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Paula Black has advised law firms around the globe on everything from powerful and innovative design to marketing strategy and business growth. She is an award-winning Amazon-bestselling author and the force behind **In Black & White** (inblackandwhiteblog.com), a blog dedicated to clear, straightforward advice and open discussion of legal marketing issues. For more information on Paula Black, her books and her company please visit paulablacklegalmarketing.com.

Legal Marketing: 5 Ways to Make Your Firm Bios Stand Out Online

Whenever I begin working with a new firm, one of the biggest challenges my team and I tackle (once the branding and positioning has been determined) is collecting and refining the firm biographies. Inevitably all of them will be formatted differently, many will contain out of date information and none of the photographs will have been taken by the same photographer. Sound familiar? But, in truth, firm bios need more than just organization to help them support your marketing and business development. They need to grab a client (or potential client's) attention, convey your expertise and personality, and help you stand apart from the millions of other attorneys out there. Here are five ways to do just that.

Name a leader.

Before you embark on revamping your firm bios you have to be committed to keeping them streamlined and relevant. The best way to ensure that bios stay on track is to charge one person with the task of organization and upkeep. Be it a marketing director, administrator, secretary or even receptionist, identify someone to take charge of the project and keep it going. By placing responsibility on one person you eliminate the possibility of slipping back into old habits and give everyone a point person to communicate with.

Be consistent.

Creating consistency with your firm bios is a project, but one that can reap true rewards for your entire firm. So how do you go about it? The first step in a revamp is to create a questionnaire and use existing bios to fill in the information. Then send those questionnaires back to each individual attorney so that they can fill in any blanks or update outdated information. Finally, pick a format and stick to it. In what order do you want to present the information? Will you put dates on Bar Admissions? Undergraduate

information before JD or vice versa? Will you separate membership listings in charitable organizations from professional organizations? All questions you should consider and make a final decision on.

Give visitors options.

One of the most effective ways I've seen of treating online attorney bios is to have two distinct ways to view the information. One with simply the basics (contact info, education, practice areas, bar admissions), and one with an extended view (narrative paragraph, community involvement, publications, etc...). This not only keeps bios clean and orderly, it gives visitors to the site a quick hit of information and an option to click a "more" button if they're so inclined. You should also always give people options to print, e-mail and view as a PDF if possible. It encourages potential clients to keep your information on hand and share it with others.

Have a great photo.

Look at your headshots. Do they look like they were photographed by the same person? Are they outdated? If you answered no to the first question and yes to the second, you may want to look into investing in some new photos. Never underestimate the power of a strong headshot. Another option to consider when having the entire firm photographed is breaking free from a standard headshot. Browse other firm websites for ideas, then apply them to your own attorneys. Many firms today are thinking outside the box when it comes to photography, having their attorneys photographed full-length, in groups or even with props. With the right idea and the right photographer it's very possible to create images that are interesting AND professional.

Show your personality.

There are links all over the Internet to attorneys (one I can think of off the top of my head) who have gone creative when it comes to writing bio copy. It may not be your cup of tea, but it certainly helps them stand out...and get some attention. You don't have to go humorous, especially if you belong to a more conservative firm, but there's absolutely nothing wrong with showing a little personality in your bio. I can guarantee that readers would much rather know what you're doing right now and what you're passionate about when it comes to your practice than skim over a long list of memberships and cases.

The biggest change you can make? Know your audience and speak directly to them—and that goes for each individual attorney. That, in combination with a unified look and feel, will elevate your website bio section from reference point to marketing opportunity.