Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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Webinar Re-cap: LinkedIn for Lawyers with Nathan Egan Part II

On Wednesday, December 8h, the ILN offered a webinar with Freesource's Nathan Egan on "LinkedIn for Lawyers." Because of all the great information in the webinar, I'm breaking this up into a couple of posts, with Part I being published yesterday.

Now let's jump right into Part II

Your External Profile - A Brand Beacon

Nathan then took the audience through an individual LinkedIn profile, saying that it can be a beacon for your brand. He said that in social media, we talk a lot about "inbound marketing" - creating the context for people to come to you - and the profile is really where it all starts in terms of positioning.

Most firms have put lots of money into their corporate websites, which are the umbrella marketing portal for the firm. Nathan said that they're looking to help people understand that the LinkedIn profile, the social assets of the firm (which are the people), are now sub-domains of the corporate website.

They have the potential to drive search engine optimization activity back to the corporate website. Nathan said that by hard linking and key wording the profile in a meaningful way, with the keywords that the firm would want to be found for, they create a tremendous lift in their marketing efforts very naturally and passively.

Nathan said that the idea is to make LinkedIn work for the attorneys in a way that doesn't take a lot of time. It does involve some upfront work to get it going, but he said the investment is well worth it. Once the profile is up, running and polished, it becomes a passive part of your professional world.

So when you're in a meeting, working with clients, or even sleeping, your online profile is working on your behalf, developing clients for you, giving people context, giving them information about your background and core areas of expertise. This is a powerful way to position yourself as a thought leader and share the context, the relationships, the experiences that you have in a dynamic way which boosts your ability to meet the business objectives of the firm.

The Basics

Nathan took the audience on a tour of his LinkedIn profile. He started by suggesting that they keep their names clean, saying that it helps people to find you if you haven't cluttered your name with email addresses and certifications.

He also emphasized the importance of having a professional headshot - this is a first impression opportunity, so if you're going to have picture online, it should be something professional that helps you shine. Nathan cautioned against having a black and white employee photo from five years ago, which he said is not a good first impression.

Nathan said there are customizable options in LinkedIn, so that users can control who sees their picture, who has access to their information, so if anyone in the audience doesn't want people to see their information or connections, there is a way to control that. He said he would go through that in detail later.

Professional Headlines

Nathan next touched on the idea of professional headlines, found just below a person's name in their profile. He said these are sometimes automatically generated from a person's job title, but suggested editing them to include more information.

By using professional headlines well, it's a nano-elevator pitch that gives you the opportunity to let people know what you're up to. He illustrated why someone would want to do this by searching through his list of contacts. He showed a short list of contacts, one of whom had just her title as her professional headline - "Director of Product Development." Nathan said he would want to know where, but might be too busy to dig around.

But someone else had her title and the company that she worked for, which is interesting to him from a business development perspective, because she's a former client from a different company. Nathan said that the opportunity for lawyers is to help their clients solve a problem, in terms of letting them know their expertise, who they work for, and how they can help. He recommended that the audience members craft their professional headlines in a way that creates impact and lets people know what they're up to.

Nathan said that the professional headline is an opportunity to say "I'm a senior lawyer with these types of credentials servicing this type of litigation practice." He said that the audience should think creatively about how they can work with their professional headline to make an impact and help people understand how they can help them.

Status Updates

Just below the professional headline and person's location, Nathan pointed out the status update, which he said is a marketing opportunity. If you write articles and develop content for the firm, you can share that with a highly targeted network.

He revisited his earlier point that the audience should only be connecting with people that they know, saying that this creates a highly targeted audience. If you win a new case and have some good content to share about it, the status update is a great marketing opportunity - it goes out to your network and people can "like" it, which will share it with their networks.

He used a recent new client announcement for Freesource as an example, saying that this win for them has now gone viral, with four people in their network sharing it with their networks. Nathan added that this starts to give a very soft marketing impact as content starts to spread through the LinkedIn network.

He said that this becomes permanent inside the architecture of data, and six, ten, even 24 months later, it can help to win clients. People will look at his profile, see that their company is doing business with the Rittenhouse Hotel, and maybe they run another five diamond property in Pittsburgh and it makes sense to send them an inbound request. It's a great opportunity to share successes.

Profile Information

Nathan said that they get a lot of questions about how much information should be included in a profile. He said he couldn't answer that, but they help their clients understand the answer by having them ask themselves "Will this create value for my network? For my network's network?"

He said that if you've worked in four major firms over the last twenty years, you would want to have that experience included in your profile, because it gives a potential client confidence that you know what you're doing and you've been around - so it's not a risky proposition to potentially work with your organization.

Nathan said that in many cases, the more information you have, the better. The goal here is to tell your story. He said that it shouldn't necessarily be a resume, adding that many times, clients aren't interested in that. They want to know how you can help them, what you are passionate about, what you're good at, and what your core areas of expertise are.

Recommendations

Nathan showed the next area of the profile - recommendations - which he said is a tremendous opportunity for the attorneys in the audience if it's ethically appropriate to get recommendations from previous clients. He said they become like status updates, in that they go out to your network, but they also live on the profile and become a way for people to self-select and decide if you're the right legal services firm to help with their very unique situation.

Nathan said that recommendations can be a very powerful business driver, but they can also be kind of lame - he cautioned against having the people who report to you directly or your peers writing recommendations, which are a sort of digital brown-nosing. But when clients write recommendations, that can really make a difference.

He used the example of the largest account he sold while at LinkedIn selling their recruiting products. It was a result of an inbound lead that was based on a recommendation that the Vice President of Sunrise Senior Living had written for him. She was connected to the Vice President of Human Resources at BAE Systems, who saw the update in their news feed and called Nathan two days later. They said that if this woman was willing to write a recommendation for him, he must be really good. And he sold the account two months later.

Nathan commented that from a business development perspective, you could call BAE Systems all day long; but it's a lot better when they call you. He said that's the type of trigger that you can set off if you position your profile and put that context and rich experience out there in a tangible way for people to touch and feel.

Websites

Nathan then showed the section of the profile where you can list your websites, saying that this is a tremendous opportunity from an SEO perspective. He said that hard linking to the corporate website, to specialty group or practice group websites, or to a corporate blog is a great opportunity. And if the firm has fifty lawyers, and they hard link them all with the same websites and keywords, they'll get natural optimization in the search engines that they really can't buy.

Nathan said there's a new, emerging field of social SEO, which is reliant on user-generated validation of a service or product, and whether it's really very good. He said that big firms can buy, through Google auctions, keywords around certain litigations or practice areas. But this is an opportunity for smaller firms in a natural, passive and relatively ethical way to do it in the right manner to promote services and beat out the Google auction-based keyword bidding that can suck up a marketing budget.

Nathan also showed that he includes his Twitter handle in his profile, and said that he doesn't necessarily recommend this. He suggested that the audience create things that work for them, not just what they see someone else doing, and said that Freesource's training is always centered around the goals of the client.

Applications

Scrolling down a little more, Nathan showed the Slide Share application on his profile, which has a presentation from his company. He said that if he were a practicing lawyer, he might have the JD Supra and/or Lawyer Ratings Applications here. He said if he had just written an article about something, this would be shared through the JD Supra application (again, as long as you are a client of theirs), and would be presented right on the profile.

Nathan again emphasized that your profile should be looking to solve the problem of a potential client in terms of what you can do. He said that Freesource doesn't have the same brand recognition as some of the larger marketing firms, like Ogilvy or Razorfish, but the Slide Share application gives them the opportunity to share their story.

He cautioned against putting up content that's already been created, saying that his clients will often want to put up their corporate slide deck on their profile. However, it's not a great way to market using this tool, because it often needs a voiceover.

But if you take a methodological approached, using large-type words and symbols that resonate with people and drive them to advance the slides, you create a powerful opportunity to market yourself and your services.

Nathan said that there's a tremendously diverse number of ways that firms with different business objectives can be using applications like this to distribute content, invite people to webinars, tap into alumni networks, and really drive these marketing efforts through free technologies.

Summaries

Nathan scrolled down again to show the summary section of his profile. He said people often wonder what they should include in the summary field, and he said it's a personal mission statement opportunity that can be used in many ways. He said that he's had three jobs since he created his LinkedIn profile, and each of the summaries was different, because it depended on his business objectives.

In his current summary, they're promoting the types of clients that they've worked with, as well as his personal mission statement that he loves new technologies and helping people. He said it's consistent both with his real world business objectives and how he behaves in the business world.

Nathan also encouraged the audience to make it easy to contact them by including contact information in the summary section. He said that LinkedIn makes it difficult to contact people within the platform, so by putting contact information in the summary, the right people can see this. He added that they can control this and not include it if they don't want to open themselves up to being contacted.

Skills & Specialties

Nathan scrolled down to show the Skills and Specialties sections of the profile. He said that the Skills section is a relatively new feature on LinkedIn that is different to the specialty section. If a lawyer has specific practice areas that they're an expert at, these should be included under specialties.

Under skills, there's an opportunity to list your core competencies and accredit them. Nathan said that there's a drop-down box with beginner, intermediate, and expert, and then you can include your years of experience. He said that if you have a law firm with ten professionals, and they all have thirty years of experience in a certain area, if you weight the value of their years of experience here, that will augment search engine efforts.

He used the example of looking for an expert in the Philadelphia area, and typing in Financial Services for a certain type of practice - the lawyers with the most accreditation will start to pop up in the natural search results in Google. Nathan said it's another great way to showcase your expertise and the ways that you can help people.

He summarized his walkthrough of the profile saying that it should be designed in a way to help you tell your story, connect with people, and see your evolution. He suggested asking yourself, should I include this in here? Will it create value for the people I'm looking to connect to and create relationships with?

Tune in to Part III next week, where we'll talk more about groups and account settings!

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