Gaggle on the Gavel: Designing an Interactive Website to Create a Community of Lawyers

Sara Anne Hook and Shilpa Pachhapurkar

Department of Human-Centered Computing, Indiana University School of Informatics and
Computing, 535 W. Michigan Street, Indianapolis, Indiana, 46202, U.S.A
sahook@iupui.edu
shilpach@umail.iu.edu

Abstract. Law is behind other industries and professions in its implementation
of technology that could make the practice of law and the delivery of legal ser-
vices more effective and satisfying. Although there has been considerable devel-
opment in legal technology over the past few years, research identified the need
for an interactive LinkedIn-style online community for lawyers to communicate
other lawyers. Such a community would be particularly beneficial for solo prac-
titioners, lawyers in small firms and lawyers in rural communities and would also
provide a convenient way to connect with lawyers for referrals and recommen-
dations, for specialized expertise and to develop contacts in different geographic
locations. Tentatively titled Gaggle on the Gavel is an attempt to create such a
community that would gather a number of attractive features and functionality
under one umbrella and be compliant with the rules of professional conduct with
respect to client confidentiality, security, advertising and solicitation. A system
has been designed, prototyped and revised based on feedback from a focus group
of lawyers.

Keywords: Community computing, information presentation, interaction de-
sign, legal technology, interactive community.

1 Introduction

In many ways, law is behind other industries and professions in its implemen-
tation of technology. Fortunately, a number of legal technology entrepreneurs and ac-
ademics are designing systems that will make the study and practice of law more effi-
cient and less expensive. New companies are coming into the marketplace to challenge
long-standing monopoly-like situations such as have been enjoyed by traditional legal
research companies LexisNexis and Westlaw.[1-3] These companies now offer compre-
hensive practice management systems as well as more targeted software for internal
law firm processes such as time-keeping and billing.[4] Websites assist potential clients
in locating and connecting with lawyers as well as allow lawyers to promote their ser-
vices to the public.[5-7] Recent issues of the ABA Journal and other publications have
illuminated many attempts to deploy technology to various specialty areas, to make the
practice of law more efficient, to create and respond to new areas of practice within the

law, and to move the provision of legal services into the 21st century.[8-14] Two benefits will be realized from the continued deployment of technology into the field of law: the creation of alternative legal careers, such as in legal operations, legal technology and data protection, in an era where there are too many lawyers [15-16] and the time this provides for lawyers to fill their intended role as counselors and work on higher-level duties that require the lawyer's skills and expertise rather than more mundane tasks that can be easily accomplished via technology or delegated to support staff.[17] The sheer amount of evidence generated by even a simple court case, along with the need to practice law more efficiently and cost-effectively, means that data analytics and data visualization are needed, including for electronic discovery, litigation management and information governance.[18-21]

Our research has identified an unserved niche within the legal technology marketplace. We observed that there was no comprehensive system for lawyers to connect with each other externally in a secure environment that would help them build a professional network of colleagues across the U.S. and even around the world. Our interactive website is intended to provide a LinkedIn-style community specifically for lawyers and will not be available for access by the general public. The tools within our community, called Gaggle on the Gavel, are totally within the lawyer's discretion as to how much of the system he or she wants to use, such as referrals, calendars and tracking of continuing legal education (CLE) seminars and other events, who he or she wants to connect with, and how much information will be shared with external colleagues about cases, career opportunities or research interests. Gaggle on the Gavel will include visualizations that will show trends in the law with respect to the kinds of cases being filed and other issues and statistics that lawyers will be interested in and that will help with strategic planning for law firms. This paper features screenshots from the most recent iteration of Gaggle on the Gavel, provides diagrams of the information architecture and interaction flow, and shares the results of a focus group we conducted in our efforts to design a compelling online community for lawyers.

2   Methods

A thorough review of the literature was conducted to determine the state of technology in law practice. In addition to articles that provided predictions for the future of legal technology, we reviewed articles on document management systems, on the impact of big data on law and legal technology devoted to specific areas, such as intellectual property law and legal research, on entrepreneurs in legal technology and on data visualization, to name but a few. From this research, we determined that although there was increasing attention to developing technology tools for law, there was not an interactive community specifically for lawyers and for lawyers only. Thus, our intent has been to design an interactive community limited to lawyers rather than a website that would be accessible by current and potential clients and the public at large. A review of existing technology indicated that there were many tools for internal law firm management, such as timekeeping, billing and case management as well as productivity tools – either as stand-alone products or as full-featured law firm management

systems. Thus, our task became to develop something that was intended for external rather than internal contact management and community-building. We gave our interaction the tentative title of Gaggle on the Gavel, not only because it described our logo of birds sitting on a gavel, one of the two most prominent images of the legal profession, but also because it captured the concept of community. Having at least a tentative title for the system that we were developing helped to move it from the theoretical realm of design into thinking about how it would be promoted and used in the real world of the legal profession.

A number of considerations have informed the development of Gaggle on the Gavel. The prototype and initial design and flow of the website are based on established usability principles and additional expertise in typography. Because of the nature of the profession that Gaggle on the Gavel is being designed for, we have been especially cognizant of setting the right tone with the layout, color scheme, font and logo. By confining the website to lawyers only, it prevents our users from violating the prohibitions related to marketing and advertising as outlined in the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct and as adopted, in whole or in part, by the states where the lawyer is licensed to practice.[22-24] Features within Gaggle on the Gavel, including who and what information to share, address the lawyer's duty to safeguard client confidentiality, as embodied under Rule 1.6, Rule 1.9 and 1.18, to name but a few. Thus, in deciding where we would focus our efforts, we were mindful of the need to protect client confidentiality and to not run afoul of the restrictions on advertising and solicitation. Many of these concerns were reduced by not having a website that would be available to the public and by leaving it to the lawyer's discretion about how much to share about a particular case. However, the need for security is paramount, not only to protect what might be private information, but to reassure a lawyer who wants to participate in the community that he or she will not be violating any disciplinary rules or putting confidential client information at risk. Thus, our problem space was defined: a social networking platform that would be attractive, easy to use and allow a lawyer to construct his or her own network for information sharing and support. We saw our community as being especially useful for solo and small firm lawyers as well as lawyers in rural areas, who are often quite isolated as compared with colleagues in large law firms or in major metropolitan areas with active bar associations.

Once we decided that an interactive community was going to be our focus, we needed to develop a "persona" of the typical user and how we would capture these characteristics. The next step in our process was to list all of the features and functionality that we thought would be useful in an interactive community of lawyers. Among the items on our initial list were a place to share cases (but with role-based access and privacy settings in place), a profile page, data visualizations and statistical representations, appointments, calendars and reminders, notifications of conferences and meetings, recommendations, an option to refer cases to lawyers with specific expertise or licensed in a particular location (with privacy settings available), a calculator to track charges or a cost sheet or template if needed for referrals, a knowledge base and a place to select contacts. In the case of recommendations, we decided that developing a rating sheet or questionnaire would be helpful and would allow some consistency in scores. To simplify even further, we considered having Gaggle on the Gavel merely provide

an opportunity to endorse a colleague rather than require a rating, with stars used as a designation. At least one commentator has advised lawyers to be careful about endorsements on LinkedIn due to the fact that this may be misleading and appear to be touting expertise that the lawyer may or may not have.

Many states require lawyers to participate in a certain number of CLE hours as a condition of being licensed to practice in that state. Failure to complete the required number of hours can mean disciplinary action, including suspension from practice. Once a year, the body overseeing this may send out a printed report that is outdated. As a result, too many lawyers find themselves registering for expensive CLE seminars in December in order to fulfill their required hours. To address this problem, Gaggle on the Gavel includes a tracking system whereby the lawyer can easily monitor completed and upcoming CLE activities, reducing the risk of a shortage of hours at the end of the reporting period or having to quickly register for expensive seminars that are not in the lawyer's area of interest.

Once the basic design had been developed, we convened a focus group of lawyers and conducted interviews. Our series of 12 questions illuminated the kinds of features that lawyers would be interested in having versus those that were of less interest or that duplicated existing systems. The feedback indicated that an online posting forum would be useful, where lawyers could share interesting information or trends in the law and which would help them develop contacts with other lawyers. Although we had originally planned on including links to reference materials, the lawyers indicated that while this feature might be useful, its utility is sometimes limited and would be very cumbersome to construct. Organization of work through the application would be appreciated, especially if there could be a way to assign priorities to tasks. One important feature that was highlighted in our interviews was a lawyer's need to develop cordial relationships with clients and other lawyers, such as by remembering their birthdays and anniversaries. Thus, a "tickler" system with more than just a name and date would be useful. Because of the way we set out to design Gaggle on the Gavel, with the power for sharing information being the lawyer's choice, confidentiality of information within the system was of less concern to focus group members. Focus group members indicated that what they were most interested in was a feature that would allow them to build a convenient contact list of colleagues working in other areas of the law, including both personal and professional information, so that they could provide referrals and obtain assistance with cases outside of their own areas of practice and jurisdiction. The lawyers were particularly intrigued by data visualizations that would illuminate trends in the law as a way to help them better focus their areas of practice and refine their marketing approaches. An overview of time spent as billable hours, on CLE seminars and in pro bono activities would be useful so that a lawyer could track his or her efficiency. Currently, all these resources are not available under one umbrella. Thus, focus group members indicated that it would be beneficial to have tools such as calendars, reminders, informational content, networking, and practice management tools available within one system. Our original philosophy for Gaggle on the Gavel evolved into a toolbox, with multiple applications being brought together, encompassing both the concept of an interactive community and a convenient dashboard.

More recently, in order to encourage lawyers to provide pro bono legal services to low-income citizens, many states have adopted mandatory pro bono reporting as part of the license renewal process. Yet many lawyers do not have a good way to account for their pro bono activities so that the total hours to report at the end of the year will be accurate. Moreover, one reason that many lawyer have resisted the mandatory reporting rule is because of the difficulty of keeping track of pro bono hours, with a fear that over- or under-reporting will be a cause for disciplinary action.[25] A feature to allow lawyers to capture their pro bono hours contemporaneously has been added to Gaggle on the Gavel.

3   Results

One of the first activities in designing Gaggle on the Gavel was to develop a logo that would be professional and invoke the sense of community, but that would also have a bit of humor to it. Thus, the image of several birds sitting on a gavel, one of the two images most often used to designate the legal profession, was chosen. A variety of color schemes were experimented with before deciding on the combination of black, tan and gold, which would convey a sense of professionalism and be easy to read.

Fig. 1. Evolution of Gaggle on the Gavel Logo

In order to capture the individual elements and data that would be needed in each specific screen of Gaggle on the Gavel, an information architecture diagram was prepared.
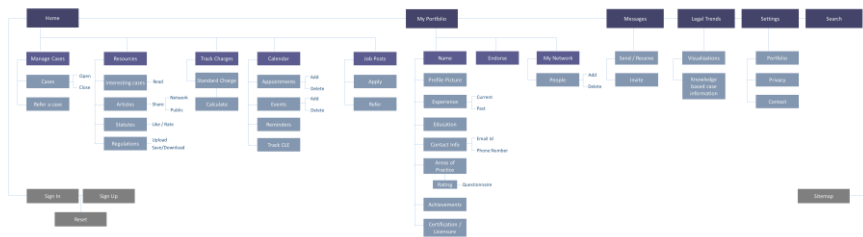
Fig. 2. Information Architecture for Gaggle on the Gavel

In order to assure that a user could move smoothly between the various screens within Gaggle on the Gavel, a graphical representation of the journey of a user from initial login to each segment of the system was developed.
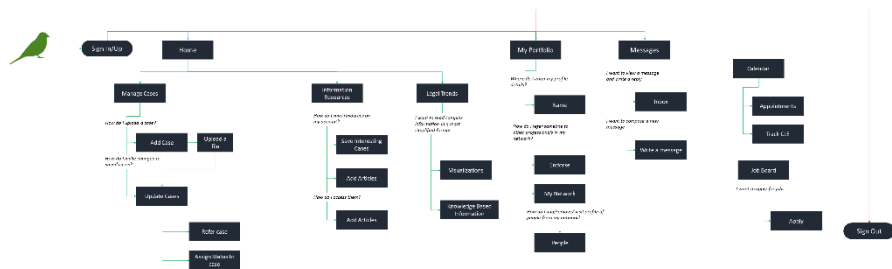

Fig. 3. Interaction Flow

Because Gaggle on the Gavel is, first and foremost, intended to be an interactive community, the system revolves around the opportunity to have a clean, attractive and compelling profile that is easy to read and update. Among the information that the lawyer can include on his or her profile page are a photograph, basic information about

work experience and education, any certifications (provided that these are in compliance with the Rules of Professional Conduct indicating specialization), recommendations, posts and number of contacts. At the top of the screen is a link to the lawyer's portfolio, messages and legal trends, which is a placeholder for visualizations.
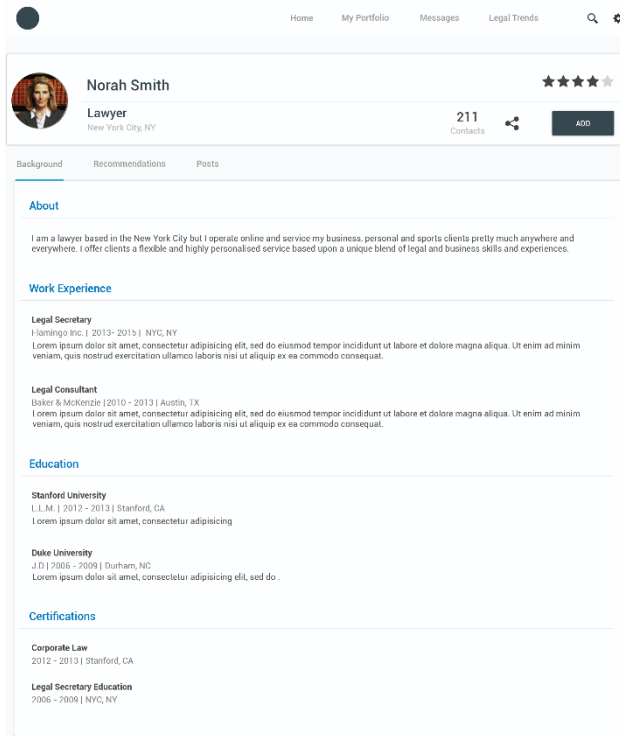

Fig. 4. Profile page for Gaggle on the Gavel

As an interactive community, Gaggle on the Gavel needed an inbox for communication between the lawyer and his or her approved contacts.
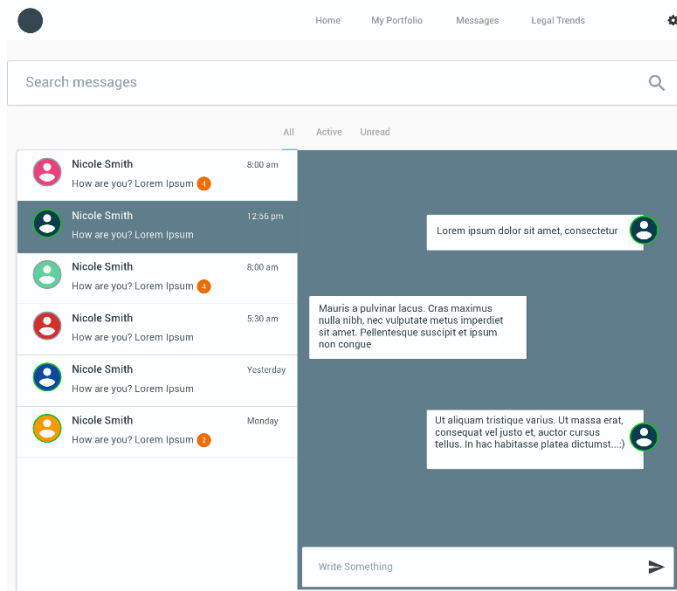
Fig. 5. Inbox for Gaggle on the Gavel

The most useful features of Gaggle on the Gavel are the tracking tools that allow the lawyer to correctly capture CLE hours needed and completed as well as pro bono services provided. Thus, the screen for the CLE personal log is shown. Note that this gives the lawyer an opportunity to add new entries and also keeps track of each category of CLE hours earned, with a convenient graphic at the top of the screen indicating the hours that are pending and an option to print the screen.
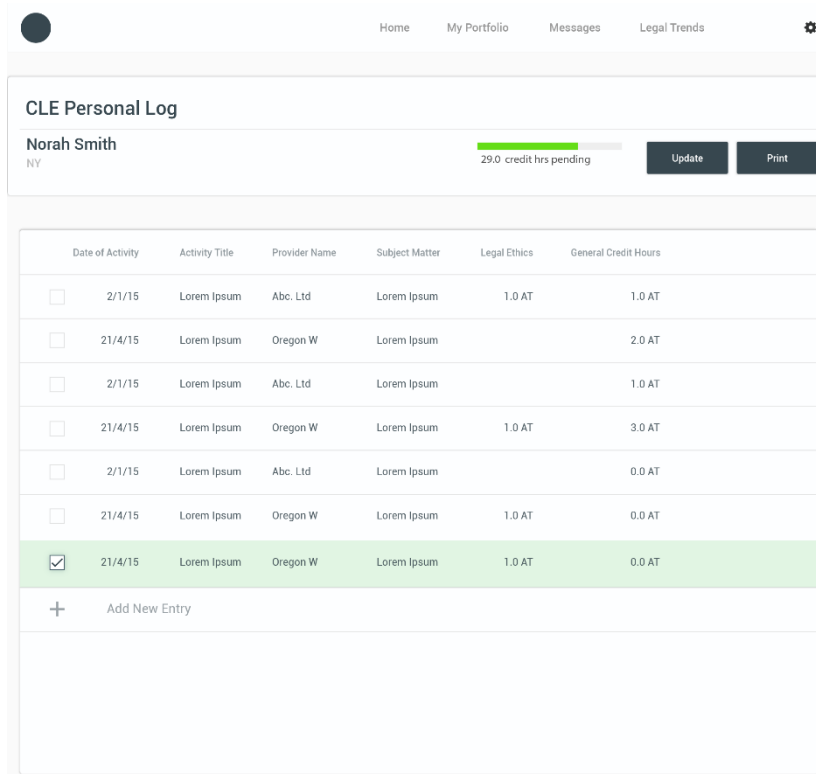
Fig. 6. Log of CLE hours in Gaggle on the Gavel

Additional sections of Gaggle on the Gavel - including functionality to manage cases and track charges, a place to save resources such as interesting articles and cases, calendars and job opportunities, and some sample data visualizations - were memorialized using a series of initial wireframes for later revision and refinement.

4   Discussion

The development of the external-looking features of Gaggle on the Gavel has been completed. Another facet of the project that is still under development is one that addresses the concept of a dashboard for capturing a lawyer's productivity, at least in the aggregate. As law firms move away from the billable hour to more of a project-based system as a measure of employee work and the basis for how the client will be charged, it is essential for lawyers to begin to discern how their time is being spent. Among the activities that might be captured on a dashboard are CLE hours, pro bono hours, client hours (including court time, travel time and meetings with clients), appointments, meetings that are internal to the law firm (such as partner and management committees), bar association activities and law firm marketing. Even a simple circle or bar chart that shows the relative time spent on each type of activity would be useful.

This would be for the lawyer's own use and quite apart from the information gathered and presented by the law firm and used for annual reviews and salary decisions. Like LinkedIn, Gaggle on the Gavel is intended to be something that a lawyer chooses to participate in as an individual professional, rather than a system that is supplied or required by the law firm.

5   Further Work

One of the issues we have grappled with is whether to have a convenient dashboard as part of our interactive community, so that the lawyer can tell, at a glance, the time he or she is devoting to client matters, CLE seminars, pro bono service and law firm marketing activities. On the one hand, we hesitate to duplicate what is already being provided by internal law firm management software. On the other hand, our dashboard was conceived as a simple summary of a lawyer's time, rather than as a detailed designation of each case and event. Another aspect of including a dashboard is how to design a seamless carry-over of time and calendar information from a law firm's internal management software system to Gaggle on the Gavel. This would be problematic for a number of reasons, including the need to provide some sort of software or app for a number of different law firm management systems as well as any security and/or privacy considerations for allowing this type of transmission, being mindful of various rules of professional conduct. We do not want to increase the risk that confidential information about clients or on the law firm's internal operations is inadvertently shared when a lawyer accesses Gaggle on the Gavel. Moreover, the overarching philosophy of Gaggle on the Gavel was that it would be externally focused, and yet this is a tool that is more internal in nature.

Another feature of Gaggle on the Gavel to be developed is data visualizations, which was highlighted as something that focus group members would be interested in having for law firm marketing and long-range planning. This feature also is something that the literature indicates is needed by the legal profession.

References

1. Li, V.: Contracts 2.0: Technology Rewires the Drafting and Reviewing of Contracts. A.B.A. J. 100(11), 30-31 (2014)
2. Li, V.: They're No Hacks: Technology Takes Center Stage as a Tool to Improve Access to Justice. A.B.A. J. 100(10), 66-67 (2014)
3. Talwar, R.: All Eyes Are on the Technology Horizon. Peer to Peer 30(2), 44-48 (2014)
4. Clio: Practice Management Simplified. Res Gestae 58(6), 26 (2015)
5. Avvo, Find a Lawyer, http://www.avvo.com/find-a-lawyer
6. ZeekBeek: https://www.zeekbeek.com/
7. RocketLawyer: https://www.rocketlawyer.com/
8. Ambrogi, R.J.: Welcoming In: Three New Products Help With Client Intake. A.B.A. J. 101(8), 31 (2015)
9. Earl, E.: Beat the Computer: Law Profs Develop an Analytical Tool to Help Better Understand Court Decisions. A.B.A. J. 100(12), 12 (2014)

10. Krause, J: Anti-Corruption Tech: A Harvard Hackathon Brings Practicality to Political Causes. A.B.A. J. 101(9), 33 (2015)
11. Laird, L.: Parole, Prison and Compiling Data. A.B.A. J. 101(9), 36 (2015)
12. Tashea, J.: Cleaning Records by the Thousands. A.B.A. J. 101(9), 39 (2015)
13. Li, V.: True to Transparency. A.B.A. J. 101(9), 40 (2015)
14. Council, J.: Startups Take Cloud-Based Tech Savvy to Legal Realm. The Indiana Lawyer 26, 4 (May 20-June 2, 2015)
15. Henderson, W.: What the Jobs Are: New Tech, New Client Needs Create a New Field of Legal Operations. A.B.A. J. 101(10), 36-43 (2015)
16. Hermann, R.L.: 10 Hottest Alternative Legal Careers. The National Jurist 25(3), 12-13 (2016)
17. Odendahl, M.: Returning Lawyers to Their Role as Counselors. The Indiana Lawyer 25, 4, 9 (Feb. 11-24, 2015)
18. Hearsay: Up, Up, Up. A.B.A. J. 101(6), 13 (2015)
19. King, V.: Data Visualization for Legal: Why You Need It and How to Start. ITLA White Paper. Austin, TX: International Legal Technology Association, Oct. 2014, pp. 10-16.
20. Ashtor, J.: The Future of Patent Analysis at Skadden. Peer to Peer 31(2), 36-38 (2015)
21. Minick, T.: Data Analytics for Profitable Business Development. Peer to Peer 31(2), 56-58 (2015)
22. ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct, 2013, http://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/model_rules_of_professional_conduct_table_of_contents.html
23. Indiana Rules of Court, Rules of Professional Conduct, Including Amendments made through April 30, 2015, http://www.in.gov/judiciary/rules/prof_conduct/
24. Stafford, D.: Lawyer disciplined over third-party site. The Indiana Lawyer, May 7, 2014, http://www.theindianalawyer.com/article/print?articleId=34087
25. Odendahl, M.: Unpopular Reporting Rule May Spur Volunteerism. The Indiana Lawyer 26, 6 (Dec. 2-15, 2015)