

MEDIA RELATIONS

Background

The courts and the entire justice system are in the background of many different news stories each day. Open any newspaper, watch or listen to any news broadcast and you will encounter news that involves courts, the laws and lawyers. The Missouri Bar is in regular contact with reporters throughout the state, providing them with information to accurately convey to the public the technical world of law and courts. News of bar activities and issues is also conveyed to the media. The Missouri Bar has always communicated with reporters, editors and news directors through news releases, news conferences, background packets, programs, phone calls or via the Internet. Bar officers are frequently called upon to provide the bar's point of view on legal issues and stories.

Almost all of The Missouri Bar's media focus is on Missouri media outlets. Occasionally bar news or opinion pieces are distributed to national news outlets. This has led to a variety of its programs and initiatives having been highlighted in national publications. The bar's Law School for Legislators, as well as its efforts to encourage lawyers to become legislators, have been carried in national media. However, it is the American Bar Association that has a national focus and audience. Several times each year, the ABA coordinates its media program with that of local and state bar associations. For instance, it may send an email to bar communications departments to advise them that the ABA president is doing a media tour and may be on the radio in their state.

Missouri Bar Activities

In the course of a year, The Missouri Bar issues many different news releases about bar activities and issues. Significant actions or positions of the Board of Governors are conveyed via news releases, as are the introduction and progress of bar-drafted legislation. The news releases follow the cycle of the bar year. For example: During the Annual Meeting, news of the officers' elections is sent statewide, while news of award winners is sent to each winner's hometown; news of renowned speakers at the Annual Meeting is distributed in the host city and nearby communities. If a survey or study completed on behalf of the bar yields interesting results, those will be released statewide. News of significant new programs is released when the programs are ready to be launched.

Each month, the Communications Department sends *Briefly*, the bar's newsletter to the media, to more than 400 reporters. This newsletter includes information about bar programs that may not be appropriate for a news release but which may interest reporters. Also included in each issue of *Briefly* is a background article on either substantive law or justice administration issues. *Briefly* provides reporters with a monthly update on The Missouri Bar, reminding them of the organization's availability to link them to knowledgeable sources of information.

Reporters from almost every newspaper in the state have called The Missouri Bar when they needed sources or resources to cover legal stories. The bar distributes its *Legal Directory for Reporters*, which lists committee chairs (or their designees) who can answer background questions about legal issues. Reporters also rely on the Press-Bar Commission's *News Reporter's Handbook*, which is now online on the bar's website. This one-of-a-kind publication includes

extensive information about Missouri's courts and legal system. It is also available on a floppy disk and has been distributed to all media outlets in the state. The Media Law Committee's *Media Law Handbook*, also online, is another resource that media managers rely upon.

The Missouri Press-Bar Commission places The Missouri Bar at the heart of the state's media. This organization, composed of some of the state's most influential editors, news directors and judges, meets yearly to discuss communications issues or problems between the media and legal professionals. The bar's director of media relations and communications director assist the commission accomplish its goals.

Sometimes a news release isn't sufficient for conveying complex information. In those cases, a news conference is planned. When the bar releases the results of the Judicial Evaluation Survey, it does so in conjunction with the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis and the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association in joint news conferences held in St. Louis, Kansas City and Jefferson City.

Editorial board meetings are another way The Missouri Bar ensures that significant issues come to the attention of editors and the public. In an editorial board meeting, bar leaders and other experts meet for half an hour with a newspaper's editors and legal reporters to provide background information on an issue, to answer questions, and to ask for editorial support of the bar's positions. These meetings were especially useful in alerting the media to the consequences of possible court funding cuts.

The Missouri Bar's website, www.mobar.org, is an incredibly rich resource for reporters. Everything The Missouri Bar does – every program, every publication, every meeting – may be found somewhere on the site. Additionally, it includes a searchable archive of articles from the *Journal of The Missouri Bar*.

The most far-reaching of the bar's media activities is its institutional advertising campaign. Each year, two or three positive messages about lawyers and the legal system are selected by the bar's president, and then produced professionally before being distributed through the Missouri Broadcasters Association. Several hundred radio and television stations throughout the state play these spots regularly. The campaign reaches all corners of the state, and it is rare to find someone in Missouri who hasn't heard or seen one of these messages. The institutional ad campaign ensures that the voice of Missouri's 28,000 lawyers is included in the mix of messages the media convey about the legal profession.