

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Background

It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of people contact The Missouri Bar each year seeking information about lawyers and our legal system. Some of these inquiries are from dissatisfied clients wanting to know where to complain about their attorney or to determine whether a particular lawyer is in good standing with the bar; some are from people who want to know about laws; and some are looking (unsuccessfully) for free legal advice. Even if the bar did nothing proactive, it would still be providing thousands of Missourians with useful information just by responding to these inquiries. Since its inception, The Missouri Bar has developed a reputation as the authoritative source of information about the law, lawyers and Missouri's legal system.

Likewise, the American Bar Association publishes excellent books for the public about laws and the legal system. Its website also includes an outstanding selection of brochures on legal topics for the public.

Missouri Bar Activities

Having established itself as a leading source of information about the justice system and the role of lawyers in society, The Missouri Bar continues to expand and improve its resources available to the public and uphold its commitment to education.

The most highly recognizable aspects of The Missouri Bar's public information program are the informational brochures explaining basic aspects of the legal system. These brochures are grouped into six "resource guides" offering information in six general categories: client information, probate law, family law, consumer law, business law, and law and the courts. With more than 50 brochure titles in The Missouri Bar's public information library, citizens can find information about nearly every aspect of the legal system – from traffic violations to divorce or the need for a will. The Missouri Bar distributes the resource guides in locales such as libraries, government offices, county courthouses, city halls and attorneys' offices, in addition to direct requests from the public. Missourians receive more than 100,000 copies of the resource guides each year.

In addition to the resource guides, The Missouri Bar provides the public with a variety of booklets developed by other groups within the bar, such as the Young Lawyers' Section. The Missouri Bar also publishes *Access*, a quarterly newsletter that includes the latest in news about laws affecting the citizens of Missouri. *Access* is available as either a printed publication or via e-mail.

Along with these printed materials, The Missouri Bar places a strong emphasis on the use of technology. The growing importance of the Internet and e-mail has opened the door to new ways in which to reach the public with important legal information. The Missouri Bar's website (www.mobar.org) boasts thousands of pages and documents detailing virtually every program, activity or service provided by the state bar. Almost all of this material is also available on the website as a downloadable document. The Missouri Bar website is an increasingly crucial means of communicating with Missourians and visitors alike who wish to learn more about the law.

In 2004, Missourians once again relied on The Missouri Bar to provide them with an evaluation of non-partisan judges standing in retention elections. In cooperation with the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis and the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association, the state bar distributed 150,000 printed copies of the evaluations. In addition, the results were posted on The Missouri Bar's website and provided to the state's news media.

The Missouri Bar understands that, despite its best efforts, it cannot always place information about the legal system directly into the hands of the public. Accordingly, The Missouri Bar recognizes that the news media play an important role in disseminating information to the general public. The state bar strives to maintain a partnership with print and broadcast media outlets to ensure that Missourians gain a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities under the law.

Working closely with reporters and news directors to explore important legal issues is the main goal of The Missouri Bar's media relations efforts. Missouri Bar officers and members of the Board of Governors often meet with representatives of the news media to discuss pressing legal issues of the day. Additionally, The Missouri Bar's Communications Department serves as a resource for reporters, fielding questions and arranging interviews with bar officers.

The Missouri Bar keeps the media – and ultimately the public – aware of important developments via *Briefly*, a monthly newsletter directed at reporters, editors and other media personnel. Each issue features information on timely legal topics, facts about legal issues, and bar programs of interest. *Briefly* is received by hundreds of media representatives across the state, who often use the information within its pages to develop enterprise stories about legal issues affecting Missourians.

Also continuing is The Missouri Bar's cooperative advertising campaign with the Missouri Broadcasters Association. This year's video and audio advertisements focused on the availability of durable power of attorney for health care and health care directive forms from The Missouri Bar, as well as the lasting value of the Missouri Non-Partisan Court Plan.