

## Six Ways to Build Your Reputation Online

BY DEBORAH McMURRAY

**As a practicing lawyer, your credibility and reputation are everything. They take years to build and only minutes to destroy. So, just as you can't afford any missteps in your representation of clients, you can't afford gaffes in your communications. Here are six ways to boost your professional reputation and increase your exposure using the Internet and electronic communications as tools.**

□ **Scrutinize your e-mail.** Business e-mail should follow business guidelines and protocol, regardless of how friendly the parties to the e-mail have become. Jump at the chance to be timely. Always use a signature block that includes your name, firm name, address, phone, fax, Web site URL and e-mail address. Never use profanity, always check spelling, and avoid cute “emoticons.”

□ **Maximize your Martindale and other listings.** What do your online listings say about you? Include *relevant* and *current* data, practice and industry areas, foreign language fluency, prior job experience that adds strength to what you do today, awards and leadership positions that distinguish you. Review all listings annually to ensure that you are putting your best foot forward. Study your major competitors' listings to learn how they are selling against you.

□ **Make your Web site work harder.** Your home page may be the most valuable practice development real estate you ever own. Design your site to give visitors a snapshot of what it's like to do business with you. Reflect points of differentiation about your practice, and display current news and other noteworthy content, too. This requires a database-driven site and a content management system that enable you to own and quickly change your content. The initial investment is higher, but the control you have and the ability to keep content fresh are worth it.

□ **Track visitors and improve your site accordingly.** If your site has several global navigation buttons and several pages of content, it's worth tracking your visitors. You will learn where your visitors came from, or the “referring site” (e.g., Google, Yahoo or Martindale); what search terms they typed in to find you; what pages they visited and how

long they spent; and countless other statistics that will help you improve your site with each upgrade or redesign. WebTrends ([www.webtrends.com](http://www.webtrends.com)) and Urchin ([www.urchin.com](http://www.urchin.com)) are two of the most popular tracking packages.

□ **Search for your name and law firm online.** Use Google and other popular search engines to see how often your name is returned as a search result—and how current the related data is. If you were a party to a lawsuit or got a bad review on a blog or an “e-pinion” site (e.g., Vault, Infirmination or Greedy Associates), it may show up in search results. The Internet has a long memory, even when something's outdated or erroneous. What can you do? You can call the sponsors of the information and request that they eliminate the bad or dated elements. However, be aware that sometimes finding the sponsor is difficult, especially when the information is posted on a personal Web site. Plus, sponsors typically aren't obligated to honor your request absent a court order or other legal requirement, such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

□ **Take a position and be consistent about it.** If you are a blogger or contribute to electronic discussion lists devoted to particular groups or subject matter, you will become known, or at least familiar to, the readers of those posts. But for what will you be known? If you post 10 times about 10 different topics, you have no chance to embed the idea that you are an expert in a particular area of law. However, if you post 10 times about the same or a similar topic, readers will learn that you are an expert in XYZ and will begin to evaluate you on the depth and relevance of your knowledge and contributions. People are known as experts because they consistently write or speak about a certain topic, not because they know any more than you do. LP

Deborah McMurray ([mcmurray@couchmoney.com](mailto:mcmurray@couchmoney.com)) is a strategic marketing consultant to the legal industry, based in Dallas. She is coauthor of *The Lawyer's Guide to Marketing on the Internet*, 2nd Edition (ABA, 2002) and coeditor of *The Lawyer's Guide to Marketing Your Practice*, 2nd Edition (ABA, 2004).