

10 ways to enhance – and protect – your online brand

By Todd Smith

In today's world, you can be assured that every potential client and co-counsel, as well as opposing counsel, will search the Internet to learn as much as they can about you. You can be assured that what they find will influence their opinion of you and what they learn can either close doors or open up opportunities.

10 tips to enhance your online brand

1. Create a personal Web site. You can control what people find when searching your name or you can leave it up to the search engines. If you don't currently have *your own* Web site, then I would suggest creating a simple one. If you don't have your own law firm, that's even more reason to have your own Web page, one where you can control the content. Pay attention to Search Engine Optimization to be certain the search engines find and regularly visit your site.

2. Join Facebook. It offers more opportunities for networking and building relationships than any other social networking site. To promote your practice you can also create a Fan Page in addition to your individual profile.

3. Create a LinkedIn profile. If you are a professional and you don't have an account with LinkedIn, you will certainly run the risk of appearing to be out of touch. Visit www.linkedin.com.

4. Consider Twitter. Consider getting an account with Twitter. You might want to Tweet interesting aspects of cases you are working on. Prospective clients with similar legal issues will find it interesting and may contact you.

5. Get an avatar. Your avatar is a photo of you that follows you from site to site, appearing beside your name when you do things like comment or post on a blog. See an example of comments posted to my blog at www.littlethingsmatter.com.

6. Complete your profiles. When you set up an account with any social networking site, take the extra time to complete your profile. Having an incomplete profile will likely make a negative impression. Even worse, you are missing an opportunity to market yourself.

7. Select good photos. Every photo you post on a Web site, including your Facebook profile picture, is how the world will see you. Many Web sites are using the Facebook login and will automatically pull your Facebook profile picture to identify you. Unless you want to be seen as a lawyer who "parties" all the time, get rid of all the photos that present you in that fashion.

8. Think before you write. Be conscious of the words you use when you post or make a comment on Web sites, blogs or forums. And since every item of information on the Internet is archived or cached, any item you post has the potential to be seen by others.

9. Groups and fan pages. The groups you join or become a fan of on social media sites tell the world what is important to you. Even if I am not connected with someone on Facebook, I still have the ability to see which groups he or she follows.

10. Google yourself. As you create your personal brand on a variety of sites, networks and other platforms, your name will begin to pop up on search engines and social networks. Google yourself and determine if the chatter is positive or negative. Consider setting up a Google alert for your name that can help you monitor your brand.

In summary, if you are going to have a presence on any Web site, make sure it is consistent with how you want the world to view you. Demonstrate pride in who you are and how you are portrayed.

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