

Published – June 27th 2024

Mastering the digital first impression: Six essential strategies for attorneys

By George Brandon

Greetings, and welcome back to another monthly edition of *"The Source."* In our ongoing journey through the intricacies of attorney business development, we've explored various elements that contribute to a thriving law practice. This is the eleventh column in the series. We started crafting your legal identity in August 2023 and last month, we discussed the essential strategies for law firms to enhance growth and success. This month, we are talking about how you can make the most of your digital impression.

In today's digital age, the importance of making a strong first impression online cannot be overstated. Many attorneys have perfected their in-person presentation—thoughtful attire, speech, and a well-crafted brand. However, fewer apply the same care to their online image, a significant oversight given the current landscape where potential clients often first meet you online. Here are six crucial strategies to ensure your online presence leaves a lasting, positive impression.

1. Crafting an effective attorney bio

Your biography is a fundamental element of your online presence. It must be concise, engaging, and reflective of your professional persona.

Key tips:

Brevity is key: Keep your bio short and focused. Highlight no more than five key points you want potential clients to know. Think about which SEO (Search Engine Optimization) words to use to help people find you in online searches. I recently read an attorney's bio listing twenty-three areas of practice that gave the impression of being a Jack of all trades and a master of none.

Add personal touches: Briefly mention personal interests or community involvement to humanize your profile. Example: "Outside of the office, I lead my son's Boy Scout troop and volunteer at the local animal shelter. These activities keep me grounded and connected to my community."

Tailor your tone: Match the tone of your bio to your practice area and ideal client. A family lawyer's bio should differ from that of a criminal defense attorney. Example: "As a compassionate family law attorney, I focus on creating supportive and effective solutions for families in transition. My approach is empathetic yet assertive, ensuring that clients feel heard and represented."

Common pitfalls to avoid: Don't overload with details: Avoid listing every accomplishment; focus on what's relevant. Example: Instead of listing every professional affiliation, highlight a few key memberships that reinforce your expertise.

Customize for platforms: Tailor your bio for different platforms to maintain interest and engagement. Example: A LinkedIn bio may include more professional accomplishments, while a website bio might be more client-focused and personable.

2. Getting the most out of your headshot

A professional headshot can significantly enhance your online profile and offer potential clients a visual connection. Use a photograph taken recently that people can use to recognize you. I recommend you take time to select a photograph and update it on a regular basis.

Best practices:

Simplicity and professionalism: Opt for a neutral style that can be used across various platforms. Example: A plain background, professional attire, and natural lighting work well.

Appropriate expressions: Smile slightly to appear approachable and trustworthy. Example: A slight, genuine smile can make you look friendly and confident.

Avoid overly casual photos: Ensure your attire is professional, even in candid shots. Example: Business casual
ah Headshot isn't in your budget:

Candid headshots can work: Follow best practices such as simple clothing and minimal accessories. Example: Have a friend take your photo with a clean background and good lighting.

Avoid selfies and group crops: These can look unprofessional. Aim for a clean, solo shot. Example: A clear, well-composed photo taken by another person is preferable to a selfie.

3. Maintaining a professional social media presence

Social media is a powerful tool for attorneys, yet many underutilize it. It's essential to build a professional, authentic presence.

Strategy:

Focus on LinkedIn: Build professional connections. Format your profile to make the most of the new algorithm LinkedIn introduced last July and their points system. For details of how to make the most of LinkedIn, refer to my The Source article published in the Daily Journal on Dec. 29, 2023. Example: Regularly share updates about legal developments, blog posts, or firm news.

Show your personality: Engage authentically but avoid divisive topics and overly casual language. Example: Share community involvement or personal milestones but maintain a professional tone.

Consistent posting: Develop a posting schedule and stick to it, reevaluating your strategy regularly. Example: Post original content on LinkedIn once a week and share relevant articles.

Additional tips:

Engage with your audience: Respond to comments and messages promptly and professionally.

Share valuable content: Post articles, legal insights, and tips that provide value to your audience.

Monitor your presence: Regularly review your social media profiles to ensure they remain professional and up-to-date.

4. Keeping it real on webcam

With virtual meetings becoming commonplace, it's crucial to present yourself effectively on camera.

Preparation Tips:

Set the scene: Position the camera at eye level, ensure good lighting, and choose non-distracting attire.

Example: A clean, professional background with even lighting.

Plan your meeting: Having an agenda will help maintain flow and focus. Example: Outline key points and questions beforehand to keep the meeting on track.

Practice: Conduct dry runs to build confidence and iron out technical issues. Example: Practice with a friend or record yourself to identify and correct any habits.

Troubleshoot in advance: Check your internet connection and ensure all technology is working smoothly.

Additional tips:

Minimize distractions: Ensure your environment is quiet and free from interruptions.

Dress professionally: Wear attire appropriate for a business meeting, even if it's virtual.

Stay engaged: Make eye contact with the camera and actively listen to the other participants.

5. Promoting your accolades properly

Highlighting your achievements can bolster your credibility, but it must be done tastefully.

Guidelines:

Contextualize awards: Provide brief explanations of lesser-known accolades. Example: "Recipient of the John R. Smith Moot Court Award recognizing excellence in appellate advocacy."

Highlight wins: Mention significant case outcomes without delving into specifics. Example: "Successfully negotiated a multi-million-dollar settlement for a corporate client."

Leverage recognition: Use badges or logos from awarding organizations to enhance visibility.

Strive for maximum leverage:

Use official logos: Many organizations provide badges or logos you can use on your website. Example: Display a "Super Lawyer " badge from a recognized legal organization.

Tag organizations on social media: Engage with awarding bodies to extend the reach of your recognition.
Example: Share your accolade on LinkedIn and tag the awarding organization.

Additional tips:

Be humble: Present your achievements in a way that highlights your dedication without appearing boastful.

Incorporate testimonials: Include client testimonials that mention your accolades and professionalism.

6. Nurturing a robust body of client reviews

Client reviews are pivotal in influencing potential clients. Actively seek and manage these reviews to strengthen your reputation.

Effective techniques:

Request reviews: Make it routine to ask clients for reviews upon concluding a matter. Example: Send a follow-up email thanking them for their business and requesting a review.

Respond to reviews: Engage with reviews professionally, enhancing your brand with thoughtful responses. Example: "Thank you for your feedback. We're glad to hear you had a positive experience."

Utilize software: Consider automated solutions to manage review requests if doing it manually feels burdensome.

Additional tips:

Make it easy: Provide clients with direct links to review sites to simplify the process.

Incentivize feedback: Offer small incentives, like a discount on future services, to encourage clients to leave reviews.

Highlight positive reviews: Showcase glowing reviews on your website and social media profiles.

Conclusion

If there's a common theme to the pointers we've shared with you so far, it's that a little investment of time and thought goes a long way. As an attorney, you have a heavy workload that often takes you away from the small tasks essential to growing your practice. Don't feel you have to follow every single tip presented here. Instead, either choose three or four that really resonated with you and focus on those. If you find you have capacity and can take on one or two more, great. If you realize you've bitten off more than you can chew, it's okay to set one aside. Alternatively, use the services of a business development consultant like me to work through this with you. Compare their hourly rate with yours because it may make sense to pay them and focus on your legal work.

By taking these steps, you can create a compelling and professional online presence that will make a positive first impression on potential clients and set you apart from the competition.

George Brandon is the president of LegalXcellence.com. He welcomes questions and ideas for future business development columns at george@legalxcellence.com