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Can law firms advertise in India? The rules explained

What the Bar Council of India rules say about advertising and solicitation by advocates and law firms, including websites, directories and social media.

Indian law firms work under one of the strictest advertising regimes in the world. Anyone building a firm's website, profile or social media presence needs to know the rule and its limits.

The rule

Rule 36 of the Bar Council of India's standards of professional conduct says that an advocate shall not solicit work or advertise, directly or indirectly. It names circulars, advertisements, touts, personal communications and interviews not warranted by personal relations. The rule treats the practice of law as a profession to be chosen by reputation, not promotion.

The website exception

In 2008 the rule was relaxed to allow advocates to maintain websites that give basic information in a prescribed form: name, address, telephone numbers, e-mail, enrolment details, professional and academic qualifications, and areas of practice. The information must be true, and the advocate remains responsible for it.

Where firms get into difficulty

- **Claims of superiority.** Words such as "best", "leading" or "number one" invite trouble.
- **Client names and case results** used as promotional material.
- **Paid listings and lead-generation platforms.** The Bar Council has warned advocates against soliciting work through online intermediaries.
- **Testimonials and endorsements.**
- **Social media posts** that read as invitations to engage the lawyer.

What is generally accepted

- A factual website within the permitted categories, usually with a disclaimer.
- Scholarly writing: articles, case notes and commentary that inform rather than solicit.
- Speaking at conferences and teaching.
- Entries in recognised professional directories, kept factual.
- Awards received from independent bodies, reported without embellishment.

The policy question

Critics say the rule protects established names and keeps new firms invisible, and that clients, especially small businesses, have little reliable information when choosing a lawyer. Supporters say it preserves dignity and prevents misleading claims. There is a middle path used elsewhere: permit truthful, verifiable information and prohibit what is false, comparative or undignified.

Practical guidance

Until the rule changes, firms should build visibility through substance. Publish useful analysis. Train your people to write clearly. Be easy to find and accurate in what you say. Keep a written policy on public communication so that every partner follows the same standard.

An industry body can help by offering shared platforms, events, research and publications, through which firms of every size are seen for the quality of their thinking.

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