

## Local attorney launches lawyer referral Web site

By DOUG SHERWIN, The Daily Transcript

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When San Diego attorney Alicia Dearn decided to start her own practice, she went looking for ways to promote it. After failing to find a Web site that fit her needs, she decided to start her own. The result is GoodSharks.com, an Internet-based, lawyer-referral system that aims to take the fear out of online marketing for attorneys while presenting the positive side of the legal industry. "Shark is not really a good term for lawyers, so I'm trying to turn it on its head," Dearn said. "There're a lot of things about a lawyer you can look for. You don't need a shark or someone that's aggressive and 'in your face.'

"We focus on the intangible qualities and the attorney-client relationship aspect. You want a lawyer who is your partner and is going to resolve your problems." A labor & employment attorney, Dearn has worked at **Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman** and **Paul, Hastings, Janovsky & Walker**. Two years ago, she struck out on her own, launching the **Dearn Law Group**. While researching ways to market herself, Dearn looked at the Web site elance.com and similar sites. However, the problem with most online services, according to Dearn, was the lack of ethical compliance, including fee arrangements. The idea of finding an attorney via the Web, though, appealed to her. "There must be a way it can be done in a way that's ethical and caters to lawyers looking to harness the Internet and looking for a marketing tool," she recalled thinking.

She also studied other referral services like lawyers.com, legal match and Avvo. While they were solid sites, she still felt there were gaps in their offerings. She wanted a site that focused more on small businesses and individuals with ongoing legal needs rather than consumers who want to file litigation. Dearn also wanted to create a place where attorneys felt confident marketing their skills.

"There's a reticence of lawyers when it comes to online marketing," she said. "They're worried about violating the rules of ethics. And it takes time (working online), so they don't do it. I'm looking to provide a tool that makes lawyers comfortable and encourages them to get online."

Potential clients fill out a survey on GoodSharks.com, requesting preferences in as many as 20 search categories for an attorney. Choices include the lawyer's skills, specialties, fee structures, languages and trial experience

The client then will be informed of how many attorneys match their requirements, and those attorneys will have the option of contacting the client. By making the attorney initiate the contact, Dearn said it prevents a lawyer from being inundating with unnecessary inquiries.

The Web site also allows attorneys to post thorough profiles for clients to look at. Dearn has developed a mini survey for attorneys to fill out, which includes "fun, open-ended questions" asking lawyers to describe their style and show what's important to them. The survey is voluntary, but it can give potential clients a better way of selecting a lawyer, according to Dearn.

"(GoodSharks.com) encourages lawyers to put all their information in a profile with a link to other profiles online," she said. "So when someone looks, they have a full dossier and can compare it to other lawyers. This is really about improving the legal profession and presenting something that is best

practices for the legal profession." The site also has the ability for lawyers to post videos they've shot for YouTube or other sites, which can be used as part of their profile.

"I've found in my practice that streaming videos is extremely powerful," Dearn said.

She hopes to offer video conferencing abilities on the site in the near future.

For a limited time, attorneys can list themselves on the GoodSharks.com directory for free. In the spring, after GoodSharks.com reaches its goals for attorney listings, attorneys will have the option to list their services for \$149 per month. The Webs site will always be free to consumers and small businesses.

The site also features a social-networking portion for lawyers to exchange ideas and gives attorneys the opportunity to write articles on its blog.

Lawyers who participate on the GoodSharks.com have to be in good standing with their bar association, Dearn said.

"I see it as a catalyst for moving the legal profession forward," she said. "It's the next benchmark in improving the image and access of lawyers for people who can use them."