



# Assisting the Public and Increasing Your Bottom Line

BY CORLISS DILLARD

Clients are the lifeblood of any legal practice. Whether it is a partnership or sole practice, being in a position to identify opportunities that can increase one's bottom line is essential to the game of survival in the legal world. There are many opportunities to solicit new clientele beyond traditional advertising. Whether a new attorney or a seasoned veteran, the State Bar Lawyer Referral Information Service (LRIS) can help Texas attorneys increase their client base.

Since 1972, LRIS has assisted members of the public by locating attorneys on its panel to represent them. The service also provides contact information for other statewide civil, criminal, government, and related agency resources.

LRIS offers the most comprehensive service to attorneys for caller and online referrals in the state. Each year, LRIS

communicates with more than 70,000 members of the public who are searching for an attorney.

Benefits for LRIS panelists include:

- Screened referrals available from more than 240 counties in Texas;
- Additional referrals for other jurisdictions where attorneys may practice;
- A 20-percent discount on all online

purchases through TexasBarCLE. The discount is applicable for registrations for live seminars, video replays, online classes, webcasts, CLE articles, and TexasBarBooks publications; and

- Online Case Manager Status Service for easy reporting.

Belton sole practitioner Michael D. Miller participated in LRIS for six years. "It was probably the best money I ever spent," he says, referring to LRIS' annual fee. "It was a drop in the bucket compared to the business it generated."

Miller, who learned of LRIS as a law student, says being a panel member helped him get his name out to the public when marketing was not an option. "I don't do a lot of advertising," he says. "LRIS is the best advertising available simply because you have the credibility factor."

A criminal defense and entertainment lawyer, Miller says he recently left the program because he received so many LRIS referrals that he could not handle any more new clients. "It's a good problem to have," he says. "I would have no hesitation about joining LRIS again. The LRIS program is one of those things that you want to try and keep a secret, but it's so wonderful that you can't keep it to yourself."

### How does the LRIS program work?

Referrals are made on rotation and based on the county (or counties) members indicate they serve and on the subject area (or areas) they engage in. LRIS works with panel members to customize their preferences so that they receive the best referrals possible. Profile preferences may be changed at any time.

Panel members agree to provide to all referral clients an initial consultation of 30 minutes for no more than \$20. If the attorney and the client agree to continue with the case, standard fees apply for the service(s) provided. On any referral from LRIS that results in a case that generates attorney fees of \$500 or more, 10 percent of the total fees are to be remitted back to LRIS.

Callers who indicate they are looking for low or no-cost legal assistance are directed to a legal aid service or other resource.

### How can I become an LRIS panel member?

In order to join, you must be a member of the State Bar of Texas in good standing, pursuant to Rule 1.01 of the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct. All members of the LRIS must also carry professional liability insurance

for a minimum of \$100,000.

You must fill out an application form (available at [texasbar.com/LRISattorney](http://texasbar.com/LRISattorney)) and return it by mail to State Bar of Texas/LRIS, P.O. Box 12487, Austin 78701; fax to (512) 427-4115; or email [mail.lris@texasbar.com](mailto:mail.lris@texasbar.com).

### Why should Texas attorneys participate in LRIS?

Miller says there are three reasons: "First, it's a service that will allow you to help a lot of people. Second, helping people allows you to build your client base. The third reason is that in terms of actual cost, being in LRIS is more personable [than a Yellow Pages or billboard ad] and gets your name out to the public quickly."

### How does LRIS ensure I will receive proper referrals?

The State Bar LRIS department fields 6,000 to 7,000 calls per month and serves more than 240 counties across Texas. Each call is carefully screened to make sure LRIS sends qualified referrals to panel members — only 45 percent of the callers qualify as a panel referral, while the other 55 percent are referred to legal aid, local referral programs, or other resources.

### How much does it cost to be a member of LRIS?

The annual fee to join or renew as a participant-member of LRIS is \$125 per year.

### How long must I participate in the program?

A participant-member may at any time withdraw from membership in the LRIS panel upon five days written notice to the LRIS, addressed to the State Bar.

### Will every referral become a client?

In the case that a referral gives rise to a conflict of interest, the participant-member should contact LRIS, obtain a new referral for the caller, and cooperate in assisting the caller to obtain legal consultation concerning the caller's problem.

Miller says that in his experience, not all cases referred to him worked out, so he referred the client to another attorney or referred the client back to LRIS.

### How do I find out more about LRIS?

For more information on how to become a member of LRIS, call (800) 204-2222, ext. 1720 or email [lisa.zvonek@texasbar.com](mailto:lisa.zvonek@texasbar.com).



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