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BUILDING NETWORKS ONLINE

Connecting Today's Poverty Law Advocates and Organizations to Meet Tomorrow's Challenges

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T he number of adult Internet users with an online social network profile has more than quadrupled in the last four years.[1] As of last year, 35 percent of all adults online, and 75 percent of online adults 18–24 used social networks.[2] As a recent book on digital networking suggests, "[w]e are living in the middle of a remarkable increase in our ability to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations."[3]

While a number of articles are available on the role of social networks and social networking in the legal profession, they focus on issues germane to private lawyers and law firms that are often not particularly relevant to the public interest legal community.[4] This does not mean, however, that social networks and social networking are not important tools for poverty law advocates and organizations. By connecting with others online, advocates and organizations are more likely to engage supporters, discover new funders, recruit volunteers, identify opportunities for professional development, keep track of issues in the field, and learn about new and emerging projects and best practices.

Most networking in the legal community happens at conferences, receptions, bar association events, and other in-person activities, but the interactions at these events are brief, and, due to geography or time limitations, these relationships can be difficult to sustain. Online social network tools have made interacting easier, offering a central location where people can engage with one another, synchronously or asynchronously, without regard to geographical constraints.

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[1]Amanda Lenhart, Pew Internet Project Data Memo (Jan. 142009), www.pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2009/PIP_Adult_social_networking_data_memo_FINAL.pdf.pdf.

[2]*Id.*

[3]Clay Shirky, Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations 20–21 (2008).

[4]See, e.g., Robert Ambrogi's LawSites, Social Networking for Lawyers (Part One of Two) (March 20, 2009), www.legaline.com/2008/11/social-networking-for-lawyers-part-one.html; *id.*, Social Networking for Lawyers (Part Two of Two) (March 20, 2009), www.legaline.com/2009/03/social-networking-for-lawyers-part-two.html; *id.*, Why Bother with Online Networking? (March 31, 2009), www.legaline.com/2009/03/why-bother-with-online-networking.html.

Here we examine social network sites and their utility for poverty law advocates and organizations. We begin by explaining what online social networks and social networking are and examine the benefits of social networking for poverty law advocates and how online social networks can be used for advocacy. We conclude with a broad discussion of what advocates and organizations need to know as they begin to use social networks. We strive to introduce basic concepts, give concrete examples, and take up common concerns. We hope to introduce social networks and social networking to those who may not be familiar with these concepts and to inspire poverty law advocates and organizations to experiment with these tools to support their advocacy.

I. Online Social Networks and Social Networking

While terms such as "social networking," "Facebook," and "Twitter" are increasingly used in everyday conversation, many people are still not clear on what they mean or why they matter. We define social network sites and social networking, identify popular social network sites, and explain why people choose to network online.

A. Focus on People and Their Relationships

The Worldwide Web has been developed in large part to facilitate communication. Initially most users focused on broadcasting information through static Web pages; however, as use of the Web grew and the medium matured, users demanded more interactivity, both with the content and with other users. Software developers responded by creating sites where users could easily generate and post their own content, modify others' content, and comment and give other feedback.

One tool created in response to this demand is the social network site. Such sites are "[Web]-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."[5] Many sites have incorporated features to engage people and build community. Using a social network site is "social networking."

Instead of being designed around topics, social network sites are primarily designed to focus on people and their relationships. This design shift has changed how people interact with one another, both online and off.

B. Popular Social Network Sites

One of the earliest social network sites, SixDegrees, was launched in 1997.[6] Since then, so many social network sites have been created that the term "YASNS"—Yet Another Social Network Site—was coined by social network experts.[7] Because each site has its own culture, tools, and purpose, classifying social network sites is difficult. Here we categorize social network sites into three.

1. General Sites

Among general sites are Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and LinkedIn.[8] These sites are open to the public and have millions of users. Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter are used primarily for personal—and LinkedIn for professional—networking.

2. Niche Sites

People who are members of a certain profession or organization or who have a specific interest network on niche sites. Among niche sites for legal professionals are LawLink, Martindale-Hubbell Con-

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[5]danah m. boyd & Nicole B. Ellison, *Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship*, 13, no. 1 Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication (2007), http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html.

[6]See Doug Bedell, *Meeting Your New Best Friends Six Degrees Widens Your Contacts in Exchange for Sampling Web Sites*, Dallas Morning News, Oct. 27, 1998, www.dougbedell.com/sixdegrees1.html.

[7]Gareth Branwyn, *Jargon Watch*, Wired, April 2004, www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.04/start.html?pg=8.

[8]Facebook, www.facebook.com; MySpace, www.myspace.com; Twitter, www.twitter.com; LinkedIn, www.linkedin.com.

nected, and the American Bar Association's LegallyMinded.[9]

3. Social Media Sites

YouTube and Flickr are examples of sites that were originally designed to host social media or user-generated content.[10] As these sites grew, they incorporated features of a social network site to encourage users to interact with one another.

C. Why Network?

People network online for the same reasons that people network offline: to connect with others in order to meet new people, share ideas, and explore interests. On social network sites, people make these connections by "friending" others, who may be family, friends, coworkers, business partners, acquaintances, or even strangers. People can send messages, make announcements, post videos and photos, and share information and links to online resources.

People do discuss trivialities, such as what they had for breakfast or what songs they are listening to, but they also post questions, comment and give feedback, and share ideas. Sharing, they create a sense of ambient intimacy: "[a]mbient intimacy is about being able to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn't usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible."[11] For example, a couple with a new child lives hours away from family. The couple cannot reasonably call or e-mail everyone in the family whenever the child tries a new food or says something cute. However, the couple can post updates about the child and photos on the couple's Facebook profile for everyone to see. As family members see these brief updates, they feel more a part of the child's life. In this case, as in many others, social networking is enhancing, not replacing, an offline relationship.

II. Social Networking for Poverty Law Advocates

Poverty law advocates are increasingly adopting social network sites. What are the adoption rates in the poverty law community, in the general legal community, and among online adults in the United States? How do poverty law advocates avail of social networking's benefits such as professional networking, collaboration, resource sharing, and substantive support? What potential professionalism and ethical issues should poverty law advocates know?

A. Adoption

Early this year a survey on social network site usage in the poverty law community was conducted by the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. Of 162 poverty law advocates approximately 30 percent reported using social network sites. Of the social network sites the most popular were LinkedIn (17 percent) and Facebook (13 percent). When asked about the usefulness of social network sites, 7 percent responded that they were extremely useful, 35 percent that they were useful, and 26 percent that they were somewhat useful. Interestingly, although 70 percent of respondents reported that they did not use social network sites, only 32 percent responded that social network sites were not useful. Not surprisingly, the survey found a correlation between age and social networking adoption. Among attorneys with fewer than five years of practice in poverty law, 70 percent reported using Facebook and 48 percent reported using LinkedIn.

Last year the American Bar Association (ABA) Section of Science and Technology Law cosponsored a survey on social networking with the ABA Young Lawyers Division.[12] Of respondents 56 percent rated social networking as important. Unlike the Shriver Center survey, the ABA survey asked respondents to rate specific social

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[9]LawLink, www.lawlink.com; Martindale-Hubbell Connected, www.martindale.com/connected; LegallyMinded, www.legallyminded.com.

[10]YouTube, www.youtube.com; Flickr, www.flickr.com.

[11]See, e.g., Ambient Intimacy, Disambiguity (March 1, 2007), www.disambiguity.com/ambient-intimacy.

[12]This survey was sent to 50,000 members of the ABA Young Lawyers Division, with nearly 3,000 responding (see ABA Section of Science & Technology Law Social Networking Survey (2008), www.abanet.org/scitech/socialnetworkingsurveysummary.pdf <http://www.abanet.org/scitech/socialnetworkingsurveysummary.pdf>).

network sites in terms of their helpfulness. Of respondents 28 percent rated Facebook—and 27 percent LinkedIn—as helpful. The ABA survey also asked why young lawyers thought social networking was important: 61 percent rated communicating with friends, whereas only 34 percent rated networking with legal colleagues, as an important reason.

A third recent survey on social networking in the legal profession is the 2008 Networks for Counsel Survey, commissioned by LexisNexis Martindale-Hubbell.[13] Of attorneys 54 percent reported being a member of a social network site. Of these attorneys 33 percent reported using social network sites for personal use, 18 percent for professional use, and 49 percent for a combination of personal and professional networking. The LexisNexis survey found that adopting social networking decreased with age, with 67 percent of 25–35-year-olds, 49 percent of 36–45-year-olds, and 36 percent of 46–55- year-olds and those older reporting membership in a social network site. The Shriver Center survey showed the same trend.

A study looks at the adoption of social networking among online adults.[14] Of American adult Internet users 35 percent have a profile on a social network site. The study also found adoption rates to be much higher among younger users, with 57 percent of online 25–34-year-olds, 30 percent of online 35–44-year-olds, and 19 percent of online 45–54-year-olds reporting having a profile on a social network site. According to May 2008 findings released for the first time in this study, 22 percent of online adults have a profile on Facebook and 6 percent on LinkedIn. As to why they used social network sites, 89 percent said to stay in touch with friends and only 28 percent to make new business or professional contacts, 43 percent to organize with others for an issue event or cause, and 28 percent to promote themselves or their work.

While comparing these surveys one-to-one is difficult because their scope and methodologies differ, some trends do emerge. First, social networking adoption is higher among younger adults, including younger lawyers and poverty law advocates, and decreases with age. Second, the adoption of online social networking appears to be higher among the legal profession than the general online adult population but slightly lower among poverty law advocates. And, third, although we do not have specific data for poverty law advocates, the primary reason lawyers and the general online adult population use social network sites is apparently to connect and communicate with friends rather than to network professionally. Whether this trend will change with an increase in adoption among legal professionals and the growth of specialized social network sites focusing on the legal community remains to be seen.

B. Benefits

For advocates, professional networking is perhaps the most obvious benefit from social networking. Indeed, one of the largest and most popular social network sites among lawyers and poverty law advocates, LinkedIn, was created explicitly to help people make better use of their professional network. Developing professional relationships over the course of one's career is crucial to both personal and professional growth. Social network sites expand one's professional network because they allow one to keep up-to-date on the activities of one's connections, reconnect with past colleagues, and newly connect with individuals who do similar work or share the same interests. Since social network sites leverage information about advocates and their work, these sites can suggest new professional contacts. Connecting with someone online often leads to multiple connection requests from other colleagues and professional contacts in an advocate's network. Thus online social networks help not only reinforce offline networks but also cultivate new connections.

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[13]See Press Release, LexisNexis, Survey Reveals Growth in Online Professional Networking Among Legal Professionals, Appetite for Lawyer-Specific Networking Solutions (July 10, 2008) www.martindale.com/xp/legal/News_Events/Press_Releases/2008/2008_0710.xml.

[14]See Lenhart, *supra* note 1.

Social networking potentially fosters collaboration among poverty law advocates. This happens when tools on social network sites, such as a LinkedIn group, are used to facilitate collaboration and when advocates use social network sites to communicate with other poverty law advocates in their everyday work. Collaboration reduces duplication of efforts, increases coordination in the field, and strengthens the field by building new and often lasting communications channels.

Social network sites can help facilitate resource sharing and substantive support. Many social network sites, including all of those mentioned here, have built-in features allowing advocates to share news and information with others in the field. This can be done through short "status updates" on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and by sharing news and posting questions or comments on LinkedIn's Groups feature. Other social network sites for lawyers, such as JDSupra, even allow users to share documents and sample materials publicly.[15] Because social network sites are inherently interactive and empower users to produce and share their own content, they are often more effective for information and resource sharing than traditional media.

C. Professionalism and Ethics

Because social network sites are newly open channels of communication and can blur the line between personal and professional activities, they raise unique challenges for professionalism and, more narrowly, attorney ethics. While these concerns should not keep advocates from exploring social network sites, advocates must give them some thought. Almost everything that one does on a social network site can be undone, but, due to the immediacy of most online communications, one cannot always "undo" what one does before any damage is done.

One approach is to try to separate one's personal and professional online ac-

tivities. Making this approach somewhat easier is that some platforms, such as LinkedIn, are better suited for professional activities; others, such as Facebook and MySpace, for personal interactions. In reality, however, this distinction may be difficult to enforce, particularly when the real-world distinction between friend and colleague is not always clear-cut. Another approach, where possible, is to create separate accounts for personal and professional activities. This requires communicating the distinction to friends, family, and colleagues, and this is not always easy. Yet another approach is to recognize that social networking requires one to embrace multiple audiences.

Other than more straightforward ethics issues, such as maintaining client confidentiality, some thorny issues may arise in the context of social networking and lawyer advertising. These issues are less likely to cause problems for poverty law advocates. We are not aware of any specific ethics rules or guidance on lawyers using social network sites for advertising purposes, although lawyers have suggested approaches to this issue.[16] Other advertising issues than client solicitation of which lawyers should be aware are rules against making false or misleading statements, testimonials, and possibly linking to lawyer-ratings sites. Be sure to review your state bar regulations or consult with bar counsel on any concerns about your online activities running afoul of your ethical obligations as a lawyer.

III. Social Networking as an Advocacy Tool

Advocates and organizations can use social network sites to further their outreach, communications, and advocacy. This entails considerations such as staffing, budgeting resources, policies on social networking for your organization, and using social network sites for fundraising.

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[15]JDSupra, www.jdsupra.com.

[16]See C.C. Holland, *Mind the Ethics of Online Networking*, Law.com, Nov. 6, 2007, www.law.com/jsp/legaltechnology/pubArticleLT.jsp?id=1194257030032. See also Steven C. Bennett, *Look Who's Talking: Legal Implications of Twitter Social Networking Technology*, New York State Bar Association Journal, May 2009, at 10, www.nysba.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Bar_i_Journal_i_&CONTENTID=26780&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm.

A. Advocacy Purposes

The Nonprofit Technology Network, Common Knowledge, and ThePort released, last April, the Nonprofit Social Network Survey Report based on a survey of 980 nonprofit professionals from small, medium, and large nonprofit organizations representing a variety of sectors.[17] The most recent and extensive survey available of social networking among nonprofit organizations, it is insightful on how nonprofit organizations are using social networks to further their mission. No similar survey has yet been conducted on organizations in the nonprofit legal sector.

Of respondents 86.2 percent reported that their organization has a presence on some form of commercial social network site. Facebook is by far the most popular (74 percent), followed by YouTube (46.5 percent), Twitter (43.2 percent), LinkedIn (32.9 percent), and MySpace (26.1 percent). Interestingly, popularity does not necessarily correlate with the number of connections. While the average number of nonprofit communities on Facebook was high, at 5,391, the average number of connections on Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube was relatively low, at between 250 and 300.

Most respondents (80.5 percent) reported that their primary purpose in social networking is marketing—promoting their programs, services, and overall brand. This is good news for poverty law organizations that see social networks' primary use as advocacy tools; this likely means more and better tools and resources focused on marketing and outreach. Facebook, for example, already allows one to target subscriber updates by age, gender, and location. LinkedIn recently upgraded its Groups feature to allow moderators to send e-mail announcements to all group members.

Poverty law advocates and organizations should also consider using social network sites for advocacy purposes besides marketing and outreach. Identifying appropriate and worthwhile uses requires experimentation, but some potential initiatives may be

- distributing short summaries of cases and changes in the law for attorneys and the public;

- recruiting volunteers, law students, and new attorneys;

- connecting pro bono attorneys with one another and with legal aid advocates to bring about mentoring, substantive support, and training for both volunteers and staff members;

- talking with other advocates about emerging issues and identifying systemic problems; and

- highlighting issues affecting low-income communities and legal aid programs protecting their legal rights.

These are, of course, not the only initiatives that could be implemented. Your organization's own goals and priorities should determine your use of social network sites and your target audience. We encourage you to be creative and think about uses of social networks and social networking beyond traditional marketing and outreach.

B. Staffing, Budget, and Policies

As in any initiative, staffing, budgeting, and crafting a set of policies to help guide your organization are crucial. While the initial exploration into social networking need not be time-consuming or expensive, it should be thought through and staffed appropriately. Some benchmarks from the Nonprofit Social Network Survey may be useful. Of respondents 80.8 percent dedicated at least a quarter of one full-time staff person, 64.5 percent between one-quarter and one-half of a full time-position, and 16.3 percent three-quarters of a full-time position or more to maintaining their social network site presence. And 55 percent reported that they would increase staff time on social networking initiatives over the next twelve months. For most organizations, the amount of staff time spent on developing, cultivating, and managing profiles and connections on social network sites depends on their priorities and goals. Our suggestion is to start small and to value quality over quantity. Also,

[17]See Nonprofit Social Network Survey, www.nonprofitsocialnetworksurvey.com/download.php.

remember that once you have developed a community by using one tool, you can use it to promote new communities on other social network sites.

Like staffing, budgeting for your social networking initiatives can be incremental. Nearly all social network sites are joined and used free of charge, but there are marketing, design, development, and consulting costs. According to the Nonprofit Social Network Report, 40.6 percent of nonprofit organizations said that they had some budget for external resources for their social networking initiatives, and 24.1 percent said that they would increase funding for external resources over the next twelve months. As in staffing, your social networking budget depends on your goals and the tools that you decide to implement. If, for example, you decide to develop your own social network site rather than using an existing platform, the costs are going to be much higher.

While there is no secret to developing a good social networking policy for your organization, there are a few considerations. First, implement a system such that all of your social network site accounts are documented by a central staff contact in a secure system accessible to more than one employee. This system should always be updated when passwords are changed—regularly—and when new accounts are added. Second, define the integration of new social networking sites into your marketing, communications, and advocacy work. Your organization likely already has a policy on making statements on behalf of your organization or responding to requests from the press. This is not necessarily a good model for social networking initiatives, which often require distributed, informal messaging. Be sure to take your experimenting with social network sites into account when you draft your policy and be willing to update it with new learning. Third,

develop a policy for employees' unofficial online activities that reflect on your organization and its mission. This can be difficult because, as we pointed out, the lines between personal and professional activities are not always clear.[18]

C. Fund-Raising

Another area that organizations are often interested in exploring as part of their social networking strategy is fund-raising. In fact, many commercial social network sites, such as Facebook, have modules that allow organizations to collect donations easily from their subscribers. Whether to make fund-raising a part of your social networking activities depends on your goals and experience with individual online donations. However, generating consistent, real income from social networking activities is not common. According to the Nonprofit Social Networking Report, Facebook was the most popular social network site used to raise money (39.9 percent), but, of the nonprofit organizations using Facebook for fund-raising, 29.1 percent raised less than $500 over the twelve-month period preceding the survey. In fact, of the 235,000 nonprofit organizations using Facebook as a fund-raising tool, only 3 had raised more than $100,000 and only 88 had raised $10,000.[19] The Internet and e-mail are among the least successful nonprofit fund-raising venues.[20] This, of course, does not mean that social network sites do not have the potential to add value to an organization's work, only that they may not be the right tools for every organization in soliciting individual donations.

IV. Joining and Using Social Network Sites

How do you start using social network sites? How do you choose a social network site and make your first connections. How do you evaluate initiatives and ensure

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[18]For more information on developing a social networking policy for your organization, see James Wong, *Drafting Trouble-Free Social Media Policies*, Law.com, June 15, 2009, www.law.com/jsp/legaltechnology/pubArticleLT.jsp?id=1202431410095&src=EMC-Email&et=editorial&bu=LTN&pt=Law%20Technology%20News&cn=ltnda_20090615&kw=Drafting%20Trouble-Free%20Social%20Media%20Policies.

[19]Kim Hart & Megan Greenwell, *To Nonprofits Seeking Cash, Facebook App Isn't So Green,* Washington Post, April 22, 2009, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/21/AR2009042103786.html.

[20]*Id.*

that your organization is benefiting from its social network participation? How do you deal with areas of concern—privacy, security, control, and information overload—that advocates and organizations often have when social networking?

A. Making Your First Connections

Signing up for a social network site is easy. It generally only requires that you fill out an online form and agree to a site's acceptable-use policy. In fact, you can easily set up many social network site profiles in a single afternoon; this might be a good idea if you are concerned about protecting your brand.

Social networking requires a commitment to cultivating your online relationships. To network online productively, you must regularly use the site—post status updates, add new connections, and follow what your connections have posted. While enjoyable, this participation can take a lot of time without yielding much benefit to an individual or organization if participation is not strategic and focused. To avoid wasting resources, individuals and organizations should set goals before investing in social networking. Knowing why you are networking and what you hope to gain from it helps you structure your time around social networking activities and helps you figure out what being successful means.

Establishing goals helps you select an appropriate social network site in which to invest your time. Before committing to a site, look at its demographics, culture, available tools, and terms of use. These characteristics should align with your goals. For example, if you want to connect with lawyers, you may want to select a niche site for the legal community. If you choose Facebook, you will probably need to work harder to find the people with whom you want to connect, but you will have a larger audience due to Facebook's popularity.

Once you decide on a social network site, set up a profile. You are likely also to be asked to enter contact information for those with whom you want to connect. Start with a small number of people; this allows you to experiment and learn more

about the tools without the pressure of having a large audience. You can also skip this step and develop your network organically, choosing one new connection at a time. If you do not know how to do something, network. Ask those who have been using the site longer than you for tips and suggestions. Most people on social network sites readily share the tips and tricks that they have learned over time.

As mentioned above, the more time and resources that you put into your social network, the more you or your organization is likely to get out of it. Integrating social networking activities with other daily activities comes naturally to some people. Others may need to schedule short blocks of time each day or week for social networking.

B. Experimentation and Evaluation

Everyone uses social network sites slightly differently. To find out how social networking fits into your life and community, you need to experiment. What has worked for someone else does not necessarily work for you or your organization. As you use a social network site, try new tools, offer new content, and join new groups to see what helps you connect with your audience. If anything works, that's great. If not, move on and try something else.

To know whether your experimentation is working, you need to evaluate your social networking activities. The evaluation does not need to be formal or resource-intensive, but you do need to collect enough data to decide whether the resources you are putting into social networking are being invested wisely. The type of data depends on your goals. Try to identify metrics that measure increasing levels of engagement or action, such as the number of comments on an update. You should also look at the number of connections, how many people click on links that you post or share with others, and how much traffic is driven to your organization's website. Such data will convey some information about how much of a relationship you have developed with your online connections and its impact on your work. Some social network sites, such as Facebook, have built-in tools for

tracking members and usage. Others, such as Twitter, require third-party tools that can be found online. Also, remember to record anecdotal data. While they may not be statistically significant, they can highlight unexpected benefits.

C. Other Issues to Consider

Four areas of concern that advocates and organizations often have when social networking are privacy, security, control, and information overload.

1. Privacy

Joining a social network site makes information about you available to others whom you may not know. To help control access to your information, most social network sites allow you to specify who may and may not see certain information. Take the time to understand such privacy controls and choose settings with which you are comfortable. You always have control over the information that you share; a good rule of thumb is not to share anything that you would not want the general public to see. Employers should also be respectful of their employees' boundaries and never require employees to join a social network site or share information that makes them uncomfortable.

2. Security

As in any online activity, using social network sites needs to be balanced with security risks. Poverty law advocates and organizations should recognize that the same rules that apply to clicking on links and downloading documents elsewhere online also apply to social network sites. Organizations deciding to use social network sites should involve their information technology staff from the first. Technology staff members can identify security risks and help the organization manage them.

3. Control

For organizations, one of the most intimidating aspects of social networking and social network sites may be the loss of control over their brand or message. Organizations cannot control what the people they connect with say about the organization online. Instead of resisting this loss of control, many organizations

choose to embrace it by acknowledging praise, trying to rectify complaints, and correcting misinformation. Often these organizations find that critics can be converted into loyal supporters if someone from the organization simply listens and responds to their concerns.

4. Information Overload

Social network sites churn out a lot of information, and anyone using a social network site is at risk of overload unless the information from these sites is treated differently from telephone calls, voicemail, and e-mail. People who are the most successful at avoiding information overload recognize that there is too much information to read or act on all of it. Instead of trying to consume everything, begin to identify what is most useful or important to you or your organization and what you can ignore.

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Organizing, networking, and community building have long been recognized as productive tools for poverty law advocates and organizations. Social network sites move advocacy activities online, allowing advocates and organizations to connect with others, while alleviating geographic and time constraints. Online social networking also introduces new ideas and resources into the poverty law community and allows for better coordination and communications in the field.

Our examination of social network sites, what they are, who are using them, and how they can be used, and our identification of ethical, professional, human-resource, and other issues that people and organizations wrestle with as they experiment with social networking, introduce individuals and organizations to social networking enough for them to begin planning their participation.

As more programs engage in social networking, we expect that there will be more data about how organizations and individuals can be successful at social networking. We hope that we have started a larger conversation about social network sites and how they can be used to support the work of poverty law advocates and organizations.

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