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thing clients see when they arrive at your office. The name of your firm is also what your clients use when talking to colleagues and sending you referral business.

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Trademark:

TM

Registered Trademark:

®

Your accounting firm's name serves as its brand identity and is generally the first

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Trademarks are an investment in the future.

Some of today's biggest professional services and accounting firms started out as small, one-office locations. And even if your current plans don't include growing past your local area, the reality is that you can't always predict what the future has in store for you. You can proactively protect your firm's brand and keep all of your options open by getting a trademark for your firm name. Not only will this give you a legal leg to stand on if a competitor opens a similarly named firm, but if you do decide to grow (or sell) your successful business down the road, it gives you options to expand beyond your current location without the worry of having to change your name.

Consider filing a trademark on your name first, then your logo.

If finances are flush, file two trademark applications simultaneously: one for your firm name and one for your firm logo. However, if the budget is a bit more scaled back, it is a good idea to consider filing for a trademark on your firm name first, as this will ensure that you are receiving the highest level of protection on the name itself.

Obtaining a trademark registration on your logo means that your firm name is protected *within the graphic context of your logo*—if you develop a new logo 5 years down the road, your federal registration would no longer be effective and you would have to re-file to obtain federal registration rights on your name again.

Monitor for infringement.

Once you've received a registered trademark, it is your responsibility as the owner of the trademark to ensure that no other business is infringing on it. US trademark law

says that if you don't monitor the marketplace and enforce your trademark rights,

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Stake your claim on social media.

Regardless of your plans on using social media for outreach or marketing, it's important that you take control of your trademark names so that no one else can. If you leave those names open, you are at risk of confusing current or potential clients—not to mention that you're putting your reputation and your bottom line in jeopardy.

If you have not already done so, visit the top social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and set up a handle or profile using your trademark name. And if you find another firm is already using it? Let your attorney know. S/he may be able to assist in obtaining the username back by submitting a trademark claim with the platform at issue.

Either way, follow through on the process of "reserving" your trademark name on social media whether you plan to be extremely active or simply want to hold your spot.

Obtaining a trademark for your accounting firm's name can have a huge impact on your long-term branding strategy. It is important to understand that trademarks are an investment in the future of your business. You want to consider obtaining a trademark registration on your name first, then your logo, and work with your attorney to keep an eye out for other practices who may be infringing on your trademark name. And finally, stake your claim on social media, regardless of your plans there. By following these tips, you'll be protecting your brand while promoting it.

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Firm Management

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