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ENHANCE PERSONAL BRAND EQUITY WITH NEW MEDIA

BY AFFIE AMBROSE, BRETT COFFEE AND STEVEN BELL

While the use (and potential abuse) of social media is widely discussed in in-house legal circles these days, not as much attention has been paid to the efficacy of social media as a personal branding tool for in-house counsel. This article addresses the emerging opportunity for in-house counsel to develop their professional reputations by establishing personal brands, and the new-media techniques that make it possible to quickly and efficiently enhance personal brand equity.

On the list of variables that lawyers like to control, professional reputation has always stood near the top. Some lawyers, particularly those in private practice, have gone beyond just guarding their reputations and have begun to actively promote them. This has not traditionally been the case with in-house lawyers, but with new expectations for them — the internal need to justify one's position, to demonstrate business (and legal) acumen, to compete effectively with talented in-house and private-practice lawyers in a saturated legal marketplace, and to present oneself as a savvy business asset rather than a cost-center — it may be time to reconsider your market positioning. In short, you may want to consider creating and advancing a personal brand.

The concept of branding is familiar to all Americans. As Al Ries and Jack Trout point out in their book *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*, our nation has six percent of the world's population, but we consume nearly 60 percent of the world's advertising. We are sophisticated consumers, and companies know they can't simply promulgate the features and benefits of their products — they need to capture our imaginations. As a result, branding has become not just product names, logos, taglines, designs, jingles, advertisements and so forth. Rather, branding has come to mean the promise, experience and feeling we will enjoy as a result of using a particular product or service. For example, think about your connotation of brands such as Volvo, Disney, Wal-Mart and Apple, to name just a few well-known companies with a clear and differentiated market position that engages the emotions and intellect of consumers.

A recent development in the world of branding is the emergence of personal brands. Just as companies use sophisticated tools to promote their brands, individuals have turned to the same tools to brand themselves. One needs only to reference names like "The Donald," "Oprah" or "Lil Wayne" to understand how far individual branding concepts have progressed. While each of these individuals is a rare talent, it also is clear that they have invested heavily and intentionally in promoting a personal brand that has yielded them enormous equity, and all the rewards — psychological and financial — that come with it. An individual brand is, no doubt, a reflection of an individual's reputation, style and appearance. But in each of the instances listed above, it is much more. Personal branding is the sophisti-



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cated and intentional use of communications tools to promote the promise, experience and feeling that we will derive from associating with the individual.

What does this have to do with lawyers? The expertise of commercial companies in branding has emerged over the last century and a half. Law firms have been replicating this for the last 15 years or so by aggressively pursuing institutional branding. Firms such as Orrick Herrington with its giant "O;" Morrison Foerster with its saucy MoFo nomenclature and spare website; and Womble Carlyle with its bulldog, Winston, all have pioneered institutional law-firm branding. But, as most buyers of legal services attest, people buy individual lawyers, not law firms. And so, while law firms have invested heavily in institutional branding to familiarize the broad market with name recognition, they have concurrently focused on the sub-brands that their individual lawyers represent. As John Hellerman phrased it in his March 21, 2011, *Law360* article on individual branding, "Successful brand marketers, after all, build their campaigns around the products consumers buy, not the companies that own them. Eli Lilly doesn't market Eli Lilly — it markets Cialis and Cymbalta. Kraft Foods doesn't market Kraft Foods — it markets Chips Ahoy, A1 Steak Sauce and Crystal Light."

Law firms are investing heavily in their lawyers' personal brands because this is how individual reputations engage their target audience to influence buying decisions. In a parallel sense, in-house lawyers, who as part of their daily roles actively engage in furthering the institutional brands of their employers, also need to carve out some mind-share for themselves. After all, in-house counsel's personal reputations influence their superiors, coworkers, customers, competitors, partners, and even the larger legal and business communities in which they are active. Developing and enhancing a personal brand will put the in-house lawyer in a position to better influence decision-making at all of these levels. Personal brands are reputations engaged, not stuck in a back office.

Personal branding for in-house attorneys

As in-house counsel, you are busy putting out fires on a daily basis, managing risks, litigation, contracts, corporate matters and transactions. Often, the last thing on your mind or on your calendar is marketing YOUR brand.

That was particularly true before the advent of social media tools, which make brand building quicker and more efficient — indeed, possible at all for the modern in-house practitioner.

Throughout the history of legal practice, excellent work has always been promoted as the ultimate brand-builder, but this technique represents a lifetime of effort — not particularly effective as a rapid brand-builder in the digital age. In recent decades, doing great work has been supplanted by “tried-and-true” channels like speaking, writing and commenting. A rule of thumb suggests that it takes between three to four hours of work to craft each significant article or one-hour presentation. In 2011, who has that kind of time? At most, a busy lawyer who insists on high-quality writing and speaking can accommodate only an article or two, or a speaking engagement or two, each year. While effective over time, this is a very slow and laborious way to build a personal brand.

Over the last two years, there has been a marketing revolution — social media and other new-media tools — that has facilitated the ability for individuals to brand themselves and create value in that brand through technology, making it quicker, less expensive and more pervasive.

Why would in-house counsel care about their brand? The purpose of branding is to build awareness among “followers” of the promise, experience and feeling that they will derive from associating with you. That will then bring positive attention to not only you personally, but also to your company. Potential “followers” will encounter your marketing and branding submissions and then evaluate them. If your content applies to and intrigues your followers, they will likely read your other submissions and digital output. If they continue to be intrigued by the information you are putting out, the “loyalty loop” begins. These followers will begin to advocate for you with their friends, which will further enhance your personal brand. This will ultimately lead to more subscribers, who could lead to interesting networking, a possible customer or client for your firm, and enhancement of your personal brand as someone who is knowledgeable and has access to useful information.

An easy way to test your brand is to do a Google or other search-engine search on your name and examine the results. If you strategically use certain key words, focus your comments to particular blogs or repeatedly contribute to specific topics while linking your name to your submissions at the same time, the search results will eventually tell a story. In addition, make sure that your online resume is updated so that if you’ve sat on the board of a particular organization, or received recognition or press for something you’ve done, a search on your name will show your accolades. If you have enough

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material for a website, you could buy your domain name and have links to the various submissions, but this can be time consuming and must be kept fresh. Even without one’s own website, an in-house lawyer can make sure her name is near the top of a search on her name by making meaningful yet frequent submissions on the topic of her choice as described below.

Rising to the top of the vast pile of flotsam and jetsam on the internet requires having a clear, distinct vision of your brand. Always ask yourself questions such as:

- What do I do best?
- What do I want my brand to be?
- How do I want to be perceived by clients and colleagues?
- How does my personal brand enhance my company’s brand strategy? and
- Does my brand align with my company’s brand?

These questions, and the answers you reach, should guide you to a few specific key terms or short phrases that will help make your brand distinctive. You should repeat these key terms and phrases often in blog posts and comments (on your own blog and others), in Tweets and LinkedIn entries, and in published articles.

The frequency of key terms helps boost your profile on internet search engines. Unlike blind repetition, strategically emphasizing and re-emphasizing the same core terms and points can be very helpful. A consistent, well-defined set of identifiable words is critical to building a successful brand. Remember: Google is the ultimate arbiter of brand success.

Also, don’t limit yourself to just one mode of social media. Use a cross-section of platforms to achieve maximum visibility. This can be done with relatively little effort by simply repurposing the same content. For example, a blog post can be distributed in a Tweet, which, in turn, is automatically linked to appear on your LinkedIn page. In just a few seconds, you have reached three distinct audiences with the same content.

What is your brand?

Social media provides new channels for distributing your personal brand. But these channels can only be as effective as the brand itself. So, before undertaking social media branding efforts defined in the paragraphs to come, it still is critical for any lawyer to go through the soul-searching necessary to define the brand she wishes to convey.

Again, this process starts with key questions:

- What is your current personal brand? What *you* think is relevant is not objective. More important are the opinions of those around you — fellow employees, peers and colleagues in the legal field. What do they think your brand is right now? What are you known for? What value would the business professionals in your company assign to you? How do you differentiate yourself from other inside counsel who do what you do?
- No matter what your personal brand is at the moment, what do you want to be known for?
- What have you proactively done to advance from your current positioning to your desired positioning?
- And, finally, if you have not done as much as you can to establish and advance your desired positioning, what will you do starting now?

Keep referring back to those questions and answers. It is important to identify a few key terms or phrases that define your brand, and keep repeating those terms to build your brand's search engine visibility.

Social media tools for branding

Once you determine what your personal brand is and should be, social media tools provide powerful ways to engage others. Unlike traditional brand-building techniques, which operate as one-way communications, social media are, as the name implies, two-way conversations. They allow you to dialogue with clients, colleagues and contacts in a way that is personal and powerful. The following are social media tools you should know.

LinkedIn

No strategy will be successful in a vacuum, and it's critical to have a personal and professional network that allows you to reach people who can help your company reach its goals. Without social media, your network would provide the contacts in your professional and personal life. LinkedIn allows you to create a broader social network by connecting with people you know, and capturing your friends' friends and their resources in a professional setting.

LinkedIn is like an online Rolodex, only it allows you to see when information has changed, and provides you reason to have a high-degree of trust in your connections' information, as the owners provide it. If someone changes

jobs, you should still be able to find his new contact information, job title, etc.

Because LinkedIn allows you to provide job titles and responsibilities, it also functions as a robust, public and searchable resume. You can be found, you can find others by particular skill-sets you need, and you can find out how you are connected to influencers and decision makers.

There are many more ways to use the various tools built into LinkedIn to build and promote your personal brand. Remember, these tools are designed to leverage your brand by engaging your target audience. They are designed to allow communication on professional topics not only with the people who already know and respect you, but also with the people who are likely to want to know and respect you because you already know someone in common. Therefore, you can join groups on various topics. You can answer questions or create polls to interact with your connections, and build your expertise. Further, you can build a network of experts who will help you address your concerns more effectively.

LinkedIn also allows you to build an effective network on soft information that is important to your career. You can stay on top of job moves, promotions, interests and ever-changing contact information. Many sites have a job search function, but on LinkedIn, you can see who is connected to a job and who may be able to help you get that job. You may not think of your running buddy Jim when you hear about an opening at XYZ Corp., but a quick search on LinkedIn will show you that he is connected to several executives there and is in the perfect position to recommend you. You can join groups of common interest; it's helpful to know whether you are connected to someone through ACC, Eagle Scouts or by having a common interest in triathlons. You can respond to or create polls that allow you to gather information, or respond to inquiries that build your personal brand expertise and reach. Finally, a simple, one-time step allows your Twitter posts, or Tweets, to automatically appear to your LinkedIn contacts, giving you a powerful one-two social media punch.

Similar to how older professionals cannot imagine not having a resume, most professionals under 40 cannot imagine not having a LinkedIn profile. LinkedIn recently surpassed 100 million profiles. If you're not engaged on LinkedIn, your personal brand probably isn't being found.

My People Maps is a helpful service used in conjunction with LinkedIn. This tool allows you to see a little deeper into your connections with people you would like to meet, by showing company and board connections and how to best reach out to contacts.

A Lesson in Social Media Etiquette

Social media can be daunting for the uninitiated, but it doesn't have to be terribly complicated, time-consuming or intrusive. Still, there are definitely some rules you should follow if you want to be successful and have fun. These are largely common sense, but often violated, so try to behave appropriately.

Keep in mind that you're trying to form a relationship and start a conversation. Just as you wouldn't walk up to someone at a party who you've never met and ask to be her friend, don't reach out to people without any context of how you know one another, and why you want to be connected. There are plenty of people who try to connect with others they've never (or briefly) met with nothing more than the automatic LinkedIn greeting: "Since you're a person I trust, I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn." Instead of sending this message, you will be much more effective if you give a quick reminder of how you know one another, or why you're reaching out, if you don't already know the other person.

Knowing that you'll be appropriately social, try to ensure that your medium is relevant. You naturally choose different topics for neighborhood BBQs than for professional networking events, and it's no different in social media. We are all overwhelmed with data, and forcing your contacts to sift through constant irrelevant updates isn't adding to your brand. Keep in mind which tool you are using, and make sure the message is appropriate for the audience. Your family may not care about your interpretation of the latest IRS circular, and your professional contacts may not be interested in your thoughts on who will win the Tour de France, but both messages can be appropriate in the right circumstances. Social media tools can

be a big megaphone, but use these tools to speak to a large and interested crowd, not to shout in someone's ear.

Be engaged and be honest. If you go to a social event and are a wallflower or don't engage with the others, you probably won't be making the best relationships you can, and you may not be invited back. The currency in the social media world is reach — how many people can you influence? But pay attention to the quality of your connections, too. Having a large number of followers can be impressive, but you will get a poor reputation if you follow someone, get them to follow you back (which is considered courteous) and then don't maintain the conversation. Likewise, you should start your conversation first and then add the connections: It's not terribly helpful to have a lot of followers but not be saying anything interesting.

Finally, use social media for more than simply promoting yourself and your company. These tools allow you to talk to a great number of people, but when you go to a party, you don't talk about yourself the entire time. It's far more interesting to people you are trying to connect with if you talk about things you know really well and show your expertise on matters not directly related to you. Your thoughts on the latest Supreme Court case will get you far more attention than rebroadcasting your press releases.

Social media may not exactly be a cocktail party, but sometimes it can seem that way. Just remember that, as with any party, people are watching. You never know exactly who was invited and you might hear about your behavior the next day ... so behave yourself and mind your social media etiquette. This will make you far more successful.

Facebook

Facebook was one of the first digital branding tools and has really led the social media world. However, it is still widely recognized as a personal space, so many professionals stay away from Facebook or limit it to their outside interests.

Still, companies are using Facebook to engage their customers, and it is possible that your company has (or should have) a presence on Facebook. While it's fine to have a Facebook page to keep up with your college friends, make sure you enable the security settings and limit your friends to people who are separate from your professional activities, to ensure your personal brand isn't diluted.

And then, be careful. If not carefully managed, your online presence can undermine your personal brand instead of enhancing it. It can also undermine your company's brand.

Blogs (and other writings)

Although it is one of the older technology-based social media approaches, blogging still holds quite a bit of attraction for anyone who wants to share ideas or commentary. Think of a blog as your personal online magazine through which you share expertise and engage in a conversation with people who are interested in the same subject. Blogs are a great place for professionals to explore a topic in more detail.

Creating your own blog can be a massive undertaking, but commenting on other blogs is an efficient way to build your brand. You don't want your readership relying on you to post something twice a week if you don't have the bandwidth to deliver; however, by using someone else's blog, you can still make yourself known. Just be sure your comments are well thought out, proofread and thought-

provoking. Try writing your response in Word, instead of in the comment box first, to pick up easy mistakes, which can easily negate credibility.

And if you are trying to follow a number of blogs or media outlets, an RSS reader (such as Google Reader) is essential for gathering and presenting content in an easy-to-follow format.

If you choose to write a blog, you should use LinkedIn, Twitter and/or Facebook to share your latest posts.

Twitter

How can you possibly say anything in 140 characters or less? The good news is that 140 characters doesn't take long to write, so you won't be losing much time. As lawyers, we all know that brevity is one of our most powerful (yet overlooked) tools.

Twitter forces brevity. As it turns out, there is a great deal you can say in the space of a text message. Combined with link shorteners (such as bit.ly or TinyURL), which condense long web addresses into a few characters, Twitter becomes a powerful tool for sharing content with your network. Likewise, you can create new networks of contacts that are interested in the same things.

Video

Telling a story is one of the most effective ways humans communicate, and video is one of the best ways to tell your brand's story. Video messages are a great way to "jump off the paper" and present yourself as a three-dimensional, trustworthy person.

Today, low-cost digital video cameras and editing software — including those embedded in smart phones — allow anyone to produce professional-grade videos. You no longer need access to an expensive production studio to make a quality video.

So how should you distribute your video?

- Post it on YouTube, the popular video-sharing website. Businesses increasingly are seeing the value of YouTube, which began as a recreational website. Old Spice recently conducted a highly successful marketing campaign based on YouTube videos.
- Embed it into your LinkedIn page.
- Share your videos using your social media tools — Twitter, Facebook, etc.

Keep in mind that, as Shakespeare said, "Brevity is the soul of wit." Keep your videos as concise as possible — one to three minutes is ideal; anything more than five minutes is probably too long.

Leverage video and you will engage much more productively. After all, which would you rather get for your next CLE: a video presentation or another boring PowerPoint?

ACC Extras on... Using Social Media

ACC Docket

- *Are You Building a House of Cards? Social Networking in the Office (Sept. 2010).* From FLSA and NLRA violations to discrimination and harassment, many legal issues can potentially stem from unchecked social networking. Guide your client with a clear policy. www.acc.com/docket/house-of-cards_sep10
- *How You Can Safely Use Social Media with Employees (April 2010).* Got employees? Then chances are they've got Facebook — and you've got a multitude of potential problems. This article focuses on using social networking sites at the pre-employment screening stage, and while monitoring and regulating their use by current employees. www.acc.com/docket/safeuse-socmed_apr10

Education

- ACC's Annual Meeting, Oct. 23–26 in Denver, offers more than 100 CLE/CPD sessions, with two tracks focused specifically on Employment & Labor and Technology. Browse the program guide for sessions that deal with both employment and social media, such as "704 — Want to be My Friend? Social Networking, Ethics & Discovery" and "703 — Ethical Obligations in the Modern Era." For more information and to register, visit <http://am.acc.com>.

ACC has more material on this subject on our website. Visit www.acc.com, where you can browse our resources by practice area or search by keyword.

Management tools

Managing all of these tools can be a chore, but once you learn the basics, it can be accomplished fairly easily. Tools that many people use, including HootSuite and TweetDeck, allow you to manage multiple LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook accounts, and other services, all from one place. You can schedule postings to be sent out at different times, follow multiple accounts for each social media tool (helpful if you have a business and personal account), and follow the analytics of your various accounts.

Analytics and measurements are the next big area in social media, and services such as Klout, Twiterizer and Crowdbooster have been gaining traction for professionals who want to understand more about who is being reached and where your influence is spreading.

Finally, new services are cropping up all the time. By the time this article is published, Google will probably have debuted its Circles network. New technology-based social media tools will continue to be created, but so long as your personal branding strategy is sound and evolving, adjusting to the new tools on the block will allow you to increase your reach, build your expertise and make your personal brand work for you.

Develop your brand before someone else develops it for you

A Morgan Stanley report on internet trends noted that in November 2007, the global time spent in social networking surpassed the global time spent using email. While predicting the demise of email is premature, it is clear to any parent of teenagers that the primary communications channels of tomorrow will be social networking, texting and the successors to these technologies.

The business and legal leaders of tomorrow already are actively building their personal brands via social media, and they will, almost certainly, expect to use these tools with which they are so familiar in the business environment. And they will expect their counterparts in other businesses to do so as well.

By the time today's teenagers are mid-career, personal branding will be *de rigueur*, and those who are not facile in these technologies will be obsolete. For those already amidst their careers, including especially today's in-house lawyers, the time already is upon us to begin building personal brands and proactively using the tools that are so effective and efficient in making it happen.

As we have discussed, it certainly is important to have a brand-building strategy — identify the brand you want to build, decide what terms best define your brand, then repeat those core messages across a variety of social media platforms.

But you also should keep in mind that the world of social media is a fast-moving, forgiving place. Too many would-be participants get paralyzed because they want to craft the perfect blog post or the wittiest Tweet. But in social media, participation trumps perfection. You can't build a brand until you jump into the conversation. 🚀

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