

SMALL FIRM FOCUS

The Social (Law Firm) Network

How lawyers from different parts of the country came together to form a virtual practice that advises clients anywhere in the world on data privacy and information security.

By Susan McRae

Daily Journal Staff Writer

MANHATTAN BEACH — It's no accident InfoLawGroup LLP's four partners met in the blogosphere.

That's where they go to write about the latest trends and court decisions in their fast-evolving niche practice involving data privacy and information security in the cyber-technology age.

It's also the place where they service their clients and draw in new ones.

"They [clients] find us because we are out there speaking and writing, and they saw that we were bringing something new to the industry," said Tanya L. Forsheit,

who founded the firm in 2009 with David J. Navetta and W. Scott Blackmer. Boris Segalis joined them last October.

The firm also has two of counsels in Connecticut and New York and belongs to a global network of law firms for international support.

Launched as a virtual boutique, it's an outgrowth of the partners' expertise in the very areas they blog about — from ZIP code privacy to a five-part series on cloud computing — and could represent a prototype for niche practices in cyberspace.

Last month, the four gathered at Forsheit's Manhattan Beach office for some rare face time. Navetta flew in from Denver, Black-

InfoLawGroup LLP

Number of Lawyers: 6

Founded: 2009

Specialty: Data Privacy and Information Security

Tips:

- Design your website as a conversation, not a brochure
- Invest in technologies that make administrative functions easy
- Find interesting trends in your practice and start blogging and talking about them
- Develop an expertise and reputation in a specialty area



Susan McRae / Daily Journal

From left, W. Scott Blackmer, David J. Navetta, Tanya L. Forsheit and Boris Segalis.

mer from Salt Lake City and Segalis from New York.

While the partners knew of each other through social networks and bar association committees, most had never met in person until they launched the firm.

Foresheit, 38, put the plan in motion after leaving Proskauer Rose LLP in Los Angeles, where she was a litigator and chairwoman of the firm's Privacy & Data Security Group. She wanted to reach a spectrum of clients she said she couldn't reach at a big firm — startups and midsize companies needing advice on small but important data protection and contract and regulatory compliance matters.

"They needed someone who really knows what they're doing, who knows the law inside out and spends their time keeping on top of it ... someone who is willing to do small bites of work for a reasonable cost," Forsheit said.

She reached out to Navetta, 40, who had opened a solo practice in Denver after leaving pre-scandal American International Group Inc. in New York, where he was counsel for its cyber insurance division that protects against security and privacy breaches.

From the beginning, the pair didn't want the firm to be just the two of them. They wanted a national reach, with

lawyers highly experienced in information technology.

Navetta contacted Blackmer, whom he knew through the American Bar Association's Information Security and Cyber Crime and Privacy committees.

A sole practitioner, Blackmer, 58, spent 13 years running WilmerHale LLP's Communications, Cyberlaw and E-commerce department in Washington, D.C., and five years running its Brussels office.

Blackmer left the firm in 2000 to help launch a couple of Internet-related companies. He also was handling transactions for Fortune 500 companies involving e-commerce, online banking and online securities trading, as well as representing trade associations with identity privacy and security issues.

Segalis, 35, was a senior associate in Hunton & Williams LLP's Privacy & Information Management group in New York, when he decided last year to strike out on his own. He knew of Forsheit through her blog and mentioned his career change on one of her postings. Segalis signing on as the firm's fourth partner brought immediate results.

"When I told one of the clients I worked with at Hunton that I was going out on my own, their response was, 'Good luck,'" Segalis said. "But when I told the same people I'd joined InfoLawGroup, they said, 'We'd like to talk to you.' We got together and eventually got work from them."

Many clients find the firm through its blog,

prominently positioned as the firm's home page. All of the firm's traditional information is there, too, but the blog is its "kernel," the partners said.

"Everything emanates from the blog," Navetta said. "I think that's been one of the tricks of the trade that put us in the spotlight and put us in an echelon with those huge firms and their privacy and security departments. We are right there with them, with a lot less resources, just a savvy knack of using technologies that are available."

The lawyers' in-depth posts — and the responses — constitute a dialogue on recent happenings in their practice area, with links to corresponding updates, articles and other information on the subjects in question.

"We're not just zipping by and saying take a look at this," Segalis said. "We're going in and engaging people."

The lawyers' quick analyses of breaking-news stories often boost their Web page to the first string of Google results. Thus the giant search engine acts as the firm's marketing tool, and the lawyers feed LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter posts to their Web page. The practice also spotlights the partners as sought-after radio talk show experts.

"None of this is really new, but we are very nimble in our use of social media," Segalis said. "At a large firm, you may need approval of five people before a blog post comes up. Here, there's four of us and two of counsel.

We have the expertise, and we trust each other enough to do these posts."

Immediacy is also vital in their work with clients, from the largest Fortune 100 companies to the neighborhood sandwich shop.

In the field of privacy and security, the lawyers said, clients can't wait two weeks for an associate to reply with a memo. They need a response in hours or days — particularly small companies, where a data breach could kill the business.

"Clients ... want lawyers who can move at the same speed that they do in dealing with their own people internally," Forsheit said. "We provide that. We can be anywhere and it wouldn't matter."

Navetta remembers when he first went out on his own. He had clients in various locations, and his biggest fear was that they'd want someone nearby and consider his practice inadequate to serve a large corporation.

But something changed around 2005, he said.

"Maybe the communications methods got better, maybe corporate internal people weren't actually seeing each other," Navetta said. "But I think they got comfortable with the fact that they could deal with attorneys anywhere in the world — and not necessarily with the biggest law firms in the world.

"They were looking for value and expertise and responsiveness. I think we provide that in a meaningful way."