

LAWYERS JOURNAL

LRS streamlines, enhances web referral process

By Brian Knavish

It's no secret that more and more people are using the internet to hire attorneys – for years, the ACBA has met this demand by offering various online options to find and retain attorneys in the Pittsburgh area.

However, the bar association has now enhanced and modernized its online attorney-finding offerings via its Lawyers Referral Service. The changes give local residents an improved way to find and hire lawyers online, and it increases the stream of business the ACBA sends to participating members.

“We're excited about the changes,” said attorney Whitney Hughes, director of the ACBA's Lawyer Referral Service. “While we are in no way moving away from helping clients who call us on the phone find lawyers – that's still the core of what the LRS does – we also recognize that more and more people are finding lawyers online.

“We've offered Internet referrals to our panel attorneys a number of ways through the years, but in recent months we've taken steps to streamline and revamp the way we go about this. I think these changes are a ‘win’ for the clients, our panel attorneys and the ACBA overall.”

Previously, prospective clients could engage with the ACBA online to find an attorney through one of two ways: the traditional LRS online referral option or via the “Pittsburgh Find-a-Lawyer” website.

Those using the LRS site would select one or several areas of practice and then trust the expertise of the ACBA to refer to them an attorney who matched that individual's specific legal needs.

The Find-a-Lawyer service was more “self-serve.” Those who used this service – which was launched in 2012 – could select one of several general fields of practice and then be provided with a menu of attorney selections. The user would view attorney bios and photos and then choose a lawyer on their own, based on this info, rather than rely on an ACBA recommendation.

Those programs operated in unison for years, but the Find-a-Lawyer website – despite the ACBA's efforts to promote the service – proved unsuccessful.

“The LRS web referral option has always been successful, but the Find-a-Lawyer site wasn't as successful as we had hoped,” said Hughes. “We weren't getting enough visitors to Find-a-Lawyer and, therefore, not enough referrals to the attorneys who signed up for the service.”

As a result, late last year the ACBA decided to terminate the Find-a-Lawyer service and, instead, combine some of its attractive “self-serve” features with the already successful LRS web referral option.

With the new enhancements, when potential clients click the web referral option at the LRS site –

Other changes

The revamped web referral program is the latest in a list of several improvements the ACBA has made to the Lawyer Referral Service in the past 18 months, changes that statistics show are dramatically improving the service (see accompanying article).

- **New website** – In 2016, the ACBA launched a new, custom designed LRS website with a catchy, easy-to-remember web address: *GetAPittsburghLawyer.com*.
- **Increased marketing** – The ACBA has increased its LRS marketing budget and currently uses those dollars to market the service through Internet keyword ads and radio “live reads” by such personalities as Colin Dunlap and Chris Mueller from sports talk station 93.7 The Fan, and “Bubba” from Star 100.7 FM. The 93.7 audience skews male, and 100.7 has a majority female listenership.
- **Greater staffing** – With more marketing comes more calls. To keep up with the volume, the ACBA has hired additional law clerks to field the incoming calls.
- **Back office improvements** – The ACBA has overhauled many aspects of LRS accounting, reporting and tracking, creating a more efficient system for running the program.

www.GetAPittsburghLawyer.com – they now also see a photo and a brief bio of the attorney who has been referred to them. And, tapping into one of the attractive features of the former Find-A-Lawyer site, these clients can obtain multiple referrals and self-select while also getting that much-sought-after third-party recommendation from the ACBA.

“We've combined the best features of both former approaches and focused our efforts on one improved online option,” said Hughes. “The two ‘similar but different’ web options could get a bit muddled. This new approach is more streamlined and just better for our panel attorneys and our clients.”

LRS Panel attorneys are embracing the change.

“I like it,” said Ryan Very of Very Law, who estimates that one-third of the referrals he gets from the LRS are internet referrals. “I make sure to have a professional headshot, and I make sure the associates at my firm get good headshots when we hire them. I think it's a good approach, and it makes you appear professional to a client who is looking for an attorney online.”

Very added that he believes the most important aspect of the LRS is that it offers clients a recommendation from a trusted source in the ACBA.

“I don’t think a lot of people trust simply googling to find their lawyer. They want to find a lawyer through a reputable source,” he said. ■

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– Ryan Very, *Very Law*

Metrics show sharp increase in LRS referrals

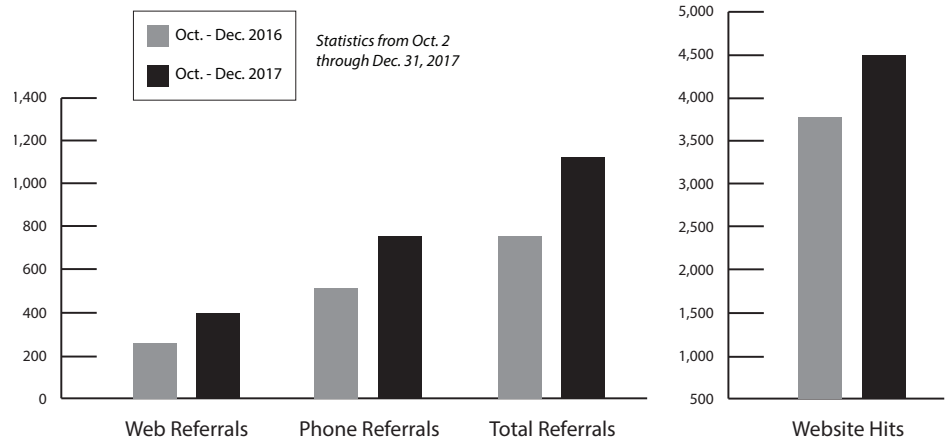
In recent months, the ACBA has invested substantial resources in enhancing and growing the Lawyer Referral Service. And, as recent metrics show, the investment is paying off for the attorneys who subscribe to be part of the service.

Highlighted statistics show the following growth from the fourth quarter of 2017 compared to the fourth quarter of 2016:

- A 55-percent increase in total referrals made by the LRS to panel attorneys (1,156 vs. 744)
- A 56-percent increase in the number of phone referrals. (751 vs. 481)
- A 53-percent increase in the number of web referrals. (405 vs. 263)
- An 18-percent increase in website hits. (4,496 vs. 3,808)

Additional statistics of interest show that, during 2017:

- The ACBA referred 4,704 clients to LRS panel attorneys.



- 10,080 unique users visited the LRS website.

- These visitors clicked through 18,862 page views.

Any practicing attorney who is an active ACBA member and has current

professional liability insurance is eligible to become an LRS panel attorney. A one-year subscription is \$220 and a two-year subscription is \$400.

For details, contact Whitney Hughes at 412-402-6703 or whughes@acba.org. ■