



Background

The State Bar of Wisconsin (State Bar or the Bar) is committed to quality decision making and delivering products, services, programs, and solutions that are useful and relevant to our members. To ensure that we deliver value, we must first ensure that our vision for the organization is grounded in the needs of the members. To that end, the State Bar is engaged in an extensive research program to better understand our members and the challenges they face in the practice of law. Future phases of the research will focus on engagement and evaluating specific products and services.

Methodology

The first phase of this program launched in July 2011 with a questionnaire that would help identify the professional and personal issues most affecting members and their practices, as well as their relationship to the State Bar. Decision Point (a Madison consulting firm) assisted us in this phase of the research. A 12-question instrument was delivered on-line. This generated results with a margin of error of ± 3.6 percentage points and 95% confidence, which exceeds the performance of many large, national surveys. The respondent data were combined with membership and demographic data warehoused in the Bar's membership database. The data were tabulated and cross-tabulated for active residents, active non-residents, and inactive members; the data presented in this report focus on active residents.

Results

Analyses of the data reveal a membership that is extremely diverse in terms of age, gender, practice area, and other factors. Even geographically, most members are located outside of Dane and Milwaukee counties. We anticipated that this diversity would be reflected in the ideas and opinions expressed in the survey instrument, and we found this to be the case.

Among active residents, a majority (55%) of members surveyed said that they are unaware of the State Bar's direction. Fifteen-percent think that the Bar is headed in the wrong direction, but twice as many think that the Bar is headed in the right direction. The 55% who don't know or don't have an opinion represent a large, strategic opportunity segment for the Bar. Mostly, these are members who are not volunteers and who are not engaged with the Bar much beyond paying their dues or purchasing a PINNACLE® product. Deeper analysis revealed that this segment was more likely to consist of attorneys who are young, female, or work in larger law firms.

We asked members to tell us approximately how much they pay in State Bar dues. Five-percent had no guess, and 24% responded correctly, but 71% were incorrect. In most cases, these members could not separate the Bar dues from the Supreme Court fees. In some cases, verbatim responses indicated an unwillingness to acknowledge the fees and dues as anything but a bundled cost.

Members were asked to rate the value that they receive for the dues they pay. Twenty-four percent rated the value as high (8-10 on a 10-point scale) and 44% rated the value as moderate (4-7). This latter segment has strategic significance and represents an opportunity to increase their engagement with the State Bar. Thirty-percent rated the value as low (1-3). Verbatim responses indicated that even among members who rate our value as low, many still appreciate specific products and services that are relevant for them. These tend to be offerings

like PINNACLE, the Law Office Management Assistance Program (LOMAP), the Wisconsin Lawyers Assistance Program (WisLAP), the ethics program, and others that help them manage their practice, stay informed, or solve specific problems.

Engagement increases positive perceptions of the State Bar. For example, members who rate the value of the Bar as low are more than twice as likely to be non-volunteers or say that they are unaware of the Bar's activities. On the other hand, members who rate the value of the Bar as high are more than four times as likely to be aware of Bar activities.

We have heard anecdotally that the Bar sends too many communications (print and email) to members, so we asked about this. Only 20% said that the Bar sends too much communication, whereas 63% said that we get it about right, and 10% said that we send too little!

Each element of our brand promise was also tested*. Results showed that we have strengths in the areas of delivering knowledge and congenial service, but also that there are opportunities for improvement. For example, only 39% of active residents consider us to be efficient, and only 53% say that we deliver advocacy. We suspect that lower ratings are closely correlated with lack of awareness, and we will try to clarify this in future phases of the research.

We asked members about the biggest challenges they face in the practice of law, and we received hundreds of candid and even poignant responses. In many cases, the Bar already has programs and services (e.g. Practice411, ethics counsel, and WisLAP) to help these members, but many may not know about them. Among the top personal struggles, members listed time pressures (37%), work-life balance (30%), and keeping up with information (29%). Fifteen of the 17 struggles we listed were selected by at least 10% of active residents, which represents thousands of members. Among their top professional concerns they listed decreasing incomes (32%), the number of attorneys (29%), and the public image of attorneys (25%). Concerns about the future of the profession revealed a wide diversity of ideas. Although this is an early stage of our research, we can begin to see clusters of concerns among certain segments of the sample; for example, government attorneys' concerns about caseload and young attorneys' concerns about debt.

Next Steps

This first phase of the research will continue with even deeper analysis of the data, dissemination of the results, and appropriate action steps based on its conclusions. In the second phase, we will explore opportunities for meaningful change that will further enhance the State Bar's relevance to an increasing percentage of its membership. A report of this work is expected to be presented at the September 2012 Board of Governors meeting.

*The State Bar of Wisconsin's brand promise is to deliver knowledge and advocacy that helps members excel at their practice and lead a balanced life – delivered with efficiency, congeniality and value. This promise, which is used internally, is communicated to members via the association's tagline: *Your Practice. Our Purpose.* ©