

Understanding Twitter: Six Basics For Lawyers

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- 1. Get It.** What is Twitter? It's an online social networking platform that enables users to post and read 140-character text messages, called *tweets*. Anyone can read them, but only registered users can post and reply to them. Twitter is used to share thoughts and information and to connect locally (like at a conference) and globally. Think of it as a worldwide banquet hall with hundreds of millions of users. Moreover, every tweet is indexed by search engines, giving lawyers exposure and SEO (Search Engine Optimization) advantages.
- 2. Get Fluent.** A *tweet* is a Twitter post. A repost (bringing someone else's tweet onto your page) is called a *retweet* or *RT*. A *hashtag* is a way to denote a topic of conversation or participate in a larger discussion. Our conference hashtag is #NACDLForensics. By searching for this hashtag, you will be able to find people talking about this conference and, by including it in your tweets, they will be able to find you. Welcome to the banquet!
- 3. Get Online.** Go to twitter.com to sign up. You will need to choose a *username*, an identifier unique to you (max 15 characters). Choose something that reflects your personality (or that of your office for a firm account). Many people use a version of their name. In addition, you will also put in your real name or firm name (up to 20 characters), a profile pic (use a recent headshot) and a short bio.
- 4. Get Following and Followers.** You'll want to follow accounts and engage with people that interest you. Start by following legal organizations you belong to and check followers of those accounts for people you know (or would like to know). You can also search for Twitter *lists*, which are curated groups of Twitter users, such as criminal defense lawyers. In addition, search on hashtags of interest, as well as the hashtags used at conference you attend, follow people using the hashtag. If you have a particular niche or interest (like forfeiture or indigent defense), search using related terms for accounts to follow.
- 5. Get Engaged.** Social media is *social*. Start conversations and add your thoughts to existing ones. RT quality tweets. A *mention* is any post that contains "@username" anywhere in the body of the tweet. This happens anytime you reply to another person's tweet or reference anyone's username in your tweets. Twitter collects all mentions of your username in the Mentions tab. Check it often to stay part of the conversation. Also, if you go to conferences and meet conference attendees on Twitter, look for them at events and say hi (you can recognize them from their profile pictures).
- 6. Get Branding (Not Spamming).** Find your voice and build your personal (and office) brand. Share your knowledge and perspective, but don't become a tiresome huckster for your services. Provide the kind of information and engagement that you're seeking. Tweet photos (that are appropriate for worldwide public distribution) and useful links. Twitter is a great place to promote your original content, such as blog posts, as well as speaking engagements and other appearances. You can also summarize and curate quality content from others. Online engagement is like offline, you get what you give.