

Industry Watch

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Networking Site Aims to Boost Lawyers' Business

By Tim Hay
Daily Journal Staff Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — While Lawlink.com, the brainchild of Oakland civil lawyer Steven Choi, is not the first-ever interactive Web site for lawyers, it is the first to offer straightforward professional networking, its founder said last week.

"Knowing a lot of other attorneys is always helpful. It's big business," Choi said. "Raising your profile is not a bad thing, unless you work in a total vacuum."

Unlike other sites that have come before — such as Lawbby.com, launched by a marketing consultant this summer — Lawlink is not a "chat" site, but a place where attorneys can post their resumes and list their accomplishments.

It's an invaluable tool, Choi said, for lawyers looking to steer clients to attorneys in different specialty areas.

"My clients are always asking 'Do you know a good patent attorney? A real estate attorney?' I had one client that needed a will drawn up in Miami," Choi said. "I was never comfortable just doing random Google searches and then making a recommendation. I want some kind of professional relationship with that lawyer before making a referral."

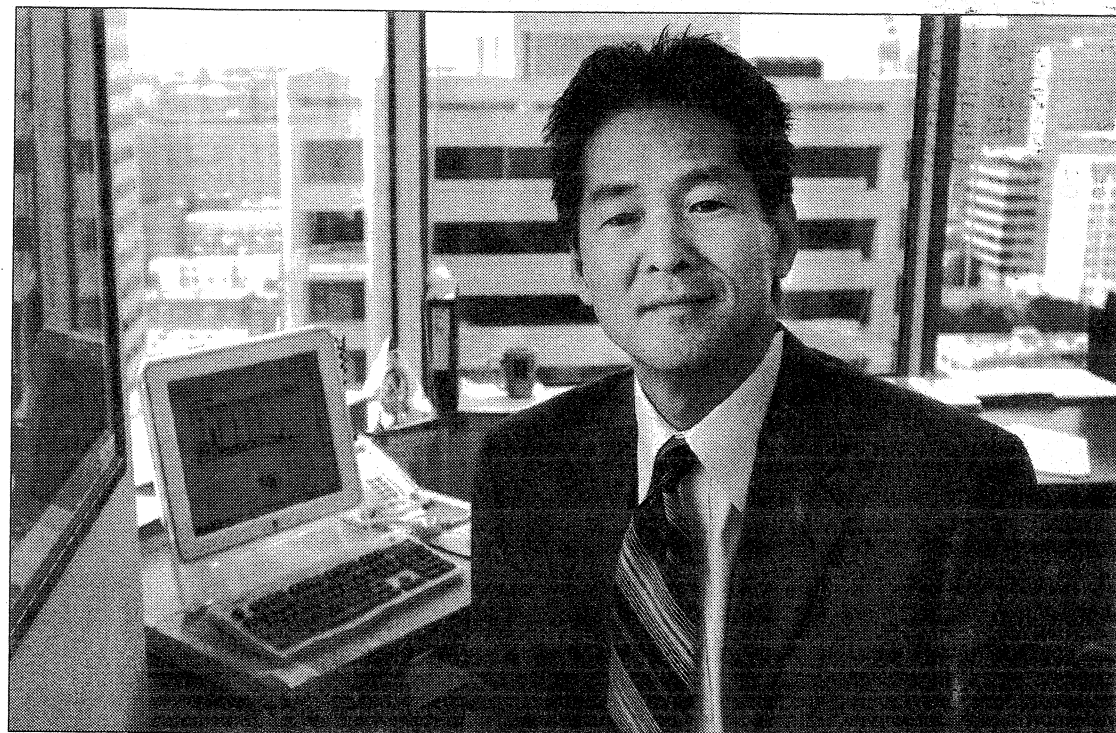
Choi created the site with one of his clients, a Web developer. Now, the two work together coping with online traffic that gets heavier each day.

Profiles, similar to the ones posted on the popular sites MySpace.com and LinkedIn.com, started trickling in as soon as the site was up, Choi said. Within a week, they were seeing some 60 profiles per day.

Each profile must be fact-checked before it's posted to the site. And while California's bar association makes it easy to check whether an attorney really is who he or she claims to be, the process is more opaque in other states, Choi said.

"We're already looking at maybe hiring staff," he said, adding that all the work is currently being done by him and his partners, several of whom are full-time lawyers.

The goal, Choi said, is to compile a database of 10,000 attorneys nation-



S. TODD ROGERS / Daily Journal

"I looked for a resource like this, and there was nothing. Just nothing. I know it's important for college kids to network to organize that kegger, but attorneys need their own network, for business, said Oakland lawyer Steven Choi, whose attorney networking site Lawlink.com has been attracting lawyers around the country.

wide. As a sign of how popular these sites have become, Choi said that 400 attorneys signed up for his site on Friday alone, bringing the total number of users to roughly 1,000.

As with other networking sites, Lawlink users will eventually be able to form subgroups based on practice area or location.

"This is viable," said Jann Dudley, marketing director of Archer Norris, a litigation firm with four offices in California. "Lawyers are so incredibly busy. Anything they can do to network from their desks is vital."

Dudley said firms are increasingly turning to the Web to boost business. Archer Norris will soon launch an appellate law blog on its Web site, she said.

"We're still trying to get our arms around all the things we can do with tech," Dudley said.

The newly launched Legal On-Ramp, www.legalonramp.com, combines networking with the content-development model of Wikipedia.com to create a digital co-op for corporate counsel and law firms.

But where other legal-networking

sites have failed to pan out — Avvo Corp. of Seattle was recently sued over its unauthorized rankings of attorneys — Lawlink could become the newest networking success story, Dudley said.

"This has the potential to get people talking about the issues, and not just their firms," she said. "I'd recommend it, especially to people just starting out."

As Choi developed the site, he and his partners simply copied and pasted information from the Web sites of lawyers they knew, and — with their permission — retooled them into Lawlink profiles.

One of these "featured lawyers" is Robert Sheppard, a partner at San Francisco real estate and tort firm Sheppard Rosen.

"At the risk of sounding trite," Sheppard said, "this is not serving me, but the community, and young lawyers. I have expertise in real estate law. When I was a young, green lawyer, I could have used guidance from experienced lawyers who had blazed the trail."

Alameda personal injury lawyer William Berg, another featured lawyer on Lawlink, was more succinct.

"I'm looking to help Steve, and get business," he said.

Attorneys joining the free site since its launch have written their own profiles, and posted their own photos.

A recent blurb about Lawlink in the American Bar Association's online newsletter caused an avalanche of new profiles to hit the site, mainly from Tennessee, where a local bar association reprinted the short ABA report.

Choi said he expects a continued strong interest from attorneys all over the nation — especially as he and his partners plan an advertising blitz.

"I've been Internet savvy from the beginning, and I've been a lawyer for 23 years," Choi said. "I looked for a resource like this, and there was nothing. Just nothing. I know it's important for college kids to network to organize that kegger, but attorneys need their own network, for business."

But will it be all business all the time?

"Well, we do have a personals section," he said.