

The Career Development Office recognizes that social media is a tool students may use for personal purposes and to present a professional profile to attract potential employers and demonstrate interest and experience in a particular practice area, industry, employment setting, or geographic area.

Because networking contacts and prospective legal employers routinely conduct due diligence about you, including a search of social media sites for information, the following guidelines are designed to assist you in avoiding common missteps when using social media.

Best Practices in Managing Your Account, Profile, and Connections

Profile:

- Choose your profile name carefully. Do not use a username that is misleading, immature, offensive, or unprofessional. Choose a username that is close to your own name to make it easier for online connections to become real-life connections.
- Choose your profile photo carefully. Even if you restrict your privacy settings, your name and profile photo still will be visible and searchable on most social media sites. Choose a head shot that will allow someone to recognize you and that features you in professional attire in a professional setting, without other distractions. Do not use a photo where another person clearly has been cropped out or where you are drinking alcohol. Use a high resolution picture.

Settings:

- Choose your privacy settings to control what non-friends may see and link to you. Even if you are cautious about the information you share, your friends' pages may be publicly accessible and therefore material posted on their sites will be visible to potential employers.
- Some sites change their privacy settings and defaults regularly, so pay attention to updates and frequently monitor your settings.

People:

- Choose your friends, connections, and followers wisely. We recommend that you use tools such as Facebook for close personal friends, and use another social media site such as LinkedIn for professional contacts such as professors, professional colleagues, managers or supervisors, alumni and other attorneys.
- If the feature is available, use sublists to control the type of information visible from your page to various connections.
- Assuming that you maintain a completely professional profile on LinkedIn, if you receive a connection request from someone previously unknown to you, you may want to accept the request when you have good professional connections in common. Social media is all about networking and creating and establishing online relationships. Over time, you will want to work to move online relationships to more valuable in-person relationships.

Digital Dirt:

- Research what can be found about you on the internet. Google your name and variations of your name. Set up a Google alert with your name. Search your name on multiple sites including Google, Bing, and Yahoo. Run a personal search on www.pipl.com.
- If you find negative information about yourself, contact the poster or the site owner/administrator and ask that it be removed.
- Establish a routine of checking the internet for personal information.
- Beef up your security settings to eliminate posting and tagging without your permission.
- Remove from your list of friends and connections those whom you do not know very well or whose own judgment you do not trust.

Best Practices in Posting

The following are best practices for participating in social media.

- When in doubt, do not post. Feel free to contact the CDO for additional guidance on questionable material in a post or a review of your profile on a social media site.

- Assume permanence. You should assume that any posted materials will be available on the internet indefinitely because it is virtually impossible to recall or permanently delete material once posted.
- Be polite. Do not post derogatory, defamatory, or inflammatory content about others for any reason. Disagreeing with another person's opinions or actions is a legitimate form of expression, but express your disagreement in an intellectual and rational way supported by facts and references that are free of overt or underlying negativity. Stay calm.
- Be responsible. As a future lawyer, take responsibility for what you write and exercise good judgment and common sense. You must take extra care with any information you offer. Do not give legal advice or form attorney-client relationships when using social media.
- Be honest. Your online reputation will follow you in real life. Be sure that online information matches your offline resume because prospective employers often check the consistency and accuracy of both.
- Watch your tone. When the only information a prospective employer knows about you is in your application materials and online postings, your words take on extra importance. If you would not make the statement in person, do not make it online.
- Post wisely. Always think carefully about what you post and your responses to others' posts. Never post anything online that you would not want a potential employer to see. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, and tone count in the development of your online presence.
- Be professional. Consider the professional you want to be and act that way now, both in public and online. Posted content should not be illegal, obscene, defamatory, threatening, disparaging, vulgar, infringing of intellectual property rights, invasive of privacy, or otherwise injurious or offensive. Practice respect for other students, professors, potential employers, clients, competitors, lawyers, staff, and all others in any posting. Be wary of expressing political opinions, religious views, or others items on social media, especially via LinkedIn, that you would not reflect on your resume. While you have a right to express your opinions on these subjects, such posts can result in misinterpretation or adversely affect a potential employer's opinion of you.
- Speak for yourself. Students may not use the name of Richmond Law to endorse or promote any product, opinion, cause or political candidate.

- Preserve confidentiality. Employer information should not be shared. Do not post pictures of an employer event or employer's offices without express permission. Do not share information about clients, colleagues or opposing counsel.
- Avoid conflicts. Be aware that conflicts of interest can result from an online comment about litigation or potential litigation from an employee or intern/summer associate. Comply with your employer's policies especially in the areas of privacy, confidentiality, intellectual property and acceptable use when writing or posting any content.
- Be ethical. As a legal professional, you will be subject to a code of ethics. Familiarize yourself with the ethics rules on social media and digital communication in the jurisdiction(s) in which you intend to practice because different states impose different restrictions. Bar associations and many employers regularly conduct background checks to assess your character and fitness. Bad behavior online or by email could delay or derail your opportunity to take the bar exam.
- Be private. If you show a lack of judgment online about your personal life and opinions, an employer likely will presume your in-person behavior and judgment are the same.
- Report inappropriate content. Because unprofessional content from another member of this law school community can affect the reputation of everyone, students are encouraged to report (anonymously) questionable content on another's social media site to the CDO or to the Associate Dean for Student Services and Administration.