

How to ... use LinkedIn

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Many attorneys have likely received invitations from other lawyers to join a LinkedIn network. In a short period of time, **LinkedIn has become a highly popular networking resource on the Internet.**

Lawyers Weekly's Noah Schaffer recently spoke with Boston attorney David A. Barrett, who has amassed one of the largest LinkedIn networks of lawyers. Barrett also writes a blog about how attorneys can benefit from using LinkedIn. The blog can be read at linkedinlawyer.blogspot.com.

Q. *So what exactly is LinkedIn? How does it work?*

A. Every user has their own network. If they make a direct connection with you, you can communicate directly with them. Most folks reveal their connection to all of their other connections, so you can see everyone in one of your connection's network. Being a connection means totally different things to different lawyers.

Q. *How do lawyers tend to use it?*

A. Some see it as the end: They want to connect with people they've already met in person or done business with. They are closed networkers, where they are only directly connecting with folks they'd recommend. Then you have the open networker, who is directly connecting with folks they may have never met before. Perhaps they got an e-mail introduction or work in an industry they may be interested in. Right now there's an avalanche of lawyers getting on LinkedIn, but the real advantage seems to be in its future. It is poised to be like Google, with a relationship feature.

Q. *How would someone use LinkedIn to find a lawyer?*

A. Someone on LinkedIn contacted me asking for an employment lawyer in Phoenix, and I was able to search for one through a people search. On the direct interface, you can refer legal clients to other clients. And, one step back from that, being a part of LinkedIn can enable legal referrals through e-mail or the phone or other means.

The referrals have a certain relationship to you. You can search through a second or third level of someone's [network], in other words, see someone's contacts' contacts. When you refer them to a lawyer in Phoenix, it isn't someone just out of the phone book; it is someone who has a relationship with other people you have a relationship with. There's also a chance for attorneys to answer questions from the "People Jobs and Answers" [section], many of whom are explicitly seeking legal counsel.

Q. *You have one of the largest networks of any attorneys. How did that happen? Has it helped you professionally?*

A. I'm connected to more attorneys than anyone else on LinkedIn. One other attorney has a larger total network. I'm an open networker, who seeks to build a quality network of attorneys and also provide access to other folks looking to be a client. I've been able to build a variety of networks within my practice area. I've developed a network of lawyers that I talk to on the phone and meet in person, and we have existing relationships outside of LinkedIn.

It has helped me better serve my clients who need an attorney outside their jurisdiction or need a particular attorney with a particular kind of experience. It has helped in my business development and law firm marketing efforts. There are business owners or in-house counsel in my network who are potential clients.

Q. *But if you have 1,500 lawyers in your network, surely you can't vouch for all of them being excellent attorneys? How do you vet them? What if one of them is disciplined or involved in some scandal?*

A. I frequently have conversations with close networkers who have that concern. I've seen some who explicitly say they reserve the right to terminate anyone's membership. We all have that right. You just have that person removed from the network.

The other side of the coin is that exposure so outweighs that issue. When I directly connect to someone, they may have 5,000 connections, and when they search for a Boston lawyer, I come up in their search. ... I haven't yet come across a situation where someone had their business reputation clouded by a LinkedIn connection.

