

PROS AND CONS OF ADVERTISING ON PROCESS SERVER DIRECTORIES

Published by the Editor of Internet Advertising News – 2008

<http://www.inetadnews.com/directories.html>

”There are a lot of directories online that profess to charge a modest monthly or annual fee to list a Process Server or Private investigator, and they insist the investment will produce results.

Here's my personal feelings about the value of Directory Advertising, and what you should think about when making this decision:

First, let me say that your ultimate decision should be based on what you think you would be willing to pay if someone came along and said "Would you pay me \$50 for every new paying customer I delivered to you?" If your answer to this was YES, then clearly you operate a business that can afford to pay \$50 to acquire a new client, and you would no doubt generate "repeat business" from that client day in and day out.

My point is this.....if a company comes along and asks you to plunk down \$2,000 a year to advertise in their directory, your decision should not be based on how much you have to pay for their advertising, but how many new clients you feel you could obtain annually as a result of making that expenditure. If you felt you might achieve 1 new client a month through this advertising, then you'd have signed on 12 new clients at a cost of \$2,000, at an acquisition cost of \$166.66 per new client.

If you grossed \$50 per paper served (as an example) and the total number of papers the 12 clients gave you to serve during the year in which you made the advertising expenditure was 400, then you would have grossed an added \$20,000 and spent only \$2,000 to do this. Obviously an investment you might consider making....that is, if you were able to achieve 12 new clients during a 12 month period, who gave you a total of 400 papers to serve, and assuming the gross profit on each paper was \$50.....a lot of variables to consider....which might or might not pan out.

Equally obvious is the fact that you might acquire a greater or lesser number of new clients, who in turn might give you significantly more than 400 papers to serve, or significantly less.

You can create a simple spread sheet to figure all this out....but the bottom line is clear, and **the point I am making is that all advertising should be weighed on the basis of ROI (return on investment), or what I refer to as "cost to acquire a new client".**

Send me a new client that can give me enough business to enable me to earn \$15,000 a year from that one client, and I'd gladly give you \$1,000 to acquire that client (amounts to a 7% commission in my eyes).

There are numerous Process Server and Private Investigator directories on the Internet. Some charge monthly fees dependent on the geographic area you wish to be listed in, while others charge a flat rate for a 12 month listing. Each professes to attract visitors to their web site in an amount that would likely bring you new business.

I have no crystal ball, so I couldn't possibly tell you how much new business you'd attract, and many variables will determine this. One of the variables is how many listings there are when a search for your city or state is conducted and how your business is presented when someone clicks on a link to your business.

I will share with you results from a recent survey we conducted by speaking with one of the popular Process Server & PI Directories:

- ✓ When attorneys conducted city or state searches on the directory, they often had to select from a field of many advertisers. On average, they clicked on 5 or 6 advertiser links to view their offerings. This suggests that the number of listings on a page does not translate to not being able to achieve a "click" on your listing. As position on a listing page is important, we would suggest listing with a company whose listings "rotate" each time a page is refreshed. That way, you'll achieve top billing more often.
- ✓ A study of navigation revealed that a majority of directory visitors spent less than a few minutes researching each company, and when they did, few spent more than 15 seconds on the home page of a site they were researching, and usually reviewed the PRICING & SERVICES page first, and then the About Us page. This is consistent with web surfing on the whole....people want to blow past any bells and whistles and get right to what they are searching for....a reputable process server who can provide the services they need at a reasonable cost.
- ✓ A further study of navigation habits revealed that more time was spent on sites where there was broader information about pricing and services, including endorsements, suggesting that visitors might not select a company that does not have credentials, or does not reveal enough information about services and pricing. The navigation patterns suggest this, but since we cannot tabulate which businesses visitors ultimately elected to do business with, we can only make assumptions in this area.
- ✓ We reviewed the sites of numerous process servers and private investigators that were unappealing from the standpoint of design, and appeared to have been constructed by amateurs. These sites conveyed a feeling that the businesses were not established, though the text suggested differently. The amount of time visitors spent reviewing these sites was under 10 seconds, so we must assume that visitors were turned off, and simply clicked through to another company. Our experience in web advertising on the whole, and for that matter any type of sales is that "first impressions" are important, so we would recommend that all sites do what they can to make a better first impression on visitors.

There are numerous companies that specialize in enhancing web sites for Process Servers & Private Investigators at a cost under \$500, and some do it for less.

In addition to conducting the above research, we spoke with numerous process servers and private investigators about the type of advertising they were conducting on the Internet, the cost, and the results.

Though there are probably more directories out there, the ones mentioned most often were the [National Professional Process Server & PI Registry](#), [the NAPPS Registry](#), [Martindale Hubbel \(Lexis-Nexis\)](#), [Serve-Now](#), [Lawinfo](#), [Findlaw](#), [RomingerLegal](#), [HierosGamos](#), [International Process Servers Association](#).

Each of the above companies markets their services in a different manner and at a different cost. As an example, **Serve-Now.com** charges process servers a monthly fee which is based on the number of geographic areas the process server wishes to be listed in.

This can result in a cost of \$300 or more per month, depending on the amount of real estate purchased. Nothing wrong with that, provided that you have the budget for this. Judging from the amount of advertising and promotion Serve Now professes to conduct (which we have no way of gauging), they probably could not cost justify charging any less. Serve-Now has a separate site for Private Investigators, a new venture, at PINow.com, which we did not evaluate.

The National Professional Process Server & PI Registry, who are also the developers of the popular Case Manager Software charge only \$75 per year for a Statewide Listing (includes all cities), and \$200 annually for a listing in all 50 States.

Advertising on NAPPS, National Association Of Professional Process Servers is at no added cost to the many NAPPS members, according to a process server we spoke to, and NAPPS has an excellent reputation for integrity, which no doubt rubs off on the listed members. It is a given that whatever amount of new business a process server or PI derives from a NAPPS listing is found money.

We noted from conducting searches on these directories that a significant number of process serving and PI firms were listed on multiple directories, some on as many as 5 directories. Even the NAPPS members were listed on numerous other directories.

The attitudes of the many process servers and PI's that we surveyed was simply that "they will try anything once if it is cheap enough without having to conduct a lot of due diligence regarding traffic studies etc." and they will invest to advertise on the pricier directories on either a "test" basis or as a result of reviewing testimonials, and through referrals etc.

Generally speaking, the majority confirmed what I already felt, that they would gladly spend \$50 or more to acquire each new client, so it is clear to this writer that they will spread their advertiser dollars in many directions, including directories, search engines, publications etc., and allow the results to guide them in future decisions. What I will bet the ranch on is that anyone who is savvy enough will remain loyal to any advertising site that can deliver even a small number of new clients if the cost of acquiring them is cost justified.

As to whether or not advertisers are satisfied with the companies they selected to advertise with, some did not like the results, and many did.

In many cases, after reviewing the web sites of some disgruntled advertisers, we felt they would have fared much better if their sites had a more professional look and feel, but we have no crystal ball telling us this. Some complained about the high cost of advertising on Martindale Hubbel and Serve-Now and they did not feel the results were adequate given the high cost, while others swore these companies were the best thing since sliced bread, which is to be expected.

BOTTOM LINE...

Advertising does pay, so review all your directory and other advertising options...spend a little here and there...and then bet the ranch when you find a medium that produces a decent return on investment."

Editor
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