

Sports Columnist 0, Twitter 1

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Sports reporters aren't known as the smartest guys in the newsroom, but it's almost like Mike Wise of the Washington Post was trying to prove just how dense he could be. In so doing, he unintentionally made a powerful point about the usefulness of Twitter for professionals.

The backstory: Wise, by most accounts a solid journalist, has a beef with Internet sites that "steal" news—that is, they repackage stories written by others without independently verifying the facts. That may be a legitimate gripe, but when Wise engineered a prank to expose the practice he fell flat on his face.

Wise took to his [Twitter account](#) and announced a bit of fake news—that the Pittsburgh Steelers' Ben Roethlisberger would be suspended for five games. (Currently, Roethlisberger is awaiting a definitive punishment from the NFL for [off-field misconduct](#).) At this point, imagine Wise pushing back from his keyboard, cackling, and waiting for the silly Internet sites to run with his fake news.

That's not how it went down. Instead, Wise's followers, knowing him to be a trusted source of information, passed the news to their own contacts and—key point—responsibly attributed it to Wise. Thus, shortly after Wise's tweet, [reports starting cropping up](#) like this from Pro Football Talk: "According to Mike Wise of the Washington Post, however, a surprise could be coming. Wise says, via Twitter, that Roethlisberger will get five games."

In short, the egg landed squarely on Wise's face, not anyone else's. Unlike George Plimpton, who created sports writing's most legendary and [successful hoax](#) at Sports Illustrated, Wise ended up with a [month-long suspension](#) from his paper.

There are [many layers of stupidity](#) to sift through here, but two points stand out for lawyers and other professional service firms.

First, as Wise suspected, if you have information of value to share (and news of Roethlisberger's suspension would have been very valuable, had it been true), it will indeed spread far and wide on Twitter. The speed with which your information travels will depend on your credibility (Wise had a lot of it—not so much now) and the size of your network, but the fact is that good content will find an incredibly large audience. That is true not just on Twitter, but other social networking forums that allow content sharing. For professionals, the most relevant ones are Twitter, LinkedIn, and even Facebook (yes, there are a lot of cat pictures, but with 500 million members and growing use by businesses, Facebook shouldn't be ignored). For maximum effect, the JD Supra service can push out your content through all three sites.

Second, regardless of how far your news spreads, credit for it will come back to you, the author. In some sense, this is not a big concern for professional service firms. Often, the content that firms and individual lawyers place in the Twitter-stream (or LinkedIn-stream, or JD Supra-stream) are articles with bylines, negating any possibility that credit for the information contained within will be lost to the ether. However, for lawyers or practice groups thinking

about starting a Twitter account, let the above experience be a lesson: even sharing little bits of wisdom can get you a reputation.

In Wise's case, it was a bad one. But you can do better than that.