

Attorneys Take Note: Yesterday's Reputation is Today's Personal Brand

The word "brand" isn't new to you. Brand names were there in your childhood, and you knew them. Barbie. Band-Aids. Kellogg's Frosted Flakes.

Then, branding got bigger. There was the *brand image* versus the *brand experience*. There was attitude branding and brand management and the relatively recent "no brand" strategy.

Attorneys are ignoring the opportunity to build their personal brand.

Lawyers and law firms need to start thinking about branding. Because in today's marketplace, you need to be conscious of your brand or lack of it. And, there's just not that much good attorney brand building out there right now.

If it helps you any ... maybe you could just remember that old, archaic term from back in the day: do you really know your reputation out there?

Don't think because you've ignored your brand that you don't have one.

Today, what with the speed of telecommunications and the advent of social media, what your business (and you, individual lawyer as well as incorporated law firm) has, like it or not, is a BRAND out there in the marketplace.

There's a public perception if you're big firm or solo. If you're plaintiff's PI or exclusively tax law. If you're male or female, AV rated or you got no rating at all.

Sure, it sounds a lot like a reputation of old. Here's where it gets different. You can build a personal brand via the internet in ways that you could never build a reputation in the olden days.

If you aren't on the net at all, or if you've got a 5 year old website that has never been updated, you're communicating something. Your fellow attorneys may understand and appreciate your position. To the client, however, you may look dated, behind-the-times, or just plain cheap.

Building Your Personal Brand Isn't As Hard As It Appears. It's Actually Cheap and Easy - if You're Smart

Strategically place yourself on Facebook and LinkedIn, start a blog, begin tweeting on Twitter, and you've got the ball rolling. You're filling in lots of personal information about yourself, for potential clients and referring attorneys to use in assessing whether or not to hire you, and you're in total control of what they see and when they see it.

Want to appear as an expert in your area of law? Start a blog. Post regularly. Sound authoritative. Give lots of info. Link to other sites that are scholarly and helpful. Start comment-communications with bloggers who are similarly situated - like professors, for example. Email the agency reps who handle the government websites. Provide good information, stuff that is quality and builds a conversation and camaraderie.

You know, NETWORK.

Want to build personal relationships with your clients? Start Tweeting. Tweets let you provide more personal, informal, friendship-building information than other web vehicles. Check out Martha Stewart. Check out William Shatner. These are two masters of this type of communication. (And let's not forget Pres. Obama whose tweets were very, very helpful during the election.)

For a divorce attorney, or personal injury lawyer, tweeting can build a rapport with clients that is easy and fast -- and without much investment of time and NO money. (Twitter is a free service.)

What all does this mean?

By creating profiles on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and the like, you are building an image of yourself that distinguishes you from the pack. You are revealing yourself to those who may need your services. People tend to connect, and to contract, with those whom they feel a connection.

It's all about finding something upon which to build trust.

Be honest, be forthright, and be brave. Put yourself out there. Get your personal brand out there and build what your grandpa might call your "online reputation."

It's not that hard.

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