



High Satisfaction, Room for Growth

BY BRUCE D. MERRILL & TARA A. BLANC

Technology, networking and efficient communication were the themes that recurred as Arizona's lawyers voiced their opinions about their member organization. A widely disseminated member survey asked attorneys to assess the State Bar of Arizona, and they were vocal in explaining what they like—and what they would like to see changed—about the organization.

The 2011 State Bar member survey was conducted by **BRUCE MERRILL, Ph.D.**, an expert in public opinion research and a senior research fellow in the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University, and **TARA BLANC, Ph.D.**, a lecturer in the School of Public Affairs at ASU and an expert in survey research.

The survey of its members was conducted by the State Bar of Arizona this spring. It found high levels of overall satisfaction with membership in the organization. But responses also offered suggestions for ways that membership could be made even more valuable.

Administered online to members from March 7 through April 1, the survey was conducted as part of the Bar's ongoing efforts to provide services and information that meet its members' needs and interests. To collect feedback, all 21,457 Bar members were invited to complete a questionnaire on the Internet. Twenty percent of members responded; demographic analyses showed that those who responded constituted a valid representation of the entire State Bar membership.

SATISFACTION LEVELS

The survey found that three-quarters (77 percent) of members are very (26 percent) or somewhat (51 percent) satisfied with their membership. This finding is almost identical to the results of a membership survey conducted in 2008, in which 79 percent of the membership reported being very or somewhat satisfied.

On the other hand, just under one-quarter of those responding to the survey (23 percent) reported being either somewhat (17 percent) or very dissatisfied (6 percent) with their membership in the current survey.

Further analysis of the results found that dissatisfaction is highest among attorneys in certain categories:

- Those who have become Bar members since 1990
- Those with a specialty in criminal law
- Those practicing in firms with between 300 and 499 lawyers
- Those who practice outside the Phoenix metropolitan area, particularly those who practice in Pima or Coconino County.

Lawyers practicing criminal law, juvenile law and legal malpractice and those between the ages of 30 and 39 also were more likely than attorneys in other specialties and age brackets to be dissatisfied with their membership (see page 22).

MEMBERS IDENTIFY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The spring survey allowed respondents to tell the State Bar, in their own words, what changes they would like to see that would make their membership more valuable.

The most frequently mentioned suggestion was to reduce dues (the amount of dues is set by Supreme Court rule). Many felt dues should be reduced, particularly for inactive and retired attorneys and for those working for government agencies such as federal, state, and municipal jurisdictions or school districts.

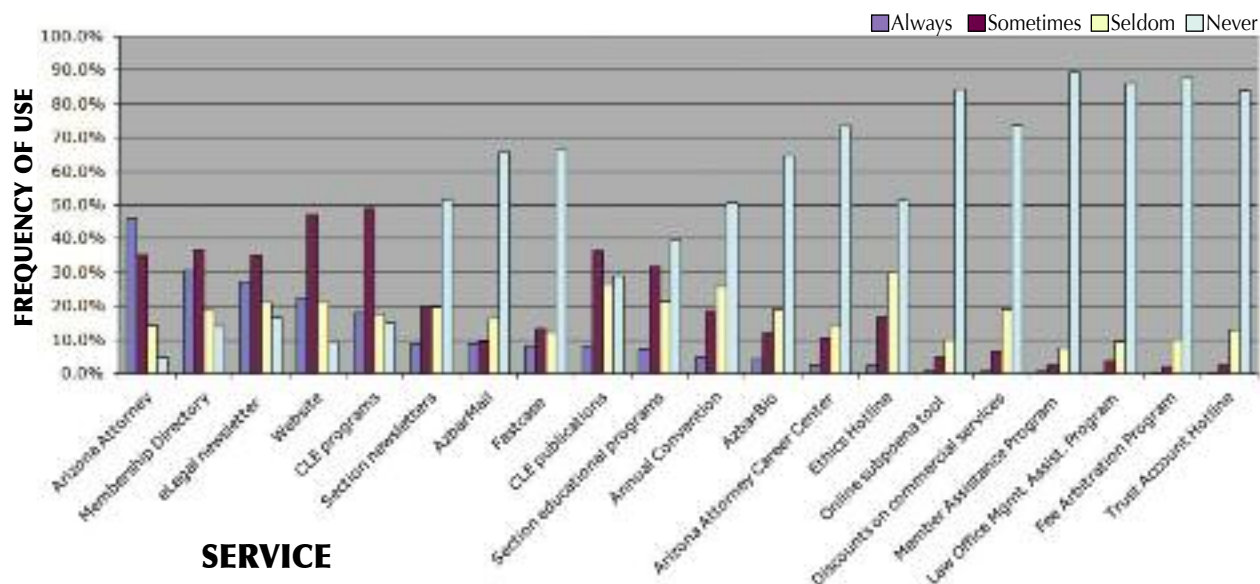
The second-most frequent set of suggestions for change related to continuing legal education (CLE). The most frequent suggestions in this area were to reduce the cost of CLE programs, to improve the quality of programs, to have more programs online, and to schedule more programs in Pima County and the rural counties.

Many members were conflicted about CLE. For instance, whereas CLE was frequently mentioned in the open-ended question soliciting suggestions for improvement, 75 percent of respondents rated the CLE provided by the Bar as valuable, and 72 said that about the right number of programs were being provided. Members were mixed, however, about the quality of the programs, as 38 percent of respondents rated the CLE programs as average, and 7 percent rated them less than average. (See chart on page 22.)

Another set of suggestions related to making the organization more efficient by increasing the use of electronic media to communicate with members. A number of members, for instance, felt that some of the printed materials produced by the State Bar should be produced electronically instead, which members believe would reduce costs associated with communicating to members.

The desire of many members to streamline the State Bar and to run a more efficient organization was demonstrated by how

MEMBER SERVICES – FREQUENCY OF USE



various services and programs were evaluated, both in terms of usage and of value (see charts on page 18 and below).

Several programs—such as CLE, *Arizona Attorney Magazine*, the Membership Directory, the Bar's website, the *eLegal* newsletter, and the "Ethics Hotline"—were identified by members as highly used and highly valued. The findings in the current survey were similar to those of the 2008 survey, in which the Membership Directory, CLE, website, *Arizona Attorney* and *eLegal* were noted as the five most-used and most-valuable programs or services.

But in the current survey, a variety of programs and services were identified as garnering low usage. They included the Trust Account Hotline, the Fee Arbitration Program, the Law Office Management Assistance Program and the Member Assistance Program. This may be related to the fact that a number of these programs are envisioned to be used by only a small percentage of members. Also receiving low usage ratings are discounts on commercial services, the online subpoena tool, the newly launched Arizona Attorney Career Center, and the AzbarBio program.

ONLINE SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION

The 2011 survey found that members are using, and value, online services slightly more than they did in 2008. Use of the website and AzbarMail is up slightly, and many of the open-ended responses members gave for several questions reflected an increased desire for more online research, ethics tools and networking tools.

When asked in an open-ended question what they would like to see added as a membership resource or service, members mentioned most often that they would like additional or improved group health insurance; less expensive and more accessible CLE opportunities; cuts in costs and expenses; more research tools;

and more networking opportunities.

A consistent finding in the survey was that communication between the State Bar and the membership received high ratings. Almost one-half of all members had occasion to contact the Bar in the past year. Eighty-eight percent of those who contacted the Bar reported that the organization responded promptly, 86 percent were satisfied with the response they received, and 83 percent rated the quality of the response they received as excellent or good.

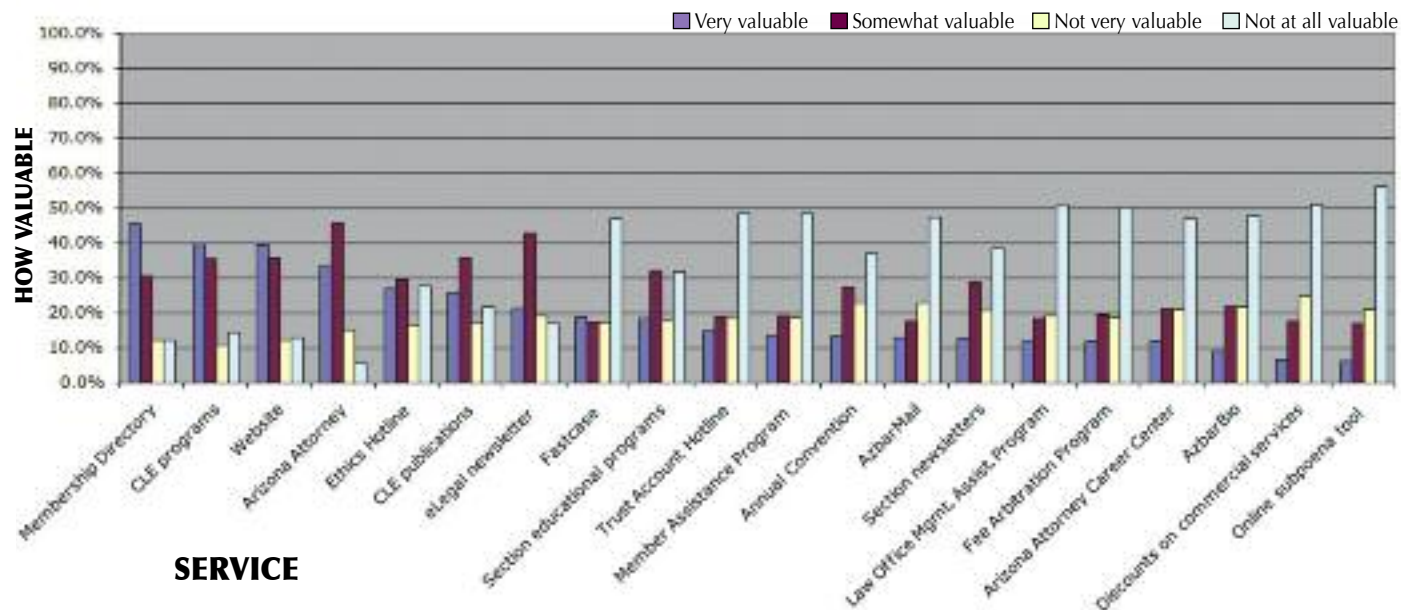
In addition, 91 percent of all members have accessed the Bar's web page. Those who have used the page give high marks for ease of usage, and several people commented in the open-ended questions that recent improvements have significantly improved the web page (since the survey, additional changes have been made to all portions of the website).

Less than half (43 percent) of the members who responded to the survey reported that they belong to a State Bar Section. Those who do belong are most satisfied with the educational programs offered by their Sections. They are less satisfied with the networking, newsletters and mentoring opportunities that Sections offer. The most frequently mentioned reasons for not belonging were a lack of interest and the additional costs involved in belonging.

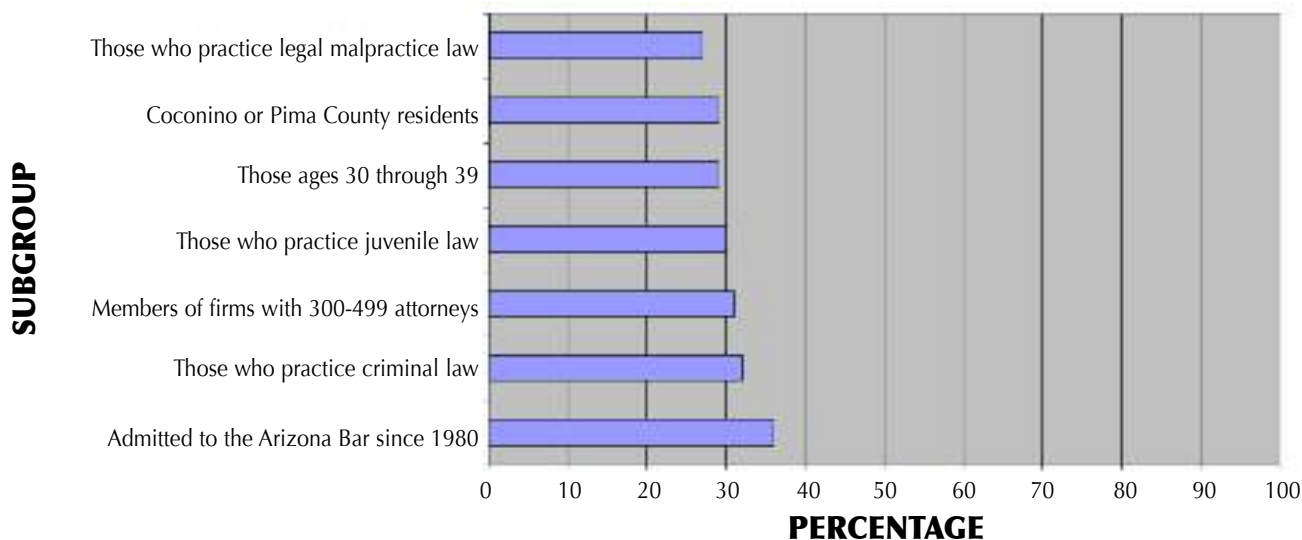
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROFESSION

The survey also measured opinions of the membership on some issues that are salient to the profession. For instance, a majority (58 percent) does not think that the Supreme Court should require mandatory fee arbitration. In addition, 29 percent of those with an opinion feel attorneys who are being disciplined should pay more of the expenses incurred by the Bar to inves-

MEMBER SERVICES – VALUE



MEMBER SUBGROUPS WITH THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF DISSATISFACTION



tigate and prosecute unethical conduct. Fourteen percent said lawyers being disciplined should pay nothing or less, 35 percent said current rates should be maintained, and 28 percent had no opinion.

Members also were asked to identify the biggest challenges facing the legal profession. The ongoing financial crisis and the downturn in the Arizona economy were most frequently mentioned (27 percent of responses). Other challenges were the increasing lack of employment opportunities for attorneys (9 percent), the need to learn and use new technologies (7 percent), too many lawyers in the market (7 percent), the image of and distrust people have for attorneys (6 percent), and the need to improve professionalism (6 percent).


CONCLUSION

In looking at the overall results of the survey, it is important to keep in mind the nature of a mandatory organization and its relationship with its members. Some members, for instance, indicated their resentment that they must join an organization in order to practice their profession; that underlying organizational distaste may have played a role in other assessments members made, such as in regard to mandatory CLE. This sentiment may have overridden other responses, even when a member had positive feelings about the Bar's programs and services.

Nonetheless, the variables that are related to the way in which the organization communicates with its members were positive. Members appear to feel that the Bar is on the right track, even as the organization identifies areas in which it can do further research and provide new services and programs or alter existing ones.

For instance, the State Bar might consider conducting focus groups among the specific subgroups that the survey identified as the most dissatisfied to better understand how the Bar may serve them more effectively. Another opportunity lies in examining the responses that indicate a desire for increased research and ethics tools and for more networking opportunities.

The study also showed that there may be additional opportunities to expand the various Sections, as a number of responses indicated that lawyers see these entities as allowing them to focus more on the specific issues related to their area of practice. Finally, there also are opportunities to incorporate new communication technologies into the organization, as it is clear that members would like to see a leaner and more cost-effective operation.

The results of this survey show there continue to be a variety of ways in which members seek improvement in programs and services. Overall, though, Arizona lawyers view the Bar as a healthy organization that is doing a good job in serving them. 

MEMBER-RATED QUALITY OF SBA CLE PROGRAMS

