



Alan Shanoff, “Easy, inexpensive ways to get legal advice”, *24 hours*, Vol 6, No. 50 (Monday, January 19, 2009), p. 15.

Easy, inexpensive ways to get legal advice

Based on e-mails sent to me, it seems that many readers don't know where to look to find a lawyer.

Last month I gave tips on how to find a lawyer but I neglected to refer to two sources: the Law Society and the Internet.

The Law Society of Upper Canada (LSUC) – readers, forgive the archaic name, this is the organization that governs lawyers in Ontario – operates a lawyer referral service. For the sum of \$6 the LUSC will give you the name of a lawyer who will provide a free 30-minute consultation. Based on that consultation you may decide to hire the lawyer at rates to be agreed on. There's no obligation to hire the lawyer and you are free to set up a consultation with another lawyer for an additional \$6.

This is an inexpensive way of connecting with a lawyer and getting basic questions answered. The number to access this service is 1-900-565-4577.

A novel way of finding a lawyer or getting legal advice is through the Internet. Some lawyers are posting ads for their services. More interesting, however, is that some people are posting a summary of their legal problems on various forums and sites such as Craigslist. Other readers or lawyers then respond and you may get the answer you're looking for and you may even find a lawyer to act for you.

Taking this a step further there's a site at www.dynamiclawyers.com where you can post legal questions. The posts get forwarded to lawyers who have signed up to the site and you get a free answer. More importantly, you may find a lawyer who can act for you. This newish site is run by Toronto lawyer Michael Carabash and has been receiving some good press lately.

I suppose that using the Internet to find a lawyer is the way of the future but if you have a serious legal problem then no matter how you initially find a lawyer, you'll need to meet the lawyer and see if there is a good fit. You'll need to agree on fees – hourly rates or a contingency fee – and a retainer agreement should be signed.

Also, by the end of your first meeting a good lawyer should give you an action plan with a clear and detailed analysis of your case with estimated timelines and a proposed budget.

The Internet can also be a great tool to obtain information on a lawyer before you make any hiring decisions. Aside from doing general searches on Google, there's an excellent site run by the Canadian Legal Information Institute available at www.canlii.org. Through this site you can search various databases to find the cases the lawyer has taken to trial. You can also read the

decisions and discover the results of the cases.

While you may not want to end up in court, it is wise to have a lawyer with plenty of court experience just in case. Lawyers who know their way around a courtroom tend to have more credibility when it comes time to negotiate a settlement or engage in mediation.

While this column focuses on employment law issues, you can use CANLII to check up on lawyers in any area of specialization. If you've got a serious personal injury or motor vehicle accident case you'll want to know how well your lawyer has done in court in other cases.

If you aren't computer savvy or don't want to bother with searches then just ask the lawyer for copies of the reported cases in which he's been involved during the past five years. Lawyers should have this information available at their fingertips. If your lawyer won't give this to you or doesn't have any cases from the past five years you may want to rethink your choice.

Remember, it's your case and your money.

Alan Shanoff was counsel to Sun Media for 16 years and is currently a freelance writer and teaches media law.