

Survey Finds Satisfaction and Offers Suggestions for Improvement

What's the most important thing the Virginia State Bar does for its members? According to a survey done in February, the bar "Fosters a positive reputation for the legal profession."

And how well is the bar doing at accomplishing this most important goal? The survey respondents said it is the bar's greatest accomplishment.

Those were two of the many results of the survey. About 40,000 members were asked to participate electronically. Responses were received from 6,161 members, a rate of 15.4 percent.

The survey was designed by the VSB and the American Bar Association Division for Bar Services, which collected and analyzed the data.

"We are always looking for ways to improve the services we offer to our members," said Karen A. Gould, executive director of the VSB. "We will look to these survey results and comments as we move forward."

The survey was done at the suggestion of VSB President Sharon D. Nelson. "It's always useful to survey the membership every few years," she said. "Personally, I was struck by the positive tone of the results and pleased that members believe we are helping to create a positive image of the legal profession."

People were asked to rate their satisfaction with specific VSB services on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the highest. The five highest rated services were:

- Ethics hotline (3.98)
- VSB Website (3.91)
- VSB E-News (3.71)
- *Virginia Lawyer* magazine (3.61)
- *Virginia Lawyer Register* (3.54)

As is often the case when a large number of people are asked a question, the responses were often mixed and even contradictory. For example, 23 percent said the practice of law had become less rewarding over time and 24 percent said more rewarding.

However, there were some areas of near unanimity. Ninety percent said they feel the frequency of VSB communications was "just right." A majority also feel e-mail is the most effective way to communicate, followed by bar publications. "More e-mail" was a common refrain.

Almost half of respondents said they rarely visit the VSB website, but those who do said the most frequently visited pages offer member resources, with 41 percent saying they often visit those. Next are publications, with 21 percent visiting often.

Only 18 percent access *Virginia Lawyer* online, and only 38 percent said they would prefer to get publications online only. While a number of respondents said "go paperless," about 61 percent said they would like publications available both in print and online (37 percent) or in print only (24 percent).

Social media was not popular, with 57 percent saying their firm does not use social media platforms. While Facebook and Twitter were not popular, a number of respondents wanted the bar to "improve legal research tools for attorneys," as one respondent wrote.

CLEs drew a lot of comments. People are taking their CLEs from a variety of sources including VACLE mentioned by 54 percent and a state (other than VSB) or local bar association by 43 percent. Twenty-five percent have taken a VSB-sponsored CLE program. Many respondents mentioned that they wanted more CLE programs offered online.

Respondents were asked to indicate how concerned they were about the impact of several issues on the profession, rating those concerns on a 1–5 scale. The issues were:

- Public understanding and confidence in the judicial system (4.02)
- Public perception of the profession (3.80)
- Legal employment market (3.65)

They were also asked about how concerned they were about several issues and the impact on them and their practice. Those concerns were:

- Keeping current in the law (3.98)
- Balancing work and personal life/family (3.93)
- Providing good service to my clients with limited time (3.86)

Respondents rated their overall satisfaction with the VSB at 3.82, on a scale of 1–5. They were asked what they liked most and least about the VSB. Online resources were highly regarded, particularly the legal research benefit and the online CLE reporting. The efficiency of the VSB staff was also mentioned. The ethics hotline and a commitment to professionalism were both mentioned frequently.

"The drift to preferring digital communications was expected — but it was important to get affirmation that this is what the members want," Nelson said. "And a round of applause goes to the ethics hotline — the folks who answer those phones are obviously doing a terrific job."

The full survey is available on the VSB website at <http://www.vsb.org/docs/2014-member-survey.pdf>.

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