

Wednesday, July 16, 2008

Avvogatto in AVVO.

Â Â Image from Library of Congress's website.Â My tireless blogging colleague Scott Greenfield has written repeatedly about (partly) consumer-driven lawyer ranking site AVVOÂ (whose spelling can mistakenly be seen as "awo", depending on how closely one's computer screen places the vees in the word). Â Having learned about AVVO from Scott's site, I answered the site's information questionnaire. Eventually, after my questionnaire information and a few client reviews, I was given a ranking of 9.4 out of ten, or "superb". Although I am happy to receive such recognition, the rankings system does not sound scientific. Â On July 15, a Maryland Daily Record reporter called meÂ for an article that appeared today, curious about her assertion that "Searching for a Maryland lawyer brings up Katz near the top of the list." If you do not want to be misquoted or distorted out of context, do not speak with a journalist; knowing this frequent risk, I still ordinarily speak freelyÂ with journalists about matters not involving my clients,Â with possibly the most stark example of unprofessionalÂ interviewing of me coming from theÂ insensitivity of a reporter (and/or his news organization) engaging in what I thought was sensationalism by telling me on camera rather than off that Deborah Palfrey had killed herself, and then seeking comment -- without ever pausing the camera -- when I had nothing to do with the case. Â The reporter's somewhat minor distortion in this AVVO article is in writing that I have "suggested that clients write positive reviews" on AVVO. In reality,Â I was answeringÂ her question about how people ended up writing the handful of AVVO reviews about me, by saying that in the past when clients thanked me deeply for my service, I would offer for them the option of sending meÂ an anonymous testimonial for me to post to our website if they wished, and now add the option to post an AVVO review. The AVVO review is a convenient way for a client to eliminate me as the middleman in getting feedback posted. Â In any event, the article confirms that AVVO's name comes from avvocato, which is the Italian word for lawyer. Curiously, whether or not intentionally, the French word for lawyer, avocat, also is the word for avocado, which is one of my favorite foods. Early on when my law partner Jay Marks and I hosted a call-in Spanish radio show "Legally Speaking: Where your cause is our cause" I got the moniker "gato" for cat/Katz, which then led to the less frequent moniker of "abogato", blending abogado for lawyer and gato for cat. The equivalent in Italian would be avvogatto. Â Finishing on this tangential discussion of the word lawyer, a very persuasive, dedicated, and intelligent longtimeÂ Amnesty International activist who spoke at the invitation of my law school's Amnesty International chapter started out by saying that the law is an ass, because, in his view, it is slow and plodding to achieve beneficial change. He then asked "If the law is an ass, what are lawyers?" I did not get around to asking him if he meant ass--les, but he had me in stitches nevertheless, even though I thought such a view was hyperbole taken from frustration with the legions of lawyers who to this day focus heavily on money and little on fairness and justice. (Only a few years ago, a colleague who includes criminal defense in his practice very seriously asked if I agreed with his view that the law practice is all about making money; I strenuously disagree with him.)Â My laughter in response to the Amnesty International activist came in the context ofÂ Â having expected that part of my law studies would involve learning the language of the oppressive enemy, so that I could more successfully battle that enemy.Â In any event, AVVO probably presents serious challenges to the once predominant Martindale-Hubbell legal directory, which is driven by rankings purportedly based on peer reviews, and expanded listings arising from payments for the inclusion. (Disclaimer: Our firm pays for such a listing.)Then again, the Internet has created substantial competition throughout the for-profit sector, including shaking the previous predominance of yellow page directories.Â Â Jon Katz

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon Katz in the News at 00:00

Jon:

Why NOT encourage clients to leave a positive review? If you do great work, your clients will WANT to tell other potential clients about it â€" and I canâ€™t think of a better place than Avvo for them to spill the beans.

Hereâ€™s the reality: Lawyers get a bad rap. We solve so many problems for our communities, and yet the lawyer jokes persist. Avvo gives all lawyers a platform to showcase all of the problems they solve - all that they do well. Whether you direct people to Avvo or they find it on their own, it is all in the name of getting the credit you deserve!

If you would like to give me a list of your clients, I will be happy to call them on your behalf. :-)

Be well.

Mark
CEO

www.avvo.com

Anonymous on Jul 16 2008, 12:59

Mark Britton's level of marketing aggression -- at least as expressed in his above comments -- to existing legal clients is not my cup

of tea. A lawyer would be foolhardy to hand him a list of their clients; attorney-client privilege and a client's privacy expectations are sacred.

Anonymous on Jul 16 2008, 23:45

Uh . . . Jon . . . the client list comment was supposed to be a joke. That's why there is a smiley face after it. Where's your sense of humor?!

Anonymous on Jul 17 2008, 12:02