



The Web's Do-It-Yourself culture and the law

“Branded networks” such as LegalZoom, Rocketlawyer and Avvo serve clients who want to be more involved in the legal process

BY TANISHA SHAFER

The DIY (“Do It Yourself”) culture is growing. Web sites like Etsy, Pinterest, LifeHacker, and GreenUpgrader are great examples of how people are taking a proactive approach in how they spend – or do not spend – their money and time. For example, in the context of products, someone from the DIY culture would use cardboard, fabric, ribbon, and push pins to create his own pinboard instead of buying a pinboard.

In the context of services, someone from the DIY culture would figure out how to file his own taxes instead of hiring an accountant; or, he would use a “branded network” like LegalZoom to draft a contract.

This DIY culture tends to make more fully informed decisions on products and services by researching their options before making their consumer decision. Sometimes they purchase partial services (or supplies to make a product) and with these “toolkits” do the rest themselves. Other times, they forego purchases altogether. Instead, they make a product or perform a service entirely on their own with guidance offered by free or inexpensive resources.

DIY and the legal industry

The DIY culture effect is trickling into the legal industry. In corporate and IP law, clients want a greater role in determining how their money is spent in attorney fees and costs. The innovative firm has already implemented comprehensive

operation management plans with transparent audit systems to show clients that their money is being spent on value added work. In the spirit of DIY, these plans also give clients a chance to carry out some of the work themselves when possible.

Personal injury, employment law and labor law are not exempt from the DIY culture effect. With branded networks like RocketLawyer budding, many different types of lawyers, including personal injury, employment and labor law lawyers, can operate a virtual law practice that meets the needs of the DIY culture clients. These clients welcome being able to perform some of the work. The clients are involved and guided through gathering information, documents, and filling out forms.

RocketLawyer’s appeal is apparent by taking one look at its Web site. The site’s layout is inviting, easy-on-the-eyes with pleasing colors, clean font, and easy to understand language. Aside from the user-friendly interface, it claims affordable services and provides an assortment of attorneys to appeal to a variety of clients.

Active role for the DIY culture

Whether a lawyer is a part of a nationally branded network, operates an independent virtual law practice, or is a part of a more traditional law firm, there are steps the lawyer can take to be more DIY-culture friendly.

It is a given that the DIY culture likes to gather information on how to make and do things on their own. They also tend to figure out their life and legal

situations on their own by reading blogs, articles and other content on a given subject. To reach this DIY market, a first step then is to post legal content to the Web. Consider using a Word Press blog to post your content, or becoming part of a branded network such as Avvo.com.

Avvo is a DIY-oriented Web site for lawyers. Avvo allows attorneys to answer legal questions, publish articles, and post video content. The DIY culture may be particularly drawn to Avvo because it provides verified endorsements from attorneys, clients, and third-party Web sites, and is also developing a growing database of legal content – including legal answers from attorneys with high Avvo scores.

What’s an Avvo score? When a lawyer decides to “claim” his or her Avvo profile, that lawyer is automatically assigned an initial Avvo score. Scores can be improved in several ways, most notably by posting content – substantive, lengthy, and in your practice area.

Avvo makes its money by helping lawyers market on the Web, and they provide a wealth of Web-marketing material. For example, if you’re looking to improve your search results placement in local searches through search engine optimization, Avvo has slides posted on SlideShare for its recent webinar “Everything Lawyers Need to Know About Google + and Local Search.”

Be transparent

Regardless of your Web marketing approach, one step every lawyer can take to be more appealing to the DIY crowd is to make the legal process more transparent



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for clients. The DIY culture likes to understand processes and be a part of them. Allow the DIY clients to see the steps that need to be taken to reach their goal, and let the DIY clients play a greater role.

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