

# Get social media savvy

## What's all the fuss about? Should you get involved? And if so, how? Social media sage Felicity McMahon explains when it's good to tweet

Where, in the space of a 30-minute commute, can you:

- find out about a new judgment;
- read about and comment on a new proposal/law/initiative;
- post an article you've written to hundreds of interested people;
- have one or two of them share or comment upon it in a way that means it comes to the attention of their followers too; and
- catch-up on the latest celebrity gossip?

Answer: social media!

I first spoke about barristers and social media at a Survive & Thrive event at Middle Temple in May 2016. I had been using Facebook (personally) since 2007, Twitter (professionally) since 2012, and LinkedIn (sporadically) for a while. Since then there seems to have been a rapid uptake of social media use amongst barristers, other legal professionals and even the courts themselves. The Secret Barrister has one of the best-selling books of the year and the Supreme Court is on Instagram! So what's all the fuss about? Should you get involved? And if so, how?

### Who is on social media?

In the legal sector: barristers, solicitors, chambers, firms, the Inns of Court, the Bar Council, Bar Standards Board, the Supreme Court, the Judicial Office, Bailii (British and Irish Legal Information Institute), the Bar associations, the Head of HMCTS (Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service), charities and non-governmental organisations (such as FRU (the Free

### CHECKLIST FOR BARRISTERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- ✓ **Connect:** There are lots of interesting people out there, whatever your niche. Follow/connect with them.
- ✓ **Be professional and polite:** This will help you avoid a lot of the potential pitfalls. Debate is great, but try not to get too heated – if you do, you might regret there being a public written record of it.
- ✓ **Keep the private, private:** Know your privacy settings!
- ✓ **Post sensibly and soberly:** Don't post without reading past the headline, resist the pressure to be first – you are an expert and a professional. Don't get caught out by satirical websites or #fakenews. Don't post after a few glasses of wine.
- ✓ **Be informed and informative:** Post on what you know and people who work in or are interested in that topic will follow you.
- ✓ **Post lawfully and ethically:** Remember the law and your professional position.
- ✓ **Put yourself out there:** It's great to post about your work, discuss things with other experts, and to point people to new and interesting cases and materials.
- ✓ **Enjoy it:** Social media gives you information on subjects that interest you, allows you to connect with clients and others you like, admire or are interested in, and allows you to build your professional profile. What's not to like?



Representation Unit), Big Voice London, Liberty) and many more. This is in addition to news organisations, public figures, and a whole host of people who are interested in whatever you are interested in. Whether you choose to use social media anonymously, like The Secret Barrister, or in your own name, there's plenty of opportunity to connect with interesting people.

### Growing your profile

As a junior barrister, social media helped me to grow my profile. When I joined Twitter I was a new pupil with few connections in the legal sector. I could post interesting judgments, articles and news stories, and comment on them, in a way that showed I have knowledge and expertise, and allowed me to connect with others.

I've seen some interesting social media interactions. One example: many barristers have complained to Susan Acland-Hood @CEOofHMCTS on Twitter about the state of courts around the country, from broken toilets to the problems of getting through security, and she has responded personally. This at least shows that the message is getting through – whether sufficient action is taken to alleviate the problems is perhaps a subject for another article.

### Do take care

As a media and communications barrister I do see the problems social media can cause. There have been some high profile social media cases – *Jack Monroe v Katie Hopkins*, and *Lord McAlpine v Sally Bercow* being two of the most famous; as well as disputes between private individuals posting defamatory or private (or even contemptuous) material on social media that I'm regularly asked to advise on. *But*, that hasn't put me off. We barristers know the law so are actually in a better position than most to navigate the potential pitfalls. That combined with bit of common sense goes a long way. Don't breach court orders even if everyone else is naming that celebrity who the papers say they can't name(!), don't post others' private information, or defamatory rumour and accusation and don't lie about yourself or your qualifications. Remember your professional position, take care when talking about cases you've been involved in, and make sure you don't do anything that would bring the profession 'into disrepute' – There is some BSB Guidance, albeit fairly limited (see @familoo's article in the October 2018 issue of *Counsel*).

### But be a human!

One of the great things about social media is that it allows you to be you, albeit professional you. The odd post about train delays or walking your dog, or a gig you went to, is likely to be warmly received by most. As they always say about 'real-world' networking, people much prefer to work with people they know, like and can relate to.

It's also important when encouraging future barristers. Initiatives such as #IAMTheBar have allowed the

### THE BIG 4: MOST COMMONLY USED PLATFORMS



**Twitter:** 'Follow' people you don't know as well as people you do if they interest you. People can follow you back, but don't have to. 240 character limit (plus you can add links and photos) – bitesize thoughts (although linking Tweets together is possible). Fast-moving – some reporters live-tweet from court, news arrives quickly.



**Facebook:** Connect with friends and family. You send a 'friend request' and the other person either accepts it or doesn't. Also organisations and groups who you can 'like' and/or follow. Plenty of space to write, post photo albums and links to other content.



**LinkedIn:** Professional networking. Your profile is an online CV, with different sections which the site will prompt you to fill in (eg qualifications, skills and publications). Widely used by solicitors and legal recruiters (you will get messages saying 'X role is on offer'), but also barristers. You can post articles and links to your professional network.



**Instagram:** Picture-based, and you can add captions that are much longer than Twitter. Newer to the legal world than in people's personal lives, but the Supreme Court has an Instagram account now!



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Bar to show students and others that the Bar is not just made up of white, public-school educated, old men. This ability to connect and inspire is vital if we want to build a more a more diverse Bar that feels accessible to anyone who has the desire and talent to pursue this great career. It can also help counter the 'fat-cat' stereotype, which is so important if we want to garner public support for access to justice and proper pay for publicly funded-work. Social media provides a way to really show what the Bar is like from the inside. Whatever your motivation, I would recommend giving social media a go. ●

### Felicity McMahon



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### Middle Temple's Survive & Thrive

The innovative Survive and Thrive programme is now well into its third year. We've covered social media in the past, and will be doing so again in the future. Event moderators have included the author Sebastian Faulks, broadcasters Anna Ford and Sir Trevor McDonald, and Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Patricia Gallan. Events are free for Middle Temple members, £15 for others, and live-streamed and live-Tweeted #surviveandthrive. Look out for the 2019 programme on the Middle Temple website and @MiddleTemple on Twitter.

### Debrett's' guide to social media for lawyers, *Counsel*, October 2018

A guide to the do's and don'ts by @familoo: Legal Twitter is a thriving, positive and influential community but even lawyers can get themselves into hot water if they don't observe the netiquette.

\*It's not Debrett's, it's Lucy Reed's (@familoo)

