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letter from the young lawyers' president



Jeffrey M. Wank

Social Media Pitfalls

As young lawyers, we are all plugged-in. In fact, most "seasoned" lawyers are also connected and in tune with current social media sites. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are some of the popular social media outlets that most lawyers are familiar with, and likely use on a daily basis. Naturally, one can see the benefit and upside to having a social media presence. For starters, it provides more visibility, name recognition and an alternative way to interact with potential clients and your network. There are even specific groups designed to refer cases. Thus, social

media can be a huge benefit to one's practice and a cost-effective way to increase business.

But what happens when social media is used for other purposes? Recently I have seen an onslaught of political posts and rather unprofessional remarks (mostly on Facebook and Twitter). These outcries and other comments may reflect negatively on the writer by those who read it. More importantly, for business, networking or professional purposes, certain posts may deter others in your network who wanted to engage in future business ventures together, or could affect a potential position with a firm or other company down the road.

Once that send button is pressed, there is no turning back. We often see news stories on a weekly basis of some athlete, entertainer or politician who deleted a controversial post or tweet minutes after posting, only to draw more attention to the "mistake" they likely did not think through. Same can be said about each of us in our everyday lives. Once it is out there, it is out there for all the world to see. And to the extent the post or tweet may offend someone, you should be aware of the potential harm your message may cause. It is difficult to imagine that an on-line forum could result in damaging one's reputation, especially if made casually or in jest, but believe you me, people take note of certain messages. In fact, in recent years, there have been instances where attorneys have been fired for their posts on social media, and have been disciplined by the Florida Bar.

In closing, be aware of your social media presence, and the impact (both positive and negative) certain posts, tweets, or messages may have on your profile. As lawyers, our reputation can make or break us. Once that reputation is tarnished, it may be very hard, if not impossible, to rebound. So be sure to take an extra minute or two, or even consult with a friend or colleague, before posting on social media sites if you think your comment may be controversial. Some attorneys even have separate personal social media accounts. At the very least, be aware of what you are posting and remember that some things are better left in 0 characters or less. **B**