

“There’s Power in Numbers”
Recruitment and Retention of Members Panel Discussion

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Using Benefits to Drive Recruitment and Retention of Members

Ultimately, whether you’re a voluntary bar or mandatory, a potential member needs a reason to join and a current member needs a reason to continue. Obviously in a mandatory state, practicing lawyers have no choice *but* to join – but for bar leaders, whether mandatory or voluntary, it is critical to know what attorneys expect to gain from being a member. How will membership in your association benefit them? Is it building their business? Networking? Continuing education? Career development? Advancement in the community of lawyers, or politics?

If you can get a handle on those expectations, you can develop programs, shape services, and tailor your messages to meet those needs.

At the Massachusetts Bar Association, we’re currently focusing on two primary targets:

First, we are trying to position the Mass. Bar as the best place lawyers can turn for information on and access to new **technologies for legal practice and law-office management**.

Recognizing that lawyers don’t have the time to research the many products available for the legal market – and that they don’t even have time to learn how to use their computers properly -- we’re developing seminars, running articles in our monthly journal, forming new affinity partnerships with legal tech providers, and even becoming a provider ourselves – all in order to draw them to us for their technology needs.

Second, we’re focusing on what might best be called “**career management.**”

For new lawyers, we’re offering seminars and social opportunities to hear about alternative career options, learn how to network or interview for a new job, as well as traditional mentoring options where they can meet successful senior lawyers in their areas of interest.

And for established attorneys we’re developing programs that acknowledge the shifts and shrinking happening in the profession – and giving them the tools to meet those new challenges.

Career Management

In addition to our traditional CLE offerings, we have begun offering day-long events as well as short programs that focus directly on lawyers careers and the business of being a lawyer in today’s economy.

Through programs such as “How to Start & Run a Small or Solo Practice” and “300 Ways to Use Your Law Degree: Careers In & Out of the Law” we’re getting into nitty-gritty topics such as billing, marketing, client care, how to pick a practice area, renting versus buying your furniture – even things like whether to stay or leave the profession – because these are the issues our members are grappling with every day.

We’ve also started an informal series of talks by people in and out of the profession where they can hear interesting people – not necessarily lawyers -- talking about life issues, career choices, and personal decisions that impacted their careers and their lives.

The point of all of these – it’s to give our members what they truly need. Or in another way of looking at it: it’s to make the bar the place they turn to when they want help with their career.

Technology

The most important way we’re doing this is in providing technology services and products for lawyers and their practices.

We began two years ago by offering free access to the Casemaker Online Law Library as a member benefit. The reaction has been strong and positive – we are adding roughly 100 new members monthly.

But more than just offering members a way to shave thousands of dollars a year off their legal research bills, we saw Casemaker as the beginning of a complete package of services that address the needs of lawyers in taking advantage of the many new products being offered to lawyers – from billing and time management, to online research to courtroom A/V presentations, to phone systems and software. These kinds of tools can speed up their work, make them more competitive, and improve their bottom line.

To that end, less than a year after launching Casemaker -- in fact, during the entire development and launch process for Casemaker -- we have developed our new Legal Tech Toolbox.

Through a number of affinity partners, we’re now offering discounts and exclusive deals on online CLE, web-based phone and business systems, listservs, voice-recognition software, document management software, Lexis-Nexis, as well as computer training classes and coaching in Word, Excell and PowerPoint geared specifically for lawyers. And we’re working on more, such as data storage and recovery, web conferencing, banking and more.

All of this is being driven by one idea – that our members need help in learning about and sorting through the vast array of tech tools available to them. And (hopefully) they will appreciate that the Mass. Bar is doing that vetting for them, negotiating the best available pricing, and offering training to keep them current. In pursuing this one-stop-shopping approach to member benefits, we are trying to train our members to see the bar as their best career resource and business ally.

And that is the benefit of membership. And that will prove to be our strongest tool in retaining and growing our membership.