Do you work in a career services office and wonder how to get started on social media? Are you in law firm administration tasked with getting your lawyers to create a profile on LinkedIn? Have you seen law students, summer associates, and lawyers post inappropriate content on Facebook or Twitter?

If you would like to teach law students and lawyers to stop committing social gaffes on social media (and perhaps learn more about social media yourself), the NALP e-Guides on e-Professionalism might be able to help (www.nalp.org/eguides). NALP’s E-Professionalism and Social Networking Work Group (part of the Law Student Professional Development Section), has created free, downloadable e-Guides to help law students and lawyers navigate the world of social media. There are e-Guides covering Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, along with e-Guides on email etiquette and managing your “Digital Dirt” (your online reputation). Lastly, there is a selected bibliography of articles and resources related to social media.

As personal and professional worlds collide on social media in ways that can adversely affect a law student or lawyer’s reputation, it pays to have a strategy. By considering elements such as Purpose, People, Profile, and Presence (factors which Amanda Ellis addresses in The 6Ps of the Big 3™ for Job Seeking JDs(Something Different Publishing, Inc., 2010), your students and lawyers can create a social media strategy for all their social media accounts.

Elements of a Social Media Strategy

**Purpose/People:** Why have you decided to use this social media platform? Is it for professional or personal use? Do you want to communicate with people you know such as family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and coworkers? Or is your target audience your clients, other professionals, or total strangers (such as thought leaders) with whom you wish to develop a relationship? For personal use, we recommend Facebook (with high privacy settings); for professional purposes, LinkedIn is the medium of choice. Twitter tends to be a blend of professional and personal communication and allows you to build a community with people you don’t know.

**Profile:** Choose your profile photo wisely. For LinkedIn and Twitter, a professional close-up headshot works best. Your Facebook photograph can be more informal as long as you are judiciously covered up and not flaunting your assets in a swimsuit. Twitter allows you to create a bio in 160 words or less, whereas LinkedIn allows you to create an extensive profile that can serve as an online résumé. On Facebook, we suggest being selective in what you reveal in your profile because privacy settings change often and personal information can be used for identity theft. Do you really need to post your birthday or hometown, either of which can be used to commit online fraud?

**Presence:** Social media can be an important tool in personal and professional branding. Want to be in-house counsel one day? Interested in intellec-
tual property? You can create a new persona by joining and participating in online groups on Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn geared toward your interests. By socializing with lawyers online, you can develop relationships to help you in the future. However, put your best e-footprint forward because your “digital dirt” can follow you for decades. All tweets are now archived in the Library of Congress, so refrain from catty comments that can live on in infamy. Comments you have posted on blogs, websites, or your friend’s Facebook page can be “cached” and accessible for years.

Online Etiquette

LinkedIn has created a helpful e-manners guide for online professional behavior for students and recent graduates at http://careerservices.linkedin.com/LinkedIn-Etiquette-Guide.pdf. In addition to the LinkedIn tips, the following guidelines are particularly applicable to the legal profession.

Be Ethical. As a member of the legal profession, you are subject to a code of ethics including such things as keeping attorney-client secrets. Before sharing successes online about current cases or client matters, make sure the information is public and is not confidential or proprietary. This means respecting copyrights and fair use, giving credit where credit is due, and citing to original sources and references directly. Lawyers must take extra care with any information offered online; if it rises to the level of legal advice, an attorney-client relationship may have inadvertently been created. Also refrain from providing legal advice via email, especially on listservs and email groups. Additionally, every state in the U.S. has rules governing attorney advertising, so check the law in your state to ensure your compliance. (See http://www.compliancebuilding.com/2009/03/24/recommendations-on-social-networking-sites-and-compliance/.)

Be Professional. Put your best professional e-footprint forward. Be a forward thinker — consider the lawyer you want to be and start behaving like that now. Consider the purpose of the platform prior to posting. For example, if you use Facebook on a personal level, you can share links to your favorite funny YouTube videos, but refrain from adding such a link to your LinkedIn status bar, which should be used instead for professional updates. Also, think about whether what you say has the potential to harm or offend and whether the link or post might be forwarded to other people. How many emails meant only for a few have ended up broadcasted to all on Above the Law?

Be Responsible. CEO of Mashery.com Oren Michels explains that “people tend to interpret having the ‘right’ to express themselves online as implying a lack of consequences when they say stupid things.” Lawyers need to take responsibility for what they write and exercise good judgment and common sense. Think twice before revealing personal thoughts. Discussing private issues on a public forum could jeopardize your personal and work relationships. For instance, commenting publicly about how you feel about a certain judge or a ruling could be viewed as unprofessional by employers for demonstrating a lack of judgment. If you show lack of judgment online, an employer may extrapolate this to your behavior in person. Many employers and bar associations now conduct background checks to assess your character and fitness.

Be Honest. Your online reputation will follow you in real life. Be sure your online information matches your offline résumé as employers often check the consistency and accuracy of both.

For further reference, see the following eGuides available at www.nalp.org/eguides:

- Facebook for Law Students: Making Friends (but Protecting Your Professional Reputation) by Ellen Jones, JD, Director of Career Services, Lewis & Clark Law School
- Mastering Facebook for CSOs by Heather Day DiFranco, Esq., Director of Career Communications and Outreach, Case Western University School of Law
- LinkedIn for Lawyers by Marina Sarmiento Feehan, Esq., Assistant

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Director, Office of Career Planning,
University of San Francisco School of Law

* Twitter: An Online Cocktail Party by Thomas Ksobiech, Assistant Dean for Career Services,
The University of Alabama School of Law

* Effective Email Strategies for Law Students and Lawyers by Susanne Aronowitz,
  Associate Dean for Law Career Services and Alumni Relations, Golden Gate University
  School of Law

* Managing Your Digital Dirt by Tracy Evans,
  Director of Professional and Bar Relations at Louisiana State University Law Center, and
  Gwen Ferrell, Associate Director of Career Services at Louisiana State University Law Center

* Selected Articles Related to Social Networking
  compiled by Sandra P. Bateau, Director of Graduate Career and Professional
  Development, Georgetown University Law Center

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