. I was already using Facebook, which was meeting my personal networking needs, using LinkedIn for my professional contacts, and reading blogs and discussion lists, so why Twitter?

Twitter is a microblogging tool where posts are limited to 140 words. You create a short profile and include a brief bio of yourself and interests so others can find you. You can choose whose posts you want to follow, you can tweet for everyone or make your tweets private, and you can also send direct messages to users. Here are some of things I have been using Twitter for, and which you might find useful in your work:

1. **Discover new blogs.** Twitter users all have profile pages on which they can link to their websites or blogs. As tweets catch my attention, I click through to find interesting—and previously unknown to me—blogs.
2. **Follow blogs I already read.** Many blogs I already read have Twitter feeds. I can follow the latest activity and click on the link to the full post if I am interested. I find it faster and easier than remembering to check my RSS feed reader.
3. **Locate experts.** Either by posting a message to Twitter or by using its search function, you may be able to find experts on a particular topic.
4. **Network with other law librarians.** For solo librarians and self-employed consultants, Twitter is a virtual office water cooler. Throughout the day, librarians on Twitter comment on the news, throw out questions, and share articles and items of interest. You can reply directly to others, either publicly or privately. I use this the same way I do a discussion list such as law-lib. The advantage is that I can choose the people whose posts I want to read by following them. I choose my own group of colleagues and eliminate unwanted "noise."
5. **Follow the government.** The White House, federal agencies and members of Congress are among the many sources within the U.S. government that use Twitter to distribute news and announcements. A list of federal government Twitter feeds is at Twitter Fan Wiki (<http://twitter.pbworks.com/USGovernment>).
6. **Track activity at a conference.** Using what Twitter calls hashtags, you can tag posts to connect them with other posts. One way this is useful is at a conference, enabling attendees to find each others' posts. The tag is marked using the pound symbol and placed directly within the post. For example, #aall2009 will be used by attendees at the AALL conference in Washington, DC this July. Even if you cannot attend the conference you can follow the action virtually.
7. **Keep up to date.** What are hot topics among law librarians, or law firms in your practice area? What are people saying about your firm, your ILS, legal technology? Select the people in these areas whose posts you wish to follow. You can also search all Twitter posts to find people who are interested in or tweeting in areas you want to know about. Go to <http://search.twitter.com>.

I am sure there are other reasons to use Twitter, but these are just a few to encourage you to get started. I would love to know how others are using Twitter, so please feel free to send me a tweet at bethgholmes, or you can email me at egh@PSH.com.