

Yelp for Lawyers: ACC Launches Secret Evaluations of Law Firms

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As I write this during lunch at the Association of Corporate Counsel meeting in Boston, people dressed as umpires are passing out forms for in-house counsel to secretly rate their law firms on a six-point scale. The scores along with open-ended, anonymous comments will be posted on the ACC Value Index, which is closed to private law firms.

It's like Yelp.com, the popular restaurant-ranking website where customers post their frank and sometimes devastating comments about where they dined. Launched on October 20, 2009, the ACC Value Index has been a year in development and already has 1,000 evaluations, reviewing almost 300 law firms. The difference from Yelp.com is that the law firms have no ability to see the reviews about them. See [Information for law firms](#) on the ACC site at <http://www.acc.com/valuechallenge/getinvolved/lawfirms.cfm>

So, it's time to get friendly with your in-house counterparts, and ask them to print out what's being said about your firm. The average overall rating is currently 3.88 with a maximum rating of 5.00 and minimum rating of 1.50, so not many law firms are getting top ratings. The value Index "is also an instrument to help shape the thinking and dialog between firms and in-house counsel about what constitutes 'good value' in legal services," according to an ACC document.

Click on <http://www.lawmarketing.com/ACCValueIndexQuestionnaire.pdf> to view it as a full size printable PDF file. The one-page evaluation inquires into only 6 areas:

(See next page)

1. Understands objectives/expectations
1. Legal expertise
2. Efficiency/process management
3. Responsiveness/communication
4. Predictable cost/budgeting skills
5. Results delivered/execution.

In-house lawyer can score their law firm 1=poor, 2=fair, 3-good, 4=very good and 5=excellent.

The form also asks “Good value; would use this firm again?” with the options “yes” or “no.” In-house lawyers can make and review comments online by visiting <http://www.acc.com/valueindex> or sending an email to accvalueindex@acc.com.

Just beneath that in-house lawyers can publish their free-form comments, and put a caption or title on it. Commenters can choose whether to show their full contact information or remain anonymous. In some ways it resembles the easily-gamed rating system that Avvo.com uses, where a profile is created about a lawyer – whether he wants one or not – and a ranking between 1 and 10 is produced.

Why so secret?

The secrecy employed by the ACC is troublesome, because it seems fair for a law firm to be able to request a copy of what is being said about it, so the firm can make improvements and correct problems.

Corporations are being encouraged by the ACC to use the Value Index when deciding to hire a new law firm, or retain a current one. Law firms have no way of knowing whether they have been defamed or whether a comment about them is totally false.

ACC Value Index Connecting law firm value to client satisfaction. **ACC** Association of Corporate Counsel

Member Name _____
 Company _____
 Member Number _____
(or email address used for ACC correspondence so that we can confirm your ACC membership)

What law firm would you like to evaluate?
 Firm Name _____
 Matter Type _____
 Office Location _____
(city, state/province, country)

Score the firm's performance on the following value criteria
1=Poor 2=Fair 3=Good 4=Very Good 5=Excellent

1 2 3 4 5 Understands objectives/expectations
 1 2 3 4 5 Legal expertise
 1 2 3 4 5 Efficiency/process management
 1 2 3 4 5 Responsiveness/communication
 1 2 3 4 5 Predictable cost/budgeting skills
 1 2 3 4 5 Results delivered/execution

Good value; would use this firm again? Yes No

Comments (optional)
 Please give your evaluation a caption or title

 Comments

Contact at firm (optional)
 First name _____
 Last name _____

Do you want to be identified with this evaluation? Check one:
 Show full contact
 Anonymous

ACC thanks its long-time friend, Serengeti Law, for their valuable support and assistance. The evaluation form in the ACC Value Index is based upon the one that is used in Serengeti Tracker. Some of our evaluations are provided by pipelining Serengeti Tracker evaluations into the ACC Value Index.

The ranking index is component of the ACC Value Challenge initiative, launched in September 2009, designed to “reconnect value and costs for legal services, and to promote a dialog among corporate counsel, law firms and others...” It would seem that a dialog would involve two parties with the same information, but in the Value Index keeps law firms in the dark.

ACC members can search the Value Index by firm name, matter type or office location. An ACC briefing document says “Uses include:

- Finding a valued law firm for a new matter type or in a new location
- Comparing firm performance
- Framing performance review discussions between in-house counsel and law firm
- Identifying firms that are highly valued at the ACC Committee or Chapter level for involvement with those groups.”

Law firm involvement in ACC is generally limited to buying booths, advertisements in the ACC Docket, furnishing speakers for free and paying for lunches of chapter meetings.

The lesson of this article is that when you achieve the spectacular result for your client, ask them to say something nice about you in the AAC Value Index.