

Play to Win

[**Online Profiles: Presenting the Best Version of Yourself**](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/online-profiles-presenting-best-version/)

By [Sally J. Schmidt](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/author/sally-j-schmidt/) | Mar.20.14 | [Business Development](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/business-development/), [Daily Dispatch](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/articles/), [Law Practice Management](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/practice-management-2/), [Legal Marketing](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/legal-marketing-2/), [Play to Win](http://www.attorneyatwork.com/category/play-to-win/)



Prior to working with a sixth-year associate recently, I reviewed her online profiles. After we had talked for an hour, I noted that her bio was a complete disconnect from her practice. While she originally had been assigned to the firm’s estate planning area, she’d spent the past three years on commercial real estate matters, which was also the practice she wanted to develop.

When I asked why the bio contained nothing about her recent experience, she said it hadn’t been updated since shortly after she joined the firm.

I spend a lot of time working with lawyers to improve their firm bios and LinkedIn profiles. I know what some of you are thinking: “Is it really that important?” The answer is *yes*, and the reason is that buying behavior is changing. Consider these two studies:

* A Corporate Executive Board study of more than 1,400 business-to-business clients and customers found that they completed nearly 60 percent of a typical purchasing decision before even having a conversation with a supplier.
* According to a recent study published by Hinge Research Institute, more than 80 percent of buyers of professional services review a company’s website before engaging.

In other words, prospects are conducting their own research to vet their choices. You may be eliminated from consideration without even knowing you were a contender. This is equally true internally — partners often review associate bios when putting together teams.

Here are some thoughts on how to put your best foot forward.

**Introductory Information**

**1. Draw people in**. Whether you are preparing a firm bio or a LinkedIn profile, start with a summary to give people a quick snapshot of who you are and how you help clients. How many lawyer bios have you read that begin like this?

* *“Kelly is an associate in the firm’s litigation department.”*

Clients don’t care how the firm is organized internally; they want to know with whom you work and how you help them. A better start would be:

* *“Kelly helps technology companies protect their intellectual property jewels—patents, trademarks and copyrights—through both preventive measures and, when necessary, litigation.”*

Write in plain English (except if using clients’ terminology and acronyms), using short sentences, short paragraphs and active language.

**2. Highlight key facts.** Many bio templates or formats organize things like education, presentations or prior work experience into separate sections. If you have impressive credentials that might be overlooked in sidebars or tabs, introduce them in the summary for the reader. For example:

* *“With an MBA in logistics, Dan speaks the language of the transportation industry and has a first-hand understanding of the issues facing his clients.”*
* *“In the past 18 months, Carla has presented more than 20 educational programs to businesses about the Affordable Care Act.”*

**3. Focus on the most recent, important or desirable issues.** One senior lawyer’s bio began with something he did for the first five years of his practice that he: (a) no longer does; and (b) no longer wishes to do. Why make that someone’s first impression? Instead, lead with your sweet spot or the area of practice you most wish to develop.

**Past Experience**

**1. Include representative matters**. Clients want to know with whom you work and how you help them. Perhaps the best way to do that is to include a bulleted list of actual cases, when possible, or scenarios disguised to protect client confidentiality, like:

* *“Represented a general contractor in a major dispute with a subcontractor.”*
* *“Assisted restaurant management in addressing tip credit issues.”*

**2. Turn prior work experience into a benefit.** The key to including prior experience is whether it is relevant to clients. I have met with lawyers who have experience doing what their clients do — as HR managers, insurance adjusters or in-house counsel — but it is not reflected in the lawyers’ bios. Not only is this experience reassuring to clients, it is a clear differentiator and should be emphasized.

If you joined a midsize firm after working for a large, international law firm, you can add that to your bio. While your firm may not want to name competitors’ names, your prior experience no doubt factored into the firm’s decision to hire you and clients might be similarly impressed.

If the benefit of your experience is less obvious, you may need to connect the dots for readers. For example, one corporate associate’s bio noted he had spent two years in the firm’s litigation department. If you are going to include that information, tell the reader why it’s important:

* *“Adam’s experience as a litigator helps him anticipate potentially troublesome language or situations that can arise in manufacturers’ relationships with distributors.”*

**3. Use discretion with articles and presentations**. Clients look at these items to determine your subject-matter expertise. A bio should illustrate a sustained thought-leadership effort in your selected practice(s). However, there are some cases where you may want to think twice about including them, for example, an old article that involves a completely unrelated area or a presentation addressing an issue that no longer exists.

**Other Information**

**1. Include outside activities.** Clients review outside activities to gauge your leadership and to determine mutual connections (human and emotional). As a result, I often suggest including more information rather than less. Professional activities are an easy call; however, personal activities (e.g., running marathons) can be appropriate, too. A prospect contacted one lawyer because his profile indicated he plays in a community band — and so does she.

**2. Demonstrate language skills.** Show, don’t tell. If you are fluent in German, use it in a sentence or two on your profile. If your firm bio template doesn’t lend itself to this type of information, LinkedIn certainly does.

To those who tell me their website bio has never gotten them a call, I say, “Bingo.” Spend a little time improving your online profiles and you might be surprised what happens.

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