

Why LegalZoom Doesn't Have to Mean Legal Doom for Solos and Small Firms

Article By:

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Today's *ABA Journal* Law Practice blog says that recent **legal victories have LegalZoom poised for growth**, and if the comment section below the article is any indicator, there are lots of lawyers still itching for a fight.

Unfortunately, most are taking a knife to a gunfight. **LegalZoom has been sued by bar associations** in eight states so far -- LegalZoom has won two, had two dismissed, settled in three and one is still in arbitration.

Each claim against LegalZoom has been for the **unauthorized practice of law** (UPL). But while the state bars are lining up behind UPL as it applies to the online forms the site provides, LegalZoom is moving its business model closer to the actual practice of law with its prepaid legal services plans that connect consumers with actual attorneys.

As legal ethicist Deborah L. Rhode, director of Stanford Law School's Center on the Legal Profession, put it to the *ABA Journal*: "With respect to LegalZoom, the train has left the station. They've got a couple million satisfied customers and it's going to be really hard for anyone to shut them down."

She notes that it's time to stop pursuing the UPL claim and instead focus efforts on regulating the product itself so consumers are protected.

While some attorneys look at LegalZoom and see legal doom, I see opportunity. In fact, several lawyers who responded to the article today said they love LegalZoom because they get paid for untangling all the mistakes people make using online DIY legal forms.

That is a book that solos and small firms should take a page out of -- protecting consumers against themselves. Instead of castigating those who use a service like LegalZoom, why not offer a free consultation to go over what they've done online?

There is a reason why LegalZoom now offers prepaid legal services for consumers and businesses -- they have probably found that people are a little wary that they've done the right thing without an actual attorney's input.

By offering to review these online documents for free, you not only alleviate a nagging doubt for a prospective client, you also illustrate perfectly the real value of obtaining legal advice from a qualified attorney -- for individualized legal solutions that can help clients head off potential problems and identify opportunities. No DIY website does that.

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