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The New PR: Online Reputation Management for Attorneys and Their Clients

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Reputation management is often called the *New PR*. Law firms and attorneys must be alert and protect their online reputations.

Not surprisingly, clients facing reputational harm online frequently turn to attorneys for guidance. They seek clarity on their legal options to eliminate negative content, identify the often-anonymous sources of such attacks, and expedite the process of removing damaging comments, if feasible.

No attorney or client is immune to online attacks; any name, achievement, and reputation can be targeted through deepfakes, online defamation, and domain squatting. We have witnessed such damage, particularly when parties losing a lawsuit publish negative content in retaliation and lash out online against the opposing attorney and law firm.

Sophisticated examples include the creation of fraudulent websites that mimic legitimate law firm sites and spread harmful information. Additionally, social media accounts belonging to attorneys and firms have been hijacked, leading to the dissemination of malicious and profane posts falsely attributed to the legitimate owner. Sometimes, a more benign, but real, impact may come from a local blog reporting

about an individual's participation in a community initiative completely unrelated to their professional life.

The widespread use of AI brings increased risks, particularly the threat of disinformation. Malicious actors can exploit AI to create convincing yet false representations through deepfake videos or fabricated audio, which can harm an attorney's or client's reputation.

Fortunately, the digital realm offers numerous avenues for attorneys to shape and enhance their reputations, plus advise their clients regarding similar measures. From establishing authority through thought leadership to strategically targeting audiences, the potential benefits are immense. A strong online presence can attract clients and bolster credibility, especially as most prospective clients now research attorneys online before deciding who to retain.

In today's digital landscape, how legal professionals manage their reputations can significantly influence their success and the trust clients place in them.

Here's what you need to know.

Content is King in the Reputation Management Landscape

Given the challenges of the online landscape, attorneys can and should take proactive steps to manage their reputations effectively. Rich rewards can result.

Because content is king, there are limitless ways to curate, create and amplify content that showcases the accomplishments and expertise of attorneys, law firms and their clients.

Articles, blogs, podcasts, websites, press releases, social media and strategic use of social media platforms like TikTok are examples of opportunities where intentionally planned content can not only showcase a reputation by appearing high in search results but also serve as a very effective marketing tool, providing a double win.

Online reputation management involves creating and placing new digital content to push old or undesirable content lower in search results. It can also raise other online content higher to displace unwanted material. Once successfully posted, the results must be assiduously monitored and maintained. Otherwise, the unwanted material may resurface at the top of Google search results—usually within three to six months.

Not all content automatically appears at the top of search results. The key challenge of online reputation management is to ***create content that search engines will rank highly***. This entails understanding search engine algorithms and—increasingly—how to create high-quality content.

The best online reputation management uses strategies that Google considers *white hat*, which is spelled out in Google's encyclopedic [guide to how its search works](#) (which, next time you're snowed in at an airport, is actually pretty interesting reading). The higher the quality of the new content, the better for search results. Moreover, the more credible the platform where it is published, the better. For example, media interviews rank very highly on Google, as do Op-Eds and other articles published on media platforms, because they are deemed objective and verified by professionals.

Managing Online Reviews

[Google Business Profile](#) is a free tool that oversees reviews and encourages satisfied clients to share their positive experiences. There are also review management services designed to assist law firms in tracking and overseeing their online reviews. They provide tools for monitoring reviews, various strategies to generate positive feedback from clients, and the capability to highlight these favorable reviews across multiple websites.

Monitoring the Conversation

Regularly monitoring your online presence helps you stay informed about conversations about you and your firm. It's easy to set alerts for an attorney's name, law firm and website URL on [Google](#) and [Talkwalker.com](#), following these steps.

On [Google](#), enter the word or phrase.

1. Click the arrow *Show Options* to set the parameters: *Daily*, *Weekly* or *As it happens*.
2. *Sources* is best set as *Automatic*, to include social media.
3. For *How many*, select *All results*.
4. Finally, indicate the email address where you prefer to get these notifications.
5. Click the blue button *Create Alert*. You have now set an alert.

Using [Talkwalker.com](#), you may find more comprehensive social media results than via Google.

The instructions for [Talkwalker.com](#) are similar to those outlined above:

1. Set the parameters for *Result type* to *Everything*.
2. Set the *Language* preference to *All languages*.
3. Opt to receive notifications *Once a day*.
4. Select *All results* in the *How many* field.

For a broad view of digital references, you may wish to add a variant of your name, perhaps Beth for Elizabeth. You can also use your middle initial.

Create an alert for your law firm and also your website URL.

Make alerts for your phone numbers, both office and mobile.

Now that you've set alerts for yourself and your firm, consider creating alerts for clients as well.

Protection Against Misinformation

In an era where misinformation can spread rapidly, law firms that prioritize their reputations can counteract false narratives and ensure that accurate information about their services and expertise is readily available.

In the United States, Section 230, which frees website publishers from liability for what is published there, results in little latitude for being able to *wipe away* information on Google, despite the claims of companies that undertake such efforts.

There is one potential avenue for remediation in certain instances: Google will remove *some* types of personal information online, if you are unable to have a website remove it on request.

These are examples of personal information that Google will remove:

- Non-consensual explicit or intimate personal images from Google
- Involuntary fake pornography from Google
- Content about you on sites with exploitative removal practices from Google
- Select financial, medical, and national ID information from Google
- *Doxxing* content—content exposing contact information with an intent to harm

Google may also remove personal information that creates significant risks of identity theft, financial fraud, or other specific harms.

If you believe your request meets one of the guidelines mentioned above, you can submit a removal request to Google, with this [form](#).

It is not a magic solution for all ills found online—or a quick fix—but it is an option.

For all the rest, there is reputation management, for yourself, your law firm, and your clients.

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