

U.S. News Law Firm Rankings Ruffle ABA Feathers

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In the wake of reports that Chambers and other ratings services may not actually affect law firm's chances of getting hired, the ABA has turned a critical eye toward what is looking like another massive project for law firm marketing departments with unknown business development value: the impending U.S. News & World Report law firm rankings issue.

The issue is said to be planned for September, and the ABA is sounding highly skeptical. The professional organization made news this week when it passed a resolution to examine the practices of law firm and attorney ratings services. (See the full National Law Journal piece [here](#).)

If nothing else, this story demonstrates the power of mass media. Despite the existence of Avvo, Chambers, the ACC's ratings index and multiple other ratings and ranking systems, the ABA only acted when U.S. News entered the game. (As NLJ reports, the New York State Bar Association, which sponsored the resolution, isn't being coy about the fact that the U.S. News rankings spurred it to action.) We can't blame them. Lawyers are highly sensitive to matters of prestige, and everyone who has been to law school knows the power of the U.S. News law school rankings.

Lawyers are now facing the prospect of agonizing on a yearly basis over where U.S. News, based on whatever methodology it might choose, will rank their firms. And regardless of how faulty the rankings methodology is, it will definitely get noticed. You only have to look at the law school example for proof of that.

It's a good move for the ABA to investigate the rankings, if only to open a dialogue with U.S. News that might produce more informed rankings. Beyond that, it's far from clear what the organization actually can or will do in reaction to the rankings issue. Some within the ABA have already raised anti-trust concerns about any organized response.

One thing we know for sure: we'll be waiting at the newsstand for it.