



Website intends to help startups skip legal pitfalls

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A classic example is Raygun:

An exciting business started, gained traction and brand identity, and then the letter from the lawyers arrived. The store that used to be called Smash was threatened with a trademark lawsuit in 2009 by another store called Smash in Southern California.

Some \$25,000 later, the store was renamed Raygun and a lawsuit was avoided.

“It’s not cheap to rebrand,” said Emily Harris, a lawyer at the Davis Brown Law Firm.

Harris’s downtown Des Moines law firm has a website called the Start-Up Launchpad, a project conceived and executed by Harris and corporate attorney Jason Stone. The lawyers believe the site, which includes a blog aimed at startups, will help entrepreneurs avoid some of the most common legal pitfalls.

Startups can pay a flat \$5,000 fee to get a package of corporate, intellectual property, employment and securities legal services.

The site is also, Stone and Harris believe,

an example of a new legal business model. The core of the website is a series of standard services and documents — customizable, easily filled out and available for flat fees. Lawyers review the documents to help clients avoid major mistakes or tax consequences, but in general the service is cheaper and faster than creating the documents from scratch.

Documents to form a single-member limited liability company cost \$300. A trademark search and attorney’s opinion costs \$1,000.

The site incorporates the strategies of sites like LegalZoom.com, Rocket Lawyer .com and FreeAdvice.com, adds automated customization, and weds the service with traditional guidance from attorneys.

It’s not just for startups.

“We don’t think there’s another law firm in the country doing this,” said Stone.

“Nobody’s doing it now, but they will be

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doing it in five years.”

Stone breaks the business of law into two categories — document generation and high-level legal services. Law firms have long charged for document generation in billable hours.

Automated forms that create those documents quickly for a flat fee haven't actually lost Stone any money, though. He can produce the document more quickly, leaving him more time for other work.

“The margin for me is sometimes better,” he said.

The site has about 30 templates for legal documents, ranging in price from free to \$1,200.

Stone and Harris expect to make additional documents available.

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