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Social Media Crisis Preparedness

By TBLS & Pierpont Communications Staff

Many legal professionals are using social media to network, strengthen their brand, promote their expertise, expand their thought leadership and promote their services. However, despite all the good things online channels can bring, there can be image-debasing consequences if they are used incorrectly. Today's legal professionals must be fully aware of social media's dark side — and be prepared with a crisis plan to quickly put out any unwanted flames, should they appear.

Here are a few tips to get you on the right path to preparedness:

Be Aware

In order to prevent a crisis, you have to be aware of what could become a crisis. Legal professionals must fully understand the impact of the information they share on social media and how it can influence their reputations. One misspelled word, wrong re-tweet, link or post can lead to a full-blown crisis — with your image and career on the line. Before you hit send or share, ask yourself: “Does it provide value? What will people think?” Consider ALL possible outcomes and all audiences.



Be Prepared

It is a mistake to think that you are impervious to any online harm. Even if you follow all the rules, you can't protect yourself 100 percent of the time — you never know when a person will start to bad mouth you or your firm online. On the internet, news spreads like wildfire, so you want to be ready to contain it. If something leaks online about you, whether you posted it or not, or even whether it's true or false, you need to be ready to address it with a plan that considers all audiences. Before a crisis hits, consider the different types of issues you may deal with and decide now how you will handle them. Is mudslinging the way to go? Probably not. But “no comment” may not work either. And don't forget that sometimes the best solution is just to ignore it — responding may only give negative information legs on which to build credibility. You have to know your practice and decide how to handle unfortunate situations. A plan in place will help prevent you from panicking and lying to your followers or to the media.



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Learn from Your Mistakes

Few crises are handled right the first time, so make sure you are keeping track of all the messages you relay and the audiences you are communicating with, as well as the impact they have. How did the media and/or your online followers react to your response? Did critics on social media lighten up or did they ridicule you even more? Include what worked in your crisis plan and document what didn't for future crises. And here's the next big step: move on! Don't dwell on the past or the past will continue to dwell on you. You will continue to give others reasons to talk about the situation if you keep bringing it up. Either lay low for a while or continuously communicate positive messages to your audiences. They won't forget the past, but you can try to focus their attention elsewhere.

Follow TDRPC Rules

When posting content on social media, whether in crisis or not, it's important to follow the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct (TDRPC). [This article](#), compiled by the Texas Young Lawyers Association (TYLA), recaps some of the most important rules to follow and includes important resources for attorneys to use when engaging online.

In the end, exposure received on social media can go either way. But more times than not, you'll come out on top if you know what you're getting yourself into.