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Technology an important tool in professionalism, civility mission

We here at the Commission on Professionalism frequently discuss technology and how it has transformed the practice of law. For our own organization, technology has allowed us to more effectively promote our mission of increased civility, professionalism and inclusion. It's therefore no surprise that technology has served as the starting point for the transformation that has taken place at the commission just in the past few weeks.

Let's start at the beginning. Technology has long been essential to our operations. As many of you know, we at the commission review the content of courses and activities to determine whether they qualify for professional responsibility credit. We primarily do so using a web-based platform through which providers submit their applications, and we review those applications. Without technology, reviewing these thousands of applications every year would be overwhelming.

Technology also plays a key role in our statewide lawyer-to-lawyer mentoring program. The program provides 6 hours of CLE credit to qualified mentors and mentees who complete one full year of the mentoring program.

Mentoring program administrators are each provided with a microsite hosted on our own website that they can use for outreach to their mentor-mentee pairs. Mentoring partners also receive a quarterly electronic newsletter to keep them apprised of mentoring news and trends that might be applicable to their pairs.

Finally, mentors and mentees submit their CLE applications through our website and can receive their credit as quickly as

possible. None of this would be possible without technology.

But it is only in recent years that we have harnessed the potential of how technology can allow us to truly fulfill our mission of statewide professionalism education.

Illinois has 60,000 square miles and more than 90,000 lawyers who practice in very different legal communities. Such distances mean that commission staff cannot meet any one group in person very often. The solution? Social media.

In late 2011, we at the commission began dipping our toe into the social media pool. We set up commission Facebook and LinkedIn pages, a Twitter account and started a blog. For those of us who started practicing law before the Internet and even before computers (thankfully not all of us at the commission), the learning curve has been steep. However, the positive aspects are clear.

As we continue on our Journey2Civility, we hope to engage more lawyers in conversations about professionalism.

When we began this journey, we had no idea whether people would be interested enough in professionalism to read our blog or connect with us on social media channels. We were amazed to learn that there was in fact enormous interest. According to our 2013 data, people spent more than 15,000 hours accessing our site. As of today, our blog averages around 25,000 readers each month. Our LinkedIn connections, Twitter followers and Facebook likes are increasing as well.

Obviously, many people care about professionalism and how to keep and enhance the core values of the legal profession, even as we

PROFESSIONALISM ON POINT

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As executive director of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism, Jayne Rizzo Reardon promotes professionalism among lawyers and judges as a guiding principle for living the justice we are called to serve.

embrace the changes impacting the way we practice law.

However, as our social media presence grew, we came to realize that the shorthand for our name, ILSCCP, did not make a very good handle for social media. It wasn't a great URL or email address either. The letters were not easily remembered nor conceptually related to our organization or our mission.

After many months of research and consultation, we hit upon "2Civility" as a substitute name for ILSCCP on our communications platform: "2" because of the transformation we are promoting and "civility" because it is the code of respect that is the hallmark of our profession and society.

2Civility is connected to the historical purpose the Illinois Supreme Court declared in establishing the Commission on Professionalism. It is at the heart of our mission (and more easily searchable on the Internet).

On April 4, we rolled out our 2Civility communications platform. The backbone of our platform, www.2civility.org, has interactive features that we hope will connect lawyers and inspire change.

For example, we have a Lawyer Spotlight feature in which lawyers may nominate folks in their organizations or legal communities who exemplify the highest ideals of the profession. Although professionalism may not be sensational enough to warrant coverage in the popular press, it is important for us, as a self-regulating profession, to hold up positive role models. If we don't tell our positive stories, who will?

We also have adopted a new logo representative of the diversity and inclusion part of our mission. Before the logo was adopted, we showed our logo to many of our stakeholders and asked what color our logo was.

Inevitably they cocked their heads, looked at it and said, "multicolored." Precisely. That is our profession, our society.

We also have a new tagline, developed in consultation with our various collaborators. We wanted to come up with a short few words to encapsulate what we do. Together, we came up with: "2Civility: Connecting Lawyers. Inspiring Change."

It has been a fascinating and educational process to brainstorm with the wonderful people of our state who are working with us to promote professionalism. To those involved in the lawyer-to-lawyer mentoring program, the law school orientation programs, continuing legal education and professional development, thanks for all of your help. We truly could not have done this without you.

As we continue on our Journey2Civility, we hope to engage more lawyers in conversations about professionalism. That includes conversations about legal education, mentoring, career development, future law and the state of our profession.

Technology is our friend on this journey. Check us out at 2civility.org, and join the movement.