



Perfecting a Digital Presence for Professional Services Companies

by Emily Reeves / 6.2013

Overview

Product companies and retailers have it easier when it comes to digital communications: they have something visual that customers can see and experience and usually form an attachment to that they want to talk about. Professional services companies — physicians, attorneys, accountants, bankers, marketing consultants, etc. — don't have a product to show and glamorize. What they do have are people. And making a purchase decision for professional services is all about the relationships with the people providing the service, making digital channels perfect for marketing their services. This digital whitepaper covers how professional services individuals and companies can position their services in digital channels to build relationships and referrals.

Why use digital channels?

- 1** Digital channels make it easy for your prospective clients **to find you**. Even for professional services, most searches start on the web now. If you are not listed in the search results, you don't exist in the mind of the consumers. Build your search equity with content on digital channels.
- 2** Digital channels give your happy clients a **place to link to** when they talk about how pleased they are with the services you provided.
- 3** Digital channels allow you to **position yourself as a thought-leader** through content marketing.
- 4** Digital channels provide you with the opportunity to **build relationships and trust** through engagement and conversation with prospective customers.
- 5** Digital channels give you control of your **reputation management**. By staying on top of what others are saying about you and responding, while also sharing information about your successes, you can manage how people see and perceive you and your services.

Who should be represented?

Many professional services providers are part of larger firms and groups of individuals. Should the brand/firm/agency be represented or should the individuals be represented digitally? It is both. The services may be retained based on the reputation of the firm, but it will be the reputation of the individuals that build the reputation of the firm. And clients will want to know the person they will be working on a daily basis and feel good about the knowledge, reputation and leadership of that individual. We as individuals are all brands now; think of managing your digital

presence as personal branding. Your digital voice is your personal voice; introduce yourself to the world.

What kind of content should be shared?

When it comes to content, you should think like a publisher and think like your target audience: what can you share that will make your customers choose your digital “magazine” from the virtual newsstand? Here are some idea starters for consideration:

- What keeps your customers up at night? How can you solve their problems. Remember to use language your customers would use and understand.
- Case studies of success stories.
- How-to explanations for conducting a do-it-yourself review of business needs before hiring a professional.
- Tips for hiring a professional in your industry.
- Customer testimonials.
- Introduction/bio videos of employees.
- Question and answer sessions, held live on a channel like Twitter.

Where should content be shared?

Not every channel is right for you and the services you offer and the messages you have to share. Think about what your master plan should be and where the best places are for those messages before you start talking.

Website:

Think of your website as the hub for all communications related to yourself and your business. All content shared on other channels should link back to the website, and links out to other social channels should be shared and easily found on the website.

Email:

Utilize email communications to keep prospects, clients and other interested parties updated on your activities and help keep the company of top-of-mind for when there is a need. Build an email database using a client database, a prospect list and with an opt-in feature on the website. Send email no more frequently than twice a month to the database.

LinkedIn:

Engage with clients and potential clients through two-way digital communications channels like LinkedIn to share content with followers in that network. Update the profile with graphics and regularly post status updates with links to content recently posted on the website and to relevant industry articles. Join LinkedIn groups related to your business. Listen to the conversations these potential clients are having in the groups and join the conversation with relevant contributions when appropriate. Consider hosting a LinkedIn group to host conversations related to your industry.

Twitter:

Use Twitter to share news and content in a headline-like format. Share company news, industry articles, people/employee profiles and project updates two to three times a day, every day of the week. Include links to content, photos and videos as much as possible. Work to build your Twitter followers by including a link and call to action to follow in all email communications. Add a link to the Twitter handle to all email signatures, as well. Follow clients, potential clients, industry organizations and business leaders in key market areas on Twitter. Listen to the conversations and join, respond and retweet when

relevant to garner engagement with these influencers.

YouTube:

YouTube is the second largest search engine behind Google. Video streams are expected to rise to 95-percent of internet use by 2015. Storytelling through video will continue to grow in popularity. Video puts a human face on the services you sell. Use it liberally.

Blog:

Consider creating a blog to establish authority, to be home-base for all your messages, and your personal website for individual reputation building.

What are a few final tips?

- Start out slow and get comfortable with the channels before pushing information regularly.
- Pay attention to what people are talking about and respond and engage.
- Be human.
- Measure everything. Optimize. Repeat what works. Do this at least monthly.

Interested in learning more?

Contact Emily Reeves at ereeves@stoneward.com for help planning your brand's digital engagements.

About Stone Ward

Stone Ward is a full-service ad agency. Established in 1984 by Larry Stone and Millie Ward, today the agency employs 52, with capitalized billings exceeding \$40 million. The agency's offices are in Chicago and Little Rock.

About Emily Reeves, Director of Digital Innovation & Insight Planning

As the agency's digital champion, Emily Reeves proves that Stone Ward has the offerings, expertise and alliances to bring sound, measurable digital innovation to our clients' marketing efforts. A seasoned communications strategist with a passion for all things digital, Emily has distinguished herself as an avid blogger, social media speaker, industry observer and moderator. In her role as digital thought leader for Stone Ward, Emily collaborates with our team of agency leaders in creative, brand management, public relations, media, digital technology and video production to create relevant ways to tell our clients' stories in the digital space and to provide meaningful measurement and analytics as a tool for calculating our efforts. Emily's focus on measurement extends to her duties as the agency's research leader, where she works with Stone Ward clients to develop and execute research plans that inform integrated client marketing efforts.