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Effective personal branding for lawyers important to success

Recent economic challenges have been instrumental in driving fundamental change in all aspects of business. Competition is ubiquitously fierce and the once clear lines between the sale of products and professional services are now blurry at best. It is essential for us to effectively differentiate ourselves to ensure that we remain relevant in our careers. It is in this context that personal branding has emerged as a key ingredient for success.

While often defined as the way we sell or market ourselves, personal branding is much more. It is the amalgam of qualities, characteristics and traits that are the essence of who we are, both professionally and personally. As we build our brand, we must be keenly self-aware during the process.

We should strive to present ourselves in the best light and ensure that we are who we claim to be and that there is alignment. We need to conduct ourselves in a way that both reflects and reinforces the essence of who we are. If there is dissonance, we will lack authenticity.

We are all unique. Being human is what drives our experiences and the impressions we make on others. Personal brands are as multi-dimensional as we are and are shaped by a number of factors, including our education and profession, oral and written communications, personal and professional networks, charitable and community work, hobbies, goals and ambitions. As each of us grows, our personal brand should likewise evolve.

Once we have clarity about the traits which best define us, we should then focus on effectively leveraging them to accomplish our goals. Being a great lawyer is simply not enough to meaningfully differentiate ourselves in the market.

We must also draw from our

additional skills and talents that distinguish us from our competition. This could be a unique capability, talent or perspective which is of great interest or value to clients. Each of our personal and professional experiences likewise contribute to our development, whether they are successes or setbacks. We should embrace them all as opportunities to better ourselves and determine how best to incorporate them into our personal brand.

Once we create this individualized framework of personal differentiators, we then need to assess who the most receptive audiences will be. This is where the sales element of the personal brand is most critical, as we are defining who we are in the context of our target market and why we are a service provider that others need to know.

This can be a difficult task, especially when it is unclear what our potential clients want and need to buy. It is our job to research, strategize and ask questions so as to better tailor the messaging to our audience. We must be discerning, both in whom we approach and what we are selling.

We cannot be everything to everyone — it is unrealistic and unexpected. Clients are sophisticated and savvy, and if we try to overreach and oversell, they will sense it and we will lose credibility with them.

After we develop both the content and target audience for our personal brand, we then need to determine how best to share this information with others. Opportunities rarely land at our doorsteps — it is our responsibility to seek them out and to identify them even when they may not yet be ripe. We must educate others about our capabilities so that they think of us first as their legal matters arise. This requires a certain level of awareness



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among our target audience about who we are.

There are countless ways to educate others about ourselves and our personal brand.

Our workplace is a good place to start. We should also get the word out among friends, acquaintances and our various networks. Taking advantage of speaking and writing opportunities is often a great way to inform others about our substantive expertise on a bigger scale.

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Leadership positions both within and outside our organizations are another avenue to learn and grow and to meet others. Community service can be an effective way to make a positive difference and to develop our personal brand, particularly when done alongside like-minded individuals with whom we can create professional and personal alliances.

Social media provides an effective mechanism to promote our personal brand on a broader scale, particularly among those whom we do not know. These tools have become increasingly popular over the past several years and certain platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter are now ubiquitous.

We must be strategic about which platforms we use and in determining which are most appropriate for what we want to accomplish. We should use care with the networks we create through each medium, including those with whom we connect and in what we choose to share.

In an era of viral communication, we must remember that information contained in posts and blogs can potentially be accessed by millions of people and, once released, is out there forever. Moreover, lawyers, in particular, should be sensitized to the potential ethical issues which may arise through the use of social media.

These issues notwithstanding, the use of social media is an easy way to step outside of our comfort zones and to get the word out among our virtual networks about who we are.

Both our professional and personal success is dependent upon effectively educating others about ourselves and in establishing credibility and trust with them. When developed and presented authentically, our personal brands can be powerful and invaluable in these efforts.