

Finding Licensed Attorneys in Michigan

By Roberta M. Gubbins

Consumers use the Internet to find goods and services. We buy books, electronics, and clothes online, secure in the knowledge that the goods can be returned if they are not quite what we wanted or are defective.

Legal services, however, can't be sent back for the cost of shipping. An improperly drafted will or contract or a power of attorney created by an unlicensed attorney can be life changing. How can consumers be assured that the lawyer they contacted is licensed and in good standing?

When consumers search for "Michigan attorneys," they will be directed to the State Bar of Michigan Member Directory and sites such as Avvo, FindLaw, Lawyers.com, or LegalMatch.

Generally, the sites follow the same format: consumers type in their geographic location and the legal service they seek, and a list of lawyers and law firms meeting that criteria is generated; users can click on a profile or website to learn more. Some sites provide client reviews—Avvo highlights ratings on a 1–10 scale while LegalMatch claims all its lawyers are prescreened and in good standing with their state bar associations. Others include links to state



bar associations so consumers can visit the sites and check a lawyer's status.

Only the SBM Member Directory prominently highlights at the top of every active member's business card and profile that the lawyer is active and in good standing. Consumers can immediately be assured the lawyer is a professional, licensed attor-

ney bound by the Michigan Rules of Professional Conduct. While consumers may not be familiar with the rules setting the standard of legal ethics and professional responsibility for Michigan lawyers, attorneys know them well. Only those who follow the rules are active and in good standing.

If a lawyer is sanctioned or disbarred as a result of disciplinary action, that information is also posted to the lawyer's directory profile. Consumers and lawyers using the SBM Member Directory can be assured the information they find is current, reliable, and authentic.

The Internet is here to stay. Consumers will use it at some point to find goods and services they desire, including legal help. It is vital that legal services provided to consumers be professional, reliable, and competent. A complete SBM Member Directory profile identifying a lawyer as active and in good standing assures consumers they will receive legal services from a licensed attorney.

Protect prospective clients by recommending the use of the SBM Member Directory to find competent lawyers who are licensed and in good standing in Michigan. ■

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Roberta M. Gubbins, Esq. practiced law before serving as the editor of the Ingham County Legal News. Since leaving the paper, she provides services as a ghostwriter, editing and writing articles,

blogs, and eblasts for lawyers and law firms. She is the editor of Briefs, the Ingham County Bar Association newsletter; and The Mentor, the SBM Master Lawyers Section newsletter.