

What Have We Done for You Lately?

State Bar Benefits, Discounts, and Services Offer Tremendous Value to Your Membership



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Solo and small-firm practitioners compose a substantial portion of Michigan's legal profession. In fact, State Bar member statistics show that of active members in Michigan, 51 percent are private practitioners and of those, 71 percent are solo or small-firm practitioners.¹ As lawyers encounter difficulties finding jobs with firms and some transition from firms to solo practice, the percentage can be expected to increase. For many Michigan lawyers, the economy has severely impacted their bottom line. We are still in the midst of one of the most challenging economic environments in history. *Michigan Lawyers Weekly* recently reported the results of its annual survey of law firms with 20 or more lawyers, which showed that, on average, Michigan firms added three lawyers and lost four this year. Its survey results last year reported that firms averaged four new lawyer hires and five departures.²

The State Bar recognizes the economy has forced many of our members in private practice to do more with less. We have worked very hard to deliver programs and services that are relevant, useful, and in line with our practice areas and interests. As president, I expanded the size of the Member Services Committee in an effort to encourage more creative thinking and innovation. I applaud the committee and State Bar staff for accepting the challenge and increasing the member benefit and discount offerings available to us this year.

For lawyers actively seeking ways to minimize overhead expenses, especially solo and small-firm practitioners, it pays to learn how the State Bar's excellent member benefit programs can provide substantial savings.

Every day, our members use computers, cell phones, software, office supplies, copy

services, shipping services, receptionists or answering services, and legal research sites. You may be surprised to learn that your State Bar membership includes discounts on every single one of these. By leveraging the buying power of more than 42,000 members, the Bar is able to negotiate several benefit programs. Although the Bar's website explains each benefit in detail, I would like to highlight a few of them as well as the new benefits and services you'll soon be hearing more about.

New Member Benefits, Discounts, and Services on the Way

Apple and Dell Computer Discounts

The State Bar is in the final stages of negotiating a member discount program with Apple and Dell. Between the two, members could save between 2 and 30 percent on products including iPods, iPads, laptops, desktops, and other electronics and accessories. Considering the number of members who use these devices, this benefit, alone, should be a huge success.

State Bar of Michigan's New Mentor Board

Among the findings in last year's State Bar member survey, 69 percent of members supported lawyer-to-lawyer mentoring programs, and our Strategic Plan prioritizes mentoring programs. After months of careful evaluation, the Bar is about to launch its JobTarget MentorBoard. Your participation in this program is voluntary, and I strongly encourage all members to sign up to help ensure its success.

Downloadable Practice Management Library

For many years, the Bar's Practice Management Resource Center included a lending library that shipped hard copies of books upon request. However, members have been requesting *digital* downloads. The Bar listened. A free downloadable library is on its way through the Practice Management Resource Center that will allow members to request e-books and audio books for downloading to office computers, laptops, smartphones, or tablets. Downloadable books will cover such subjects as business and client

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relations, career transitioning, financial management, marketing, software, technology, and data security. Unlike the lending library, which requires return shipping, the downloadable library items will automatically delete themselves after a few weeks.

Other State Bar Benefits and Services

JobTarget Career Center

The Bar initiated an online career center last year that is free for members seeking employment. What differentiates our career center from other job boards is that ours not only allows anonymous résumé posting but also provides job alerts to notify candidates of new opportunities that match their criteria.

Casemaker® Legal Research

Budget-conscious lawyers whose research needs include state and federal case-law, constitutions, statutes, administrative codes, court rules, attorney general opinions, and more for all 50 states should try Casemaker®. The State Bar is one of a few bars nationwide to partner with this company to provide members *free* access to its most updated search capabilities, which can potentially spare members substantial overhead expense and time.

Ruby Receptionists

Among the Bar's newest member benefits is Ruby Receptionists, an excellent business tool for solo and small-firm practitioners. It

provides virtual receptionists for a fraction of the cost of on-site staff. Members receive a discount on the monthly service fee.

FedEx Office

Sophisticated, high-speed copy machines can be tremendously expensive, particularly for solo and small-firm practitioners, but the Bar's FedEx Advantage® program gives members substantial discounts on certain copy, print, and other services available at FedEx Office locations. The program promises savings up to 70 percent on selected large-quantity projects.

Office Space Rental

As an attorney who rented space within law firms for almost two decades, I believe LookingForSpace.com, a newer member benefit, could be especially valuable for many members. Through this online resource, law firms interested in renting extra offices are matched with attorneys seeking to rent space.

Practice Management Resource Center (PMRC)

Throughout my presidency I have written and spoken extensively about the Practice Management Resource Center and its Practice EZ™ program. In addition to its many web-based resources such as articles, checklists, and links, the PMRC also includes a computer room at the State Bar offices that allows members to test and compare software products by appointment. In addition, the PMRC's services include a toll-free Prac-

tice Management Helpline (800-341-9715), optional individualized practice management consulting, and traveling presentations to groups on a variety of practice management topics. To better meet member needs, the PMRC has been undergoing a reevaluation and expansion. Visit it often and subscribe to the Bar's free PMRC "Tip of the Week." Watch for new, innovative PMRC programs such as last month's well-attended "Order in the Court: Trial by iPad" seminar.

e-Journal and E-Mailed Updates

When I became a lawyer 26 years ago, I received the latest appellate rulings and summaries from advance sheets or subscription-only legal newspapers. For years, the State Bar's award-winning e-Journal has offered this information daily—*free of charge*. The e-Journal provides case summaries organized by areas of practice along with links to cases, news about our profession, and classified ads. The Bar also offers a free online Public Policy Resource Center and sends free public policy updates via e-mail to subscribers.

Best Buy for Business™ and Geek Squad®

State Bar members are eligible for discounts on support services and IT coverage through our program with Geek Squad® Office Support. Our arrangement with Best Buy for Business™ provides discounts on certain products.

Practice Management Software

Members can receive a discount on Clio®, a web-based law practice management program designed for solo and small-firm practitioners. It offers docket management, time tracking, billing, data security, and other services in a user-friendly format.

Office Supply Discounts

The Bar's Staples Advantage program provides member discounts on numerous products and services.

Credit Card Processing

Members who offer clients the option to pay bills by credit card should consider the Bar's credit card processing program, arranged through Midwest Transaction Group. It provides low processing rates, no monthly minimums, and no supply costs.

Free Meeting Rooms

Many members are unaware that meeting rooms at the State Bar's Michael Franck Building in Lansing can be reserved at no charge. Available by advance reservation, these rooms can spare the expense of a conference room for meetings such as facilitations or depositions.

Free Ethics Advice

For years, the Bar has provided to members an Ethics Helpline (877-558-4760), which

allows you to receive free, confidential advice on issues of ethics and professional conduct.

Insurance

The Bar offers discounts on several types of insurance such as health plan options, auto and home insurance, disability income, term life, and other plans.

Benefits from Section Membership

The State Bar's 38 sections allow members excellent opportunities to grow personally and professionally, and yearly dues are very low. Sections can help keep you current on substantive legal developments through timely newsletters and continuing-education programs. Sections include Business Law, Consumer Law, Criminal Law, Family Law, Law Practice Management, Litigation, Negligence Law, Probate and Estate Planning, Real Property Law, and other areas.

Conclusion

The State Bar is genuinely dedicated to helping members succeed, especially during these challenging financial times. In addition, I am committed to ensuring that the Bar pays close attention to the needs of its members, especially solo and small-firm practitioners, and provides them with a broad selection of useful and innovative benefits, services, and programs. Our dues are below the national average, and I hope you will agree that the State Bar's many member benefits and services offer tremendous value to your membership. Please contact me any time with suggestions for how the Bar can serve you even better. ■

FOOTNOTES

1. State Bar of Michigan member statistics.
2. Levy, *Same differences, but new changes? Numbers among state's biggest firms make subtle shifts*, Michigan Lawyers Weekly, Michigan's Largest Law Firms 2012 Directory, p 3.