



Legal Referral Service Advertising Stirs Up Controversy

By Christine Cristiano

Need a lawyer but not sure what kind or where to find one? A Boca Raton, Florida based firm has enjoyed success since launching a website that matches prospective clients with the appropriate attorneys.



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WhoCanISue.com is a referral service where visitors can utilize the computer friendly website

for legal services available that match their legal needs. The site is comprised of a multitude of drop down menus listing 'complaints' that can potentially result in a lawsuit. Once the client has determined their complaint, they are required to input their zip code to generate a list of matched lawyers. The site also matches defense lawyers for prospective customers who are being sued.

The services of the website are free to visitors but legal firms must pay a fee to be a referred service on the site. According to the website, all attorneys are screened to ensure that they "are licensed to practice law by the bar association from their state."

According to the WhoCanISue.com website, the company's mission is "to provide equal legal opportunities to internet users regardless of economic or social status. Users will be able to determine whether they may be eligible for a lawsuit. We seek to inform a greater share of the population about their legal rights, a facet of life normally kept obscure from most people."

There has been some controversy over the website's advertising choices, including billboards, bus shelter signs and television ads.

Lawyers who have advertised on the site see this venue as a viable way to attract clientele and report an increase in calls inquiring as to their legal services, however some critics claim that online referral services 'degrades the legal profession'.

Advertising for legal services is governed by the Florida Bar's advertising committee who are responsible for reviewing and monitoring advertisement from legal firms. According to Gary Lesser, Vice Chairman, advertisements by lawyers and legal professionals are required to submit their ads to the committee in advance of publication, but it is impossible to monitor all 87,000 bar members.

According to Curtis Wolf, founder of the website, the site's name is "definitely meant to be edgy." Wolfe admits it was the intent to "provoke people" because "most lawyer advertising is unremarkable and not memorable. I would sit at home and see these ads asking if you're injured, blah, blah, blah. There was no branding involved. We have a brand."

Curtis Wolfe, launched WhoCanISue.com in October 2008. Wolfe was previously employed as an in-house counsel for a Miami based law firm.

President Vincent Celentano, who helped finance the multimillion dollar start-up, predicts that the company will reach the \$10 million plus mark in 2010.

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