ACC DOCKET
INFORMED. INDISPENSABLE. IN-HOUSE.

Personal Branding: Improving the Legal Profession's Reputation Through Social Media

Skills and Professional Development



> "If you don't mind me saying... I have not had the best professional experiences dealing with legal folks, but it's amazing to see a glimpse of your all-rounded, conscientious, and inspiring personality."

When I received this message from a new connection on LinkedIn, I was unsurprised. Lawyers and the legal profession at large have faced a negative public perception for centuries. One doesn't have to look far to find jokes poking fun at lawyers.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "It is the trade of lawyers to question everything, yield nothing, and to talk by the hour." Likewise, John Keats said, "I think we may class the lawyer in the natural history of monsters."

William Shakespeare went one step further in "Henry VI" with this line: "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."

So, what are the negative perceptions that inspired those harsh remarks?

- For the legal profession – Untrustworthiness, unapproachability, greed, arrogance, and dishonesty as well as issues relating to lack of representation, homogeneity, and disconnection from society.
- For lawyers – Rigid, "fun-police," slow, too detailed, inflexible, risk-averse.



John Keats thought lawyers were on par with monsters.

With the increasing influence of social media on public thought, lawyers can use platforms such as LinkedIn to build their own personal brands and in doing so, help combat some of these misconceptions.

1. Personal brands help humanize the profession

How often have you told someone you're a lawyer for them to say "Oh!" and look at you warily? How often does announcing your title stop the conversation in its tracks?

The average person has limited interactions with the legal profession beyond what they see in television shows or films. When asked to imagine what a lawyer looks like, they are likely to conjure an image of a stern middle-aged white man in a stuffy suit.

In the age of social media, we have the opportunity to change this image. When we show up online as our true, authentic selves, your followers can get to know the person behind the title: your personality, values, and general approach to life. They'll see a person who can inspire others and whose stories can promote a sense of trustworthiness within the profession.

Over the past year, I have been regularly sharing stories relating to my mental health, inclusion, leadership, and parenting. I have connected with a broad spectrum of people both within and outside of the legal profession. Many of them have reached out to me to tell me how my stories have resonated with them and have shared their own experiences. When people get to know who you are, you can effectively break down many of the stereotypes that have long plagued legal professionals.

Does that mean you have to share every part of your personal life on social media? No, but you can share stories that show that you're more than a lawyer. You could also share stories about your professional life that challenge prevailing stereotypes.

For example, a story about how you took risk in the face of ambiguity would help to diffuse the perception of lawyers as being risk-averse. Posting about the importance of innovation in the profession can help counteract perceptions of rigidity.

At the end of the day, people connect with people. They want to know who you are and what makes you tick. We haven't done this particularly well as a profession in past decades, but we can now change the narrative.

2. Creating a personal brand can help lawyers be considered for leadership roles

As lawyers, we're comfortable when providing legal advice to our clients. However, as we progress through our careers as in-house counsel, we will increasingly be asked to take leadership positions, manage teams, and contribute to executive-level discussions that stretch beyond our legal expertise.

By sharing our positions on leadership or business-related topics on social media, we can help not only to build our own profile, but also position lawyers as individuals who can contribute to business discussions and who can and should be considered for board directorships (and not just company secretarial positions).

As an in-house counsel, we occupy a space that may have visibility and involvement in activities stemming from many different departments within our company. This involvement can help us to have a bird’s eye view of the organization that others may not have . In turn, this can place us in the perfect position from which to contribute to different topics in board or management meetings.

In fact, a fellow management team member once remarked that it was astonishing that I was across so many of the issues discussed in our management team meetings. The more we use that knowledge to position ourselves as leaders — and not just lawyers — the better for the entire profession.

We can become industry changemakers

Many of the lawyers currently on social media speak at length about some of the systemic issues that burden the legal profession, including:

- The billable hour model of law firms that breeds inefficiency and mistrust amongst clients;
- The mental health and burnout issues that are so prevalent in the industry;
- The lack of diversity at the most senior levels of the profession; and
- The slow adoption of technological innovation by the industry.

As in-house lawyers, we are in a position of privilege. We have the power to reshape the profession by sharing our stories and personal views on the necessary evolution of the profession and overdue updates in the industry. We can additionally drive that change in our own backyards by mindfully selecting law firms and barristers that provide us legal advice and by insisting on alternative fee arrangements and technological solutions.

We can become changemakers for an industry that needs change.

3. It's time to get started

Social media has exploded as a result of the pandemic and the need for human connection. I have seen many say, however, that the legal profession is still underrepresented in the space of content creation.

We have the perfect opportunity to transform the way the profession is viewed as well as to drive much necessary change by engaging more actively on platforms like LinkedIn. There’s no better time to build your personal brand.

Niti Nadarajah



Founder, Coach, and Freelance General Counsel

Coaching by Niti

After serving as the head of the legal team for Philip Morris in Australia and the Pacific Islands and member of the local management team where she advised on a variety of legal issues in a heavily regulated environment, she has transitioned to coaching and acting as a freelance GC.

She is an advocate for a range of issues at work, from mental health to flexibility, gender equity and authentic and inclusive leadership. She has also advocated for other issues such as pregnancy loss,

DEI in all its forms, and changing the old-school culture of the legal profession on LinkedIn and Clubhouse, in the hope that her voice, and her stories, might just make a difference.