

Inksters innovations

By Brian Inkster

Inksters is based in Glasgow but carries out legal work throughout Scotland and in particular in Shetland where I come from. I am a sole practitioner with an associate, a trainee solicitor (with another about to join us) and three support staff. Although a small practice, we have embraced web-based technology with enthusiasm. The Telegraph Business Club recently commented that what Inksters "lack in size it more than makes up for in entrepreneurial spirit".

Multiple websites

In November 2008 we launched three new websites:

- www.inksters.com is our main site and showcases the firm's legal services
- www.scotsproperty.com highlights the properties that we market for sale throughout Scotland and, in particular, within Glasgow, Edinburgh and Shetland. (It is commonplace in Scotland for Solicitors to also be Estate Agents.)
- www.shetlandproperty.com is designed specifically for the Shetland Property market.

Standing out

We stand out from the crowd in a number of respects:

(1) We allow clients to pay their invoices online, possibly the first law firm in Scotland to do so. The website links through to the Sage Pay (formerly known as Protix) secure payment gateway where payments are processed. People are now used to paying for all sorts of services online. Why should legal services be any different?

(2) We enable house hunters to note interest online. In Scotland it is the norm for people who are very interested in a property to note interest with the selling agent, normally through their own solicitor, so that they can be kept advised of the closing date if one is fixed. It seemed obvious to us that there should be the ability to do so online.

(3) We offer Inksters TV and Inksters Radio with videos and podcasts on areas of our expertise. In particular this includes a detailed video on *Moncrieff v Jamieson*, with footage taken outside the House of Lords (or access via www.moncrieff-v-jamieson.com). There is a whole section on the website dealing with this ground-breaking legal case on the question of the servitude right to park and it is used as a resource by law students who are directed to it by the Scottish Universities as part of their property law courses. Incorporating videos on the website also turned out to be fortuitous when the Telegraph Business Club decided to make a Masterclass film on Inksters for their "Secrets of Success" series. We were then able, with no additional effort, to showcase the finished film on our website.

(4) We provide additional web addresses for postcode areas. The domains www.ze1.com, www.ze2.com and www.ze3.com are pointed to the property listing pages on www.shetlandproperty.com relating to each of the three postcode areas (namely ZE1, ZE2 and ZE3) within Shetland. House hunters in Shetland can now get there faster by typing one of these short URLs into their browsers. This is a further unique selling point for us when competing for estate agency work in Shetland.

(5) We give viewers a bit of fun. If you register to receive periodic email newsletters, you have a chance to win an Apple iPod nano. This prize draw produces regular registrations by persons who are not currently clients of the firm. We now have a larger audience and potential pool of new clients when e-mail newsletters are issued.



In developing the websites we felt that the overall look was important and commissioned photography to enhance this rather than rely on stock imagery. It also enabled us to capture images to reflect the new tagline, "just that little bit different", which was developed for the websites.

We have certainly seen an increase in new business coming to us as a result of our new online presence. Whilst our previous website had been in existence since 1999, we could not update it in house, it lacked content, had a flash intro page and did not feature highly, if at all, in search results. The new websites were all search engine optimised at day one and we have been building and improving on that. Search engine optimisation is an ongoing process and a very important part of our marketing strategy.

Doing it on

Twitter is a micro-blogging social networking site where people follow the sources most relevant to them and access information via Twitter as it happens. Twitter asks one question, "What are you doing?" Answers must be under 140 characters in length and can be sent via mobile texting, instant message or the web. Twitter is being embraced by businesses, politicians, educational establishments, the entertainment industry and the media. Barack Obama twittered his way to the White House. Gordon Brown and the Queen both tweet (although probably not personally). All the major newspapers have twitter pages (often multiple ones) as does the BBC. The Dragons from the Dragons Den are twittering, as is Sir Richard Branson.



In February 2009 we became the first Scottish law firm to twitter at www.twitter.com/inksters. The following month we set up Twitter pages to complement our two property websites and list properties at www.twitter.com/scotsproperty and www.twitter.com/shetlandhomes. I also twitter personally at www.twitter.com/BrianInkster. Our twittering resulted in a lot of interest in the local, national and legal press. *The Scotsman* referred to us as having "come up with an innovative way of stimulating interest in the flagging housing market".

We are gradually following and being followed. One twitterer who has yet to post a tweet (perhaps therefore they are not really a twitterer yet but just a follower) is following Stephen Fry (who is the UK's most popular Twitterer with 394,193 followers at the time of writing) and me (with 20 followers) and no one else! How does that come about?

UK lawyers and law firms are beginning to appear on Twitter. There were only a handful in England, Wales and Northern Ireland twittering around the time we started but numbers are increasing daily. A significant number of lawyers and law firms were already tweeting from the USA and Canada.

So what are the benefits to a law firm of being on Twitter? I see it as a natural progression in the use of modern technology to communicate with our clients and prospective clients. You may tweet about things that would be too short to find their way into the news items on your website. You can raise awareness about your services and news by short tweets that link back to relevant pages on your website. If you follow other relevant legal tweets you can keep up to date with what is going on in the law. One good resource for this is Scots Law News at www.twitter.com/ScotsLawNews.

However, we are legal pioneers, at least in this country, in the use of Twitter and it is perhaps too early clearly to state what the benefits really are. I will let you know when a follower becomes a client or we sell a property for a client as a result of it being listed on Twitter. In the meantime I must now log on and tweet that I have finished this article.

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