

Think that Twitter is just for kids? Well think again. Although the social media site can be used to follow the antics of the *Made in Chelsea* stars, it can equally well be harnessed into a useful professional tool to keep you up-to-date with developments in the law. It's all about who you follow. Don't worry, there is no need to Tweet your own thoughts. You can, instead, simply consume the thoughts and information of others. And it can be a very effective way of keeping informed.

With a little bit of initial searching through Twitter, you can find legal bloggers and commentators who contribute on legal topics from criminal, family, housing and human rights to property, tax and even party walls. Once you've found your niche, you can develop further connections to other legal contributors. Based on those you follow, Twitter will also start suggesting other people that you might be interested in following.

If the relaxation in the CPD proposed by the BSB is implemented, consuming legal education and topping up your professional awareness via Twitter will become a realistic way of keeping on top of your game. It is particularly useful as a grazing resource whilst waiting at court or on a train. You can add material to a reading list for further review later.

Another increasingly important role that web blogs and Twitter plays is the opportunity for lawyers to explain contentious areas of law or headline news in ways the conventional media often do not – or will not – report or just get wrong. Just recently, it was

the howls of protest from Twitter users that led to the mainstream media's correcting of its erroneous reporting of Andy Coulson's acquittal of a perjury charge in Scotland. The acquittal was not, as the Legal Twitterati pointed out, clearing Mr Coulson of lying. That was because perjury required not only proof that someone had lied, but also that the lie had had a material outcome on the relevant proceedings. How many of us knew that? Hat tip (as Twitter users say when acknowledging the work of others) to Peter Jukes (@peterjukes) amongst others who were persistent in getting this error corrected and adding valuable insight into an important case.

In this social media series, *Counsel* is going to be featuring profiles of some of the more prolific legal commentators who blog and Tweet. We begin with 1 Crown Office Row barrister Adam Wagner (@adamwagner), founding editor of the UK Human Rights Blog and who not only Tweets in a personal capacity but who, through @rights_info, is also bringing accessible information about human rights law to lawyers and non-lawyers alike.

On the *Counsel* website we'd like to hear of legal Twitter users that you find useful. Join the debate by visiting www.counselmagazine.co.uk. Or tweet @counselmagazine with your favourite bloggers/twitterati.



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Adam Wagner

In *Counsel's* first interview of the series, Penny Cooper speaks to human rights blogger, Adam Wagner

Blogging – not so different from squirreling on skeles

Appropriately enough I made contact with Adam Wagner via Twitter and he readily agreed to be interviewed for *Counsel's* new *Barrister Bloggers and Tweepers* series. I then reverted to an old-fashioned landline to quiz him about his journey to becoming one of the Bar's highest profile bloggers.

It all began when he was a pupil at 1 Crown Office Row. Adam started experimenting with "blogging" (basically on-line publishing of short pieces) using free software called *Wordpress*. It cost him nothing but his time and he obviously enjoyed it.

As a brand new tenant, he then persuaded chambers it should have its own blog aimed at lawyers, academics and law students. The "UK Human Rights Blog" (<http://www.ukhumanrightsblog.com>) was launched on 31 March 2010 and for the first year or so almost everything on it was written by Adam. Interest grew and other writers started joining in, as long as they could adopt a suitable "blogging" style. Adam points out that legal blogging doesn't suit every writer: "You need to be able to convey the key message in 1,000 words or fewer, use all the good things about journalistic writing, be legally accurate and include web links to the primary sources such as BAILII, the Supreme Court website, law reports, legislation and so on." To date the blog has had almost five million hits and has over

25,000 subscribers.

Once the blog "found its voice", Adam realised that "something else was missing from the human rights set-up". That something was the message to the world at large that "human rights have done a huge amount to transform society for the better". Initially he thought of writing a book but then a website seemed more logical, more accessible. His brainchild – *rightstinfo.org* – launched on 21 April 2015. As at June 2015 it has had over 300,000 hits and there are 10,000 followers via social media. Adam modestly says "people have been pretty receptive".

This remarkable venture was made possible thanks to a grant that Adam obtained from a charity and the support of a



Social media



team of volunteers. He also recruited the services of Information is Beautiful Studio (IIB Studio). Anyone who has seen the website will know that the designers' work lives up to their name. The look is novel and draws one in to explore. Adam says, "We respect that people don't have a lot of time and want to enjoy themselves online." Behind the attractive simplicity of the site there is, he says, a "sophisticated communication strategy". Adam has studied



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the competition and is the first to admit that publications such as *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* demonstrate "communication genius" in the way they portray human rights. *Rightsinfo.org* aims to redress the balance and, though a far cry from "Freddie Starr Ate My Hamster", its case headlines also grab attention and whet the reader's appetite:

"Police must investigate rape claims"

"You can't ban every prisoner from voting"

"Hospitals must protect vulnerable patients at risk of suicide"

Behind each one of the headlines is a very short story summarising what the case is about and a link to the judgment. The site ran a poll and picked the "50 Human Rights Cases That Transformed Britain". (Teachers and lecturers please note, this has got to be the best online resource by far for engaging students on the subject of human rights.)

Though blogging and developing the website must have used up precious time that Adam could have spent developing his practice, it was almost certainly a wise investment in his career. He is deservedly developing a reputation as a go-to junior for human rights law. For example, Felicity Gerry QC recently sought him out to assist on the human rights arguments in an appeal on joint criminal enterprise. They will be appearing in the Supreme Court in October 2015. He has also been instructed by Liberty in a high-profile case involving the death of ex-paratrooper Christopher Alder. Whilst his practice has a focus on public law, Adam feels he benefits from a wide variety of work for claimants and defendants, including working for the Home Office.

Five years ago with nothing but free software, free time and a passion for writing about human rights, Adam Wagner became a legal blogger. Would he encourage others to do the same? He most definitely would. Adam believes that any legal issue is ripe for blogging; all it needs is a blogger with a passion for his or her area whether it is tax, copyright or something else. "Clear, persuasive communication is what being a barrister is all about," he says. "Usually we are squirreling away at midnight on skeleton arguments that only a couple of people get to read, but if you want to communicate more widely, the internet is the perfect platform." ●



Contributor Penny Cooper

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