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Getting Your Money's Worth in These Difficult Times

Economically speaking, these are difficult times—times that most of us have never experienced. Economists, pundits and even Federal Reserve governors paint a bleak picture with few expecting that we will exit this economic morass before next year. In an effort to shore up the nation's faltering economy, President Obama signed a historic \$700 billion economic stimulus bill passed by Congress. Some analysts surmise that a recovery will take far longer despite the collective actions taken by Congress, the Treasury and the Federal Reserve.

Few areas of our nation's economy have been unscathed by this recession. In fact, most of the world's leading economies are sharing our misery. Not only has our nation's industrial sector been hard hit, the service sector is suffering, too. In particular, the legal profession is feeling tremendous pressure as the economy has plummeted. I have spoken with a number of Alabama lawyers, including solo practitioners and members of large and small firms, as well as lawyers who practice in small towns and cities. All the lawyers I spoke to conceded that the economy had taken a toll on their practice.

One way to lessen the economic impact of a tightening economy is to save money by cutting costs. By virtue of purchasing your occupational license to practice law (\$300), or payment of your special membership dues (\$150), you can take advantage of the bar's member benefits, many of which can help you save hundreds of dollars or help you bring clients to your front door. I will highlight four of these benefits.

Increase Your Client Base

Many Alabama citizens need and can afford to pay for the services of a lawyer, but don't know how to locate one. That is where the Alabama State Bar's Lawyer Referral Service (LRS) can help. The LRS can provide you with an excellent means of fee-producing work. Created in 1978, LRS members are lawyers who charge their regular rates. Beyond the initial half-hour consultation fee (maximum of \$50 or at no charge), the fee arrangement is between the lawyer and the client. The fee for the state bar member who joins the LRS is \$100. Panel members are asked to remit five percent of the legal fees they collect on referrals that reach \$1,000 to \$5,000.

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Being a member of the LRS is an ethical and inexpensive method of marketing your practice. Qualified attorneys with malpractice insurance and without an ongoing disciplinary case may choose to list up to 10 areas of legal practice. All referrals are made on a rotating basis, with each sub-panel rotating independently. Since clients select the geographical areas they prefer, there may be minimal rotations within the overall rotation for some sub-panels.

Make Your Practice More Efficient

The Practice Management Assistance Program (PMAP) serves as a clearinghouse for the collection and dissemination of information about the effective management of the modern law office. This program was created to serve the needs of solo practitioners and lawyers practicing in small firms, and to protect the public from lawyers whose management skills are inadequate to allow them to deliver competent legal services in a timely manner.

Information is distributed through PMAP's lending library containing books and audio and video programs. The program also provides information on management issues such as attorney compensation, billing, business planning, client relations, employee relations, ethics and professionalism, loss prevention, marketing, retirement planning, and technology. PMAP provides this information through on-site visits to law offices, and via telephone and e-mail help lines. PMAP also handles the sale of discounted American Bar Association publications, particularly those of the Law Practice Management Section.

Use the Free Web Law Library—Casemaker

Casemaker is a free, Internet-based legal research service available to all Alabama State Bar members. In addition to Alabama case law beginning with 1 So.2d, the Alabama *Code*, constitution, rules of court and *Administrative Code* and regulations, Casemaker also contains a federal database with U.S. Supreme Court cases, case law from federal circuits and many federal district courts, U.S. Bankruptcy court opinions, Federal Court rules, the U.S. *Code*, and the *Code of Federal Regulations*.


Because Casemaker is the product of a multi-state consortium of bar associations, it also contains cases and statutes from all 50 states. Casemaker is continuously

adding information to its databases, so it's a great method for doing legal research that allows many lawyers and firms to do so without expensive monthly packages from other research providers.

Save Money with Better Rates on Insurance

The Alabama State Bar endorses eight insurance programs (health, hospital, income, disability, term life, business overhead, comprehensive accident, accidental death and dismemberment, and Medicare supplement) through our administrator, ISI Alabama, a division of Insurance Specialists, Inc. As a benefit of membership in the state bar, these plans offer association-based products through which applicants receive discounted rates and enhanced benefits. These endorsed plans are all available to state bar members, and most are offered to member spouses, employees and eligible family members.

A variety of health insurance options are available for individuals, families and self-employed attorneys including the availability of small business and short-term medical plans and dental insurance. The Aetna Association Medical Plan is the latest addition to the bar's health insurance portfolio.

In addition to the endorsed benefits described above, the state bar provides a host of others that have been especially selected to aid lawyers regardless of their practice type. A complete listing is located on the bar's Web site, www.alaba.org, under "Member Central." If you are not a regular user of the bar's member benefits, there is not a better time than now to take full advantage of these benefits. I encourage you to join your colleagues who have found great value in the Alabama State Bar's Member Benefits program. 

EDUCATION LOAN UPDATE

For the February 2009 bar examination, there were 114 first-time applicants. Of this total, 68 percent had education loans, averaging \$79,141.