

Twitter: An Online Cocktail Party

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WHY SHOULD YOU USE TWITTER?

Twitter (www.Twitter.com) may at first seem like the most impersonal of the social media. After all, you can only fit so much personal information within the 140 character limit that Twitter imposes upon its users. And yet, it is a system of fast-hitting messages that enables users to stay in contact with all of their network members at one time. Twitter celebrated its fifth anniversary in March 2011, experiencing remarkable growth with over 200 million registered users. This number includes lawyers, recruiting coordinators, career services officials, and law students. As a law student, you can use Twitter to interact with the very people who will be making the hiring decisions in your career search.

Beyond individual connections, Twitter allows law students the opportunity to develop an identity or brand. Law students can use Twitter as a vehicle from which they can demonstrate their knowledge and interest in a practice area. A growing number of students have found themselves referenced or "retweeted" by professionals already practicing in their desired fields. Once you become a lawyer, you can use Twitter to foster a client base, essential for lawyers in the private sector — especially if you wish to become a partner.

GETTING STARTED

Considering several important factors can help you create a social media strategy that can apply to all your social media tools, including Facebook and Twitter. These include *Profile*, *People*, and *Presence*, some of the factors Amanda Ellis outlines in-depth in *The 6Ps of the BIG 3™ for Job-Seeking JDs* (Something Different Publishing, Inc., 2010).

- *Profile*: More than the other social media sites, Twitter users are limited in how much information they can provide in their profile. You will get to choose a name, a picture, and fill out a short description of yourself. When it comes to your user name, choose something close to your actual name. If you want Twitter connections to become real-life connections, it is much easier

for someone to recognize John Doe as @JohnGDoe than as @FutureLawStud.

As for your picture, it tends to be small on the page. Stick to a head shot that will allow someone to recognize you. Your description should briefly mention your interests and goals. You only have 160 characters. As an example, I currently have distilled [my life](#) down to: *I'm Asst. Dean for Career Services at Alabama Law. I also care about my wife & son, politics, music, running, ChiSox, Hawkeyes, and Blackhawks.* In that description, I feel that I have given anyone who follows my tweets a pretty good understanding of the subject matter that I am likely to discuss. Law students will want to mention if there are any particular areas of the law in which they have an interest.

There is one other setting that requires special notice. If your goal is to interact with other users, it is crucial that you do not select "Protect My Tweets" in your settings. With that option selected, only your followers, which will be a small, limited number of people, will be able to see your tweets. That will prevent you from being found by the people that you want to meet. Twitter's default setting is that all tweets are public.

- *People*: Once you've filled out your profile, start following other users. Twitter's main component is its stream of tweets from individuals that you follow. The website recommends popular users to you, and that can be a fine place start. It is also a good idea to look for the friends that you know are already using the service. On each user's page, you'll see a link to follow the user. Go ahead and start following. Additionally, on other Internet sites, you are also likely to find the Twitter logo. Clicking on that will help you follow the people that you already read on a regular basis.

Next, go to [Twitter Search](#) and search for something that interests you. Fan of The Bachelor? Search for the show. Like the Celtics? Do the same. But also use this to start looking for legal connections. Interested in intellectual property? Try searching for "Intellectual Property Attorney." You'll probably see job postings, news items, and details of what is new in the industry. Much as you would in a job search, you can focus your search

on a practice area, a geographic area, or the legal world in general.

As you start looking for the people that you want to follow, you may find other law students who can serve as good examples. Here are three law students who have used Twitter in different, yet very useful ways:

- ❑ Laura Bergus (University of Iowa) — [@lbergus](#)
 - ❑ Michael Stewart (University of Alabama) — [@michaelstewart](#)
 - ❑ Jack Whittington (University of Tulsa) — [@j2_whittington](#)
- **Presence:** When starting out on Twitter, it pays to be an active observer before jumping in. Twitter has a few [etiquette rules](#), such as shortening your links and giving credit to your original source as well as an entire online language — e.g., @reply, DM, RT, # (hashtag use), which can be confusing to a new user. You will also notice that most tweets contain a link to additional information, such as an article, website, or photo, which is a terrific way to make your tweets more interesting and readable.

Once you feel comfortable, join the conversation. Whether you are tweeting about the movie you saw or game you attended, it is a chance to start being heard. This is especially important if you are trying to develop your identity in a legal area. Tweeting about that area of law, sharing interesting links from around the web, and giving your opinion on news can help people whom you've never met get to know you. Retweeting (RT) someone else's writing is a way of passing on information that you find useful, while giving your source a pat on the back.

Twitter is NOT Facebook however. While the 140 character limit may remind you of a Facebook status update, do not treat it as such. Twitter is an opportunity for you to present yourself in a professional manner. A tweet such as "So bored in civ pro; Prof. White needs to get a clue" might be true at the moment, but an employer might see it as evidence of poor judgment.

Such a tweet could cause an employer to think twice before extending you an interview.

A Reminder: you are entering a very public domain here. What you tweet will be found. All tweets are now archived in the Library of Congress so what you tweet will live on in posterity. While every user will find his or her own comfort level for sharing information, I advise my students to be cautious about writing anything that makes them less likely to be hired.

TWITTER AIDS

Most users of Twitter, after they get going, do not spend much time on the actual Twitter website. Instead, there are numerous applications that are commonly used to save time and increase readability. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, and continual improvements make it impossible to give a static recommendation. At the time of this writing, [TweetDeck](#), [HootSuite](#), and [Seesmic](#) are all popular options on your computer. These applications allow you to schedule tweets for months in advance, making it seem like you are on Twitter 24/7. Additionally, the applications may also contain automatic URL shorteners, allowing you to exercise the Twitter etiquette rule of shorting your links. Lastly, Twitter is commonly used on smart phones. You will find numerous apps for both iPhones and Android phones that allow users to manage their Twitter accounts.

LEARN MORE

[Twitter's website](#) provides instruction and help if you have any questions as to the functionality of the service. For a more detailed description of how Twitter can be used, Mashable.com has a [detailed guide](#) to using Twitter, including sections on [building a Twitter community](#), [tweeting like an executive](#), and [finding a job](#). An excellent book to help you use Twitter to get hired through social networking is *The 6Ps of the BIG 3™* by Amanda Ellis (Something Different Publishing, Inc., 2010).