

# VIRGINIA LAWYERS WEEKLY

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Lawyer: Here's how to answer DIY legal

Dear Editor:

In reference to your article, "Bar confronts do-it-yourself legal products," in the March 7 issue:

The only lawyers who should feel that the massive rise of the Do-it-Yourself legal (DIYLegal) industry is a true threat to the profession are those who feel entitled, just because they have a law license, to a consumer's purchase of legal services.

Over \$731 million of venture capital money has flowed to DIYLegal since 2010. The DIYLegal services market is estimated to be a \$4.1 billion dollar market. (Source: IBIS-World Industry Report OD5638). Smart lawyers see these figures as evidence for, if not proof of, a huge opportunity for the established legal community.

Lawyers who are unwilling to discover for themselves what DIYLegal knows about attracting the interest, attention and money of consumers will find themselves in the same position that horse whip makers were in once Henry Ford introduced the automobile and made it easy and affordable for the public to buy. Simply put, if we lawyers are not smart enough to convince consumers that we are the "right choice" then we don't deserve their business.

Virginia State Bar President Edward Weiner has asked for "bold recommendations" from the "future of the practice of law" committee.

No one asked, but here are mine:  
**For The State Bar:**

Don't spend another minute trying to figure out how to regulate Avvo, LegalZoom, et. al. It's a game of whack-a-mole and you can't afford to spend mandatory bar dues defending the inevitable lawsuits that will follow. Moreover, bar efforts to deprive consumers of *their* choice as to how to buy legal services will be seen as monopolistic protectionism and will further diminish our standing in the community.

Quickly eliminate the prohibition on non-lawyers owning law firms. If law firms, particularly the small law firms that make up the bulk of firms here in Virginia, are to survive, they need to be able to bring on, as shareholders, experts in business systems, marketing, sales, technology, human resources, culture leadership and finance. This is what DIYLegal has that we don't.

Reverse course and approve for CLE credit courses that *do* primarily focus on marketing, client development and other business topics that apply to any business. Lawyers need to be encouraged to look outside of our industry for ideas.

**For Lawyers:**

Don't look to any bar organization to "save the profession." It's your life. Take responsibility for it. You don't have to wait for reports from committees. The answers are all around you.

Educate yourself about what makes great businesses great.

You should be studying Avvo, LegalZoom, Amazon, Uber and any industry or business to which consumers give their attention and money and be asking yourselves: how can I import that idea into my law practice?

The "unique selling proposition" (USP) of DIYLegal is generally some version of "Lawyers are a pain in the butt to deal with, and they are expensive, aren't they? We make it easy." Right or wrong, this is what much of the public perceives or they would not be trying to write a will online or handle their own property settlement agreement. Those lawyers who have figured out how to deliver legal services coupled with Amazon® like customer service are thriving.

If you think that consumers are truly making the wrong choice when choosing DIYLegal for their needs, then it is up to you to convince them otherwise. Most lawyers do a poor job of differentiating themselves in the marketplace.

DIYLegal is filling a huge gap that we lawyers have allowed to widen by refusing to even be interested in, and at times openly hostile to, the success strategies of great and enduring businesses.

Over 10 million consumers go to Avvo.com each year to either get their questions answered or to find a lawyer. The massive legal services market is there for the taking.

Who will take it?

Benjamin W. Glass III  
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