Using the Internet to Make it Rain--
The Challenges of Advertising in a Digital World

*We now begin to pay attention to Mindy’s journey, as she works her way up the associate ladder.*

Mindy Fuller is enjoying her experience with the large corporate law firm -- the big cases and big salary. Mid-way through the year, Delores Kline, the firm’s managing partner meets with the mid-level associates. After politely asking how they are doing, the partner shares her opinion that the associates are extremely fortunate to have jobs and reminds them of the big expectations placed on them by the partners. She says that while the associates have enjoyed their very competitive salaries for the past several years, before long it will be necessary for them to bring in clients if they expect to remain with the firm.

The next day Mindy is enjoying lunch with some law school classmates, and learns about Caado, the lawyer recommendation website. A classmate talks about how effective it’s been for him to promote himself and pick up new clients. He explains that the site lists all lawyers and provides a basic profile which the lawyer can then update -- you can post a picture, tell about your practice areas, and have clients provide reviews or testimonials about your services. He cautions though that you have to pay attention to your profile in case a client posts a negative review because then you might want to mitigate any potential damage to your reputation.

Another classmate says that she has become really active on LinkedIn and is receiving new endorsements everyday. Her profile lists commercial litigation as one of her skills, but she is also practicing some bankruptcy law. She suggests that everyone at lunch should have a LinkedIn profile and endorse each other.

As lunch concludes, yet another classmate cautions that when using Internet sites you have to be especially careful to follow the rules of professional conduct. When Mindy gets back to her office, she finds the website and bookmarks it. She makes a note on her calendar to review the site and decide if it is legitimate and, if so, determine whether it might be a good tool for client development. Mindy also updates her LinkedIn profile, which she hasn’t really used since she set it up in law school. She sends invitations to connect to a number of contacts, including everyone who was at lunch that day. Mindy is amazed by how quickly her friends accept her invitations to connect and endorse Mindy for litigation skills, commercial law and public speaking.

That evening, as Mindy is getting ready to leave the office, she runs into the managing partner on the way to the bathroom and they begin to talk. The managing partner looks at her watch and comments on how good it is to see Mindy working late. “I can tell that you took what I said seriously.” Mindy mentions that she is already thinking of using an Internet website to cultivate clients. The partner nods approvingly noting that she wishes she had the Internet when she started practicing. She adds, “I’ve always said make hay while the sun shines. With the Internet, you can make hay 24/7.” Mindy agrees and, trying to interject a little humor, asks “what about when it’s raining?” Looking her in the eye, the partner replies, “If you can help make it rain, you make partner.” As they depart, the partner asks if Mindy is heading home. “No,” Mindy says changing her plans, “just taking a break.”

Mindy heads back to her office and pulls up the CAADO site. She finds her blank profile and signs up so that she can update it and add information about her practice area. She notices that there is a place for client testimonials. After considering for a moment and then rejecting the idea of creating a fake one to “start the ball rolling,” she picks up the phone and calls her neighbor, Lanny, who she had helped with a landlord dispute while still in law school. Her neighbor answers and Mindy asks Lanny to post a review that will make Mindy look good and help her build her practice. Lanny happily agrees.

The next day Mindy visits the Caado website and sees that her lawyer profile has been updated and her neighbor’s excellent review has been posted. Click here to view Mindy’s attorney profile on the Caado site.

The review is not only positive, but pushes the envelope a bit. Mindy ponders what to do and decides that since she did not write it, she should not feel responsible for its content. She sends an e-mail to the managing partner with a link to the site and short message that she will do her best to develop clients. Mindy also sends the link to family and friends asking them to make comments on the lawyer description and to feel free to pass it on to friends who may be interested in a lawyer, now or in the future. A few days later she looks on the site and is surprised to see that another client has voluntarily posted a review. She sends an e-mail to the client thanking him for taking the time to write the review.

Mindy is psyched by what’s happening and decides to spend a little time online pursuing more client development efforts. She does a Google search on law and contract disputes and finds a link to a chat room. She begins to follow a conversation between two people discussing a similar problem they each have with their landlords. Mindy is excited because she and one of the partners recently settled a case with similar facts. Mindy joins the conversation and tells them about her colleague’s recent success and offers to assist them. They thank her for the information and ask for her website address. She gives them the firm address and also a link to the Caado profile. Inspired to make more rain, Mindy comes across a website named QuickAdviceNow and registers to be one of the lawyers who provides quick legal answers to consumers questions from all over the country. She smiles, thinking to herself, “This rainmaking thing is actually fun!”

About two weeks later Mindy’s enthusiasm wanes a bit when a disgruntled client posts a negative review about Mindy on several websites. The client refused to settle and lost his case based upon the facts, not the advocacy. Mindy contemplates how to respond.

As Mindy begins to appreciate the power of social media, she becomes a fan of several Facebook organizations to both show support and network. She joins the Facebook pages for the ACLU and PETA.

She decides to set up a second account using “Mindy Moo,” a nickname she was called as a child and known only to her closest circle of friends. Mindy “friends” organizations and causes she finds important to support but isn’t comfortable making public to her colleagues.