Top 5 Strategies for Efficient Lawyer Reputation Management

Written by Willie Peacock

What do you do when you want to find a product or professional service? You Google it to research your options, get contact information, or look for reviews. Legal clients do the same. According to the *2022 Legal Trends Report*, client reviews and responsiveness to communication have a strong impact on hiring.

Therefore, it's important to be proactive about managing your lawyer reputation, especially when today's legal clients search for you online.

1. Identify the current online reputation of lawyers in your firm

The first step in managing your online reputation is to put yourself in the client's shoes and start Googling. I recommend doing it **in incognito mode**, so that your browsing history doesn't influence your research. Google knows you're connected to your law firm and colleagues. If you use your regular browser, Google won't give you an authentic impression of the reputation of lawyers in your firm.

How to use incognito mode

Use one of these two simple ways:

- Click CTRL + shift + N simultaneously on your keyboard if you use Windows, or Command + shift + N simultaneously if you use a Macbook.
- Alternatively, open a regular Chrome window, and look up to the right side of the top taskbar. Click the three vertical dots, and choose "new incognito window."

Search ideas to begin your law firm reputation management research

When doing your lawyer reputation research:

- Look up similar law firms in your practice area.
- Type your law firm's name.
- Look up the names of your attorneys.

- Look up any search terms relevant to your law firm, like variants in your law firm's name or colleagues' names.

For example, when I did my lawyer reputation research, I Googled "William Peacock attorney," "William Peacock lawyer," "Law Office of William C. Peacock." When you do this, you might find your website, Avvo, Yelp, LinkedIn, Twitter, and a few other local listings, such as Yahoo and Mapquest.

You'll see that each of your sample queries returns different results. That's why your lawyer reputation research must include a few variants on your name, the name of your law firm, and the names of your colleagues.

Hopefully, you won't find any red flags, like bad reviews. In this case, your law firm reputation management will focus on building your brand from scratch or expanding on what's already out there without the need to do damage control.

If you find that your online reputation includes unfavorable results, including negative reviews, look at it as an opportunity. You can turn any unfavorable results on their heads by:

- Being proactive by setting up your own site, controlling your directory listings, and asking happy clients for reviews
- Ensuring you're positive when responding to criticism or negative reviews in a respectful way that shows you're looking to improve
- Being prolific in producing positive content and PR for your firm.

2. Improve your lawyer reputation by asking for positive reviews and responsibly handling negative ones

A few weeks ago, a potential client from California with a messy litigation matter contacted me for help. I currently reside in New York, but I'm licensed in seven states. However, I only handle transactional work, especially in faraway states, so I tried to refer the matter to a friend and mentor.

I gave the friend a glowing recommendation, but the client refused. The client reviewed my friend's lawyer reputation online and discovered he had bad reviews that said he was "rude" during a consult. The client also reviewed my lawyer reputation and found I had positive reviews. Therefore, he pleaded with me to take his case anyway, despite the distance.

The anatomy of reviews that improve your lawyer reputation

Not all reviews are created equal. While it's nice to have a review from "Nora" that says "you are the best lawyer in the world," it's not as trustworthy as a more specific review.

Below is the anatomy of a trustworthy review. It won't always be possible to secure all the elements, but aim to get as many as possible.

- **Ensure your reviews are specific.** When asking clients for reviews, suggest a few ideas that highlight what you want your firm to represent, or what you want to be known for.
- **Ask clients to tell a results-driven story.** Have them present the challenge they faced, the solution you offered, and what results they saw thanks to working with you. Even if they give a general idea that doesn't go into too much detail, it will still indicate this is a real case that actually happened.
- **Include identifying client information.** Ideally, include the client's name and another relevant information piece, like their position if they represent a business client, or how many kids they have if it was a family court case. Not everyone will feel comfortable with this, but it's worth asking. Make sure you're also complying with your jurisdiction's rules on client data security.
- **Feature the client's photo.** Seeing various real faces and names praising your law firm makes your lawyer reputation more authentic.
- **Film the client's review.** Videos are the ideal review channel and can contribute to improving lawyer reputation, because Google and social media platforms such as YouTube pick up video reviews and include the videos in their search results.

Does the anonymity that review sites offer harm law firm reputation management?

Review sites often offer anonymity, yet clients will likely assume you didn't make these reviews up if it's a trusted site. That's unlike vague "best lawyer ever" reviews without identifying client information on your own site. Moreover, the anonymity of review sites might make it easier for clients to be more specific in their reviews.

For an even more trustworthy lawyer reputation, consider using screenshots of public reviews on your website, in addition to reviews you secure for your website separately. Prioritize reviews that contain more specific details over more general or vague reviews.

How to get reviews that simplify your law firm reputation management

To improve your lawyer reputation, you need to include reviews in your file closing process proactively.

- **Reach out to your most satisfied clients** after their matter has concluded with a request for feedback. If it makes you feel more comfortable, delegate the task to a paralegal or assistant, or automate it with an email.
- **Ask for a review on one site.** You can suggest a couple of options, but avoid giving clients a long list, as it might scare them off or postpone the task to "one day" that might never happen. The best strategy is to pick the one with the weakest rating, the one where you already have negative reviews, or the strongest profile you've been focusing on building reviews. If they're all equal, go with Google—it's the most important for your lawyer reputation.
- **Use an automatic review funnel.** Build a page that asks the client whether they are happy. If they say yes, automatically link to a review site with a request to spread the good word. If they say no, ensure that a feedback form appears so they can vent to you privately. Here is a sample funnel I created in five minutes via Google Forms for free. While this is a more straightforward strategy, consider if this may qualify as misleading advertising, as you are filtering out bad reviews before they are posted, presenting a deceptively positive review profile instead.

Customize this sample of an email requesting a review

Feel free to use this template, and customize it to your needs:

Dear Favorite Client,

I'm extremely happy that we were able to [do something wonderful for you / mitigate the damage in your case]. It was a pleasure working with you, and we hope the feeling was mutual.

If you have a few minutes, would you mind providing us with some feedback on [Google/Yelp/Avvo]? It will help us improve our service and spread the word about our firm's work.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve you,

Lawyer

What to do if clients don't help you build your lawyer reputation with reviews

Not all clients agree to write reviews. Even if they loved working with you and you changed their lives for the better, they might feel uncomfortable sharing personal information. Or, some clients might not feel confident in their writing abilities, or they might just be too

busy.

Either way, never make up any reviews. Real testimonials should reflect your lawyer reputation.In fact, having no testimonials at allis still better thanmade-up reviews.

Consider that there are rules about false or misleading advertising. Plus, Yelp filters many reviews, fake or real, based on whether their algorithm picks them up as spam. Multiple reviews from the same physical location will trigger Yelp's spam algorithm. In fact, Yelp's servers read reviewers' IP addresses, and if multiple reviews come from the same internet connection, the reviews will likely get flagged—this has been the case in a few Yelp lawsuits over reviews and "extortion." Yelp also flags reviews from people who registered that same day, and only reviewed a single business. If you try to fake your lawyer reputation, review sites will probably catch it.

Instead, consider asking for feedback privately. You can change some things, which will make the next client say yes to a review. It will also help improve the reputation lawyers in your firm have offline, which will increase word-of-mouth leads.

Meanwhile, keep asking every happy client for a review. Little by little, you'll start building up the reputation lawyers in your firm have. Simultaneously, focus on the additional ways to create positive law firm reputation management covered in this guide.

Can you offer rewards for reviews that boost your online reputation?

Most states have rules against offering anything of value in exchange for a good review. Other states, like Missouri, require disclaimers when testimonials are paid for.

Read up on your specific state's advertising rules to make sure your request is compliant.

Keep track of new reviews to stay on top of your law firm reputation management

You can't manage your lawyer reputation if you're not aware of its status. Therefore, check in on your Google and Bing search results every few months to keep an eye on any new results for you and your firm's names.

In addition, use services that alert you if something new is posted, such as Talkwalker and Google Alerts. In my experience, the former is more comprehensive, but brings in a large amount of irrelevant content, like Australian obituaries.

How to handle negative reviews in a way that builds positive lawyer reputation

Even the best, most attentive, and empathetic attorneys who have the best lawyer reputation in town will receive a negative review one day.

The law is an uncertain business. Lawyers deal with stressful matters, where success often means achieving the best possible bad outcome. Clients, being human, are sometimes saddled with unreasonable expectations. With a sufficient volume of reviews over time, the overall tenor of the reviews for a practice should paint an accurate picture. But any given review may widely miss the mark. Accepting this reality is the first step in law firm reputation management.

There is no easy remedy for negative online reviews—the only cure is to respond with a kind message. Also, you'll need to work harder to earn more positive reviews to outweigh the negative ones. The former goes a long way: I've seen many Yelp-ers backtrack on a negative review, and up it to a more palatable three-star rating after a business contacted them about their experience, and did its best to make amends.

Guidelines for responding to negative reviews

A few guidelines to help you respond to negative reviews in a way that improves your lawyer reputation:

- **Do not engage in an argument with the reviewer.** Trying to argue or defend your law firm will look unprofessional to potential clients and signals that you are more concerned with defending yourself than providing the best client-centered experience possible.
- **Apologize for any substandard customer service** the client experienced.
- **Request that the person contacts your firm privately** to make it right. It shows the public that you care about client satisfaction.
- **Mention any improvements your firm has made** since that situation occurred.
- **Do your best, within reason, to make the client happy** if they reach out to you privately.
- **Remember your ethics.** When responding to negative reviews, you cannot disclose details of the case that are confidential. Even if privilege is waived, you don't want the lawyer reputation of someone who airs a client's dirty laundry online.

In addition, you can also sometimes drown out negative websites, and improve the reputation lawyers in your firm have by filling out online profiles on sites like Avvo, Justia, HG, and Lawline. There are only so many results on the first page of Google, and these

sites are more likely to rank than a disgruntled client's blog post.

The rare case of blogs that aim to bring down lawyer reputation

Some disgruntled folks won't be happy with venting on Yelp and RipOffReport.com alone. They'll also set up blogs and other websites to "expose" your "real" lawyer reputation. They may even call themselves citizen "journalists" or "watchdogs."

The most pernicious example of this was the Crystal Cox and Marc Randazza saga. Crystal set up sites trumpeting the alleged misdeeds of a financial company, then allegedly offered online reputation management services to undo the damage that she allegedly caused. The Ninth Circuit nixed a $2.5 million verdict against her, even while citing a New York Times article on her alleged extortionist tactics. However, she also aimed her blogging and domain name tactics at a lawyer and his family, including his then three-year-old daughter.

The solution for law firm reputation management in this case was, for one, more speech. Marc, a First Amendment attorney of note, has a lot of friends online who countered Crystal's incessant posting with their own blog posts. Marc also went after the domain names. He had the domain names seized and transferred to his name in two legal proceedings.

Hopefully, you'll never have to deal with anyone who is this motivated to write about you and damage your lawyer reputation. But if you do, the cure for your lawyer reputation is the same for a negative review—more positive reviews. And for extreme cases like this one, you can hire someone experienced with domain name disputes and cybersquatting to handle the dispute through the World Intellectual Property Organization.

3. Master social media and community management to establish your lawyer reputation

Choose one social media platform and start establishing your lawyer reputation there. You could choose to focus on your law firm reputation management as a whole or individual lawyers' reputations. For example, by starting a profile for each one if you have the resources to manage multiple profiles. If so, you'll be able to cross-promote them. Otherwise, focus on your law firm as a whole, or the main face of your firm.

Either way, you don't need to be on every platform to build your lawyer reputation. It's best to choose one platform and master it first. Then, once you have a large enough audience, leverage this audience to help you build your second platform, which will strengthen your lawyer reputation.

How to choose the best social media platform for your law firm reputation management

To choose a social media platform, combine these two factors:

- **Consider where your ideal clients already hang out.** If you serve business clients, LinkedIn is the easy answer.
- **Think outside the box,** especially if the main person maintaining the platform is more likely to be proactive in a more unexpected setting. Let's say you represent residential real estate buyers and sellers. It doesn't mean you have to be on Facebook. For example, TikTok is rising in popularity across many age groups. Let your lawyer or team spend some time on a couple of platforms, and see what they connect with more. It'll be critical for long term law firm reputation management.

How to build your lawyer reputation from scratch with a new social media profile

Once you choose your platform, it's time to build an audience that trusts and protects the reputation lawyers in your firm have.

Every social media platform has its own culture. Things that work on Instagram might not work on LinkedIn. Therefore, take some time to study the platform you chose.

However, whichever platform you choose, some guidelines remain the same:

- **Provide valuable content that actually helps** (and if possible, entertains) your audience.
- **Avoid sales pitches (for the most part).** Focus on providing value. If you provide value for a while, you can sprinkle in some pitches here and there without jeopardizing your lawyer reputation or losing audience trust.
- **Use hashtags** to promote your content and find similar content to comment on and engage with. If you leave thoughtful comments that add to the conversation (think beyond "great post!"), it'll be easier to build your lawyer reputation from scratch. People will click through to your profile to see who you are. Just focus on posts that target your ideal clients, so that the people who check out your profile are indeed your ideal clients.
- **Be consistent.** Building your lawyers' through social media takes time, but it's worth the investment. At first, it'll feel like you're posting for yourself and your colleagues, but gradually, you'll gain more followers who will trust you and help establish your lawyer reputation.

How to combine social media with community management for an even stronger lawyer reputation

When you build a social media presence, you build a community of ideal clients. Therefore:

- **Respond to their comments.** At first, you'll be able to do this individually. When your community grows, you can offer free Q&A sessions.
- **Take ideas from your community,** both for content they'd like you to create and for innovative services they'd like your law firm to develop.
- **Connect them to each other.** Everyone needs to feel they're not the only ones going through a challenge. Alternatively, if they're business clients in similar industries, they might benefit from getting to know each other. Find opportunities to create connections beyond your law firm, and your positive lawyer reputation will precede you.

4. Accelerate law firm reputation management with PR tactics

You could be building your lawyer reputation from scratch or navigating a crisis regarding the reputation lawyers in your firm have developed. Either way, by showing up in places that already have large, trusting audiences, you can encourage positive PR messages about your firm.

- **Land interviews or publish articles** on prominent publications, podcasts, and YouTube channels. These methods will encourage positive PR messages about your firm. While successfully reaching out to prominent publications for a PR spot is a highly involved process, it's another efficient way to accelerate your firm's lawyer reputation.
- **Partner with trusted complementary businesses**. Consider businesses who serve your audience, but aren't direct competitors. If they have a positive reputation, it will rub off on your lawyer reputation. For example, if you support commercial real estate deals, you could partner up with contractors and business strategists.

5. Bullet-proof your lawyer reputation as much as possible by building owned assets

There are no guarantees in law firm reputation management, but it's still critical to build owned media assets, such as your own website and email list.

Social media platforms can change their rules, or even shut down entirely. Publications where you've regularly guest posted or interviewed can change their strategies. When you simultaneously develop owned platforms, your firms' lawyers can develop reputations that won't be dependent on other companies' agendas.

There are other benefits for building owned assets (like a website) for law firm reputation management, including being able to:

- **Tell your own story.** When clients log into your website, they can read your story and what you're about in your own words. Your website gives you many opportunities to build emotional connections with your audience, making them more likely to trust you.
- **Implement content marketing** and generate traffic to your own site. Over time, Google will grow to trust your website over others for your top keywords (like your lawyers' names), displaying it further up in search results, and supporting a more positive lawyer reputation.
- **Display your social proof,** including the number of positive reviews you've gotten, the publications that have featured you, and the amount of cases you've won. When Google trusts your website and makes it the first destination of a relevant search inquiry. The first thing clients see about your firm is all these reasons to believe in you, the journey toward a trusted lawyer reputation grows shorter.

Control the narrative of your lawyer reputation

Law firm reputation management is an ongoing process. You can counter a bad review with a thoughtful, professional response and multiple positive reviews. It's a good idea to get featured on trusted publications that strengthen the reputation lawyers in your firm are developing. It's also a good idea to develop original content on your own firm's website so you can control your firm's narrative.

Between the positive content, your website, and review sites, you'll increase the odds of burying older negative content onto the second page of search results.

Instead, your target audience will find that they can wholeheartedly trust your firm to serve them well and lead them as close to their desired result as possible. When clients hire your law firm, and you provide an outstanding client-centered experience, they'll carry your positive lawyer reputation further, spreading the news on review sites, to their friends, colleagues, and maybe even to their social media followers.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.