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LEGAL MARKETING

Are You Kidding Me? Fix Glaring Public Problems With Your Personal Brand Now!

BY STACY WEST CLARK

Special to the Legal

Hi folks—I started this article with the headline of “Are you kidding me?” because I have noticed that many of you are forgetting to monitor things that are out there about you that can negatively affect your public practice image. I am seeing these things, both on and off the internet—so of course, others are too—and guess what—they can all be easily fixed. It is incumbent on you to make sure everything that you can control about your personal brand is done. You must be proactive and act.

Here is my top-10 list of things about you to stay on top of regularly.

Googling Yourself: When you Google yourself, what comes up? If your bio does not come up first, or at least in the first five entries of page-one search results, you have a problem. If your bio appears in the top slots, it gives silent affirmation to searchers that you are in the game.

This problem can be erased by working with an SEO professional or your firm’s IT tech who understands how Google works. Fix this. What else shows up on the next two to three pages of results?—if the answer is nothing, “we have a problem Houston.”



STACY WEST CLARK
has been successfully helping Delaware Valley lawyers and law firms substantially grow revenues for over 25 years. She has been recognized as one of the top legal marketing consultants in the region. A former attorney with Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, she was the firm’s first global director of client relations in the 1980s and 1990s. Contact her at www.stacyclarkmarketing.com.

If this answer is not enough to show that I am the lead lawyer for these kinds of matters—get to work.

Your LinkedIn Profile: Have you updated and reviewed it this calendar year? Did you know that your LinkedIn bio is usually the second most popular way for searchers to “check you out” so ensure your profile is up-to-date, and has fresh 2023 content, recommendations and endorsements on it. Fix this.

Your Google Numerical Rating: Check to see when you Google yourself, what your numerical rating is and if it is anything lower than a “5” on Google Business and other rating databases that show up on pages one or two of search results, fix it. A less than perfect “grade” leaves a question mark, at least in my head and I am sure others, as to why you only got a “4

out of 5” star rating. Start to by asking happy clients to review you to improve your score.

Your Bio: It is the most read page about you likely on the internet. Check your bio for “datedness” and passivity. I read hundreds of attorney bios and one thing that always gets my attention is the lack of anything described or listed from the current year! Lawyers list accomplishments (awards, publications, speeches) from 10 to 15 years ago rather than going out and doing something today in 2023. My reaction to a lawyer’s bio with fresh, current content is much better than to one whose accomplishments and activities really stopped at a certain point in their career, say many years ago. In fact, “older stuff” begs the question “are you still in the game?” You do not want to leave that impression with anyone. Fix this.

Your Bio No. 2. Is your headshot photo dated? Does it have a dark background? Such backgrounds can bring someone’s impression of you down. They are depressing—compared to looking at a headshot where the background is bright and light. Bright backgrounds are uplifting and subtly convey you are with it—a cutting-edge professional. Check out the beautiful headshots of lawyers at California’s

Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati and New York's Carter Ledyard & Milburn's. They are great examples of what you should compare your headshot to—and then see what you think.

Your Bio No. 3. Make sure your bio spells out that you have successfully solved the exact problems you want more work/clients in—so use the right client buzz words, specific industry terms and more to make sure that a prospective client gets a clear picture that you are “the lawyer” for this exact matter.

Keep Ethics Rules Front and Center: If you see you are endorsed on LinkedIn or if there is something on a rating site that is inaccurate, false or misleading about your practice, under Rule 7.1 of the Pennsylvania Professional Rules of Conduct, you have an affirmative duty to correct it. For example, if you practice family law 100% of the time but a rating service or your LinkedIn profile has an endorsement for your criminal defense skills—you must try to get it down.

Your Handshake. This is one of the critical elements of a first impression of you. If your handshake is weak, loose, wet and fishlike, you are silently conveying a very negative first impression of yourself. If your handshake is firm and gripping it gives out the message that you are confident and actually want to shake my hand. Take the handshake test with me.

There Is Nothing About You on the Internet or, if Your Bio Appears, It Is Skeletal. Is this what you want to convey about your practice? What are your competitors doing? Is there something you can affirmatively do to change that public perception of your practice. For sure there is.

Make Sure Your Appearance Is Uber Professional. I have written and

preached on this subject many times and it still bears repeating because of its importance. As Miuccia Prada said “What you wear is how you present yourself to the world, especially today, when human contacts are so quick. Fashion is instant language.” First impressions of you are created in one to three seconds. A negative one takes literally a lifetime to undue. People form an immediate read on you by what you are wearing and how put-together you look. It is a silent size-up of you that happens every day whether you like it or not.

I am seeing these things, both on and off the internet—so of course, others are too—and guess what—they can all be easily fixed. It is incumbent on you to make sure everything that you can control about your personal brand is done.

The New York Times ran a story on May 11 about how Trump's now-winning sexual assault and defamation accuser, E. Jean Carroll, looked every day in court and how her appearance was central to her credibility with the jury. Her clothes were tailored, simple, neat and professional and also neutral in color. Her words had to be the main attraction, not a piece of jewelry she was wearing. In fact, it was central to her winning the case. Said the New York Times, “(her appearance) was so effective that people began to wonder

if someone was stage-managing her style. Well, her lawyers, duh. It has long been understood that appearance is part of any courtroom drama.”

It is the same in your everyday life. It matters. So, dress up. Avoid business casual unless it is top-shelf casual—blue blazers work instead of formal business suits for example. And yes, always wear nice shoes. Shoes, like handshakes, convey a lot about you—and people do look at them and size you up.

The moral of the story is threefold:

- There are very public mistakes, omissions and things being said about you that may negatively color your public image—whether you like it or not.
 - You (or someone on your staff) must be proactively checking each of these areas at least every 6 months.
 - See something, DO something. Your public brand or persona—what you convey about your practice in just a few seconds-- is largely in your control. Be active in checking yourself out and making sure you present the best picture of your practice.
- Get going. You can do this. If you want help, let me know. Take charge. Be the lawyer publicly that the kinds of clients you want—want to hire. •