



Who to Hire – Process Server or Sheriff?

When a paralegal or legal assistant needs a legal document served they generally have two options: hire a professional process server or hire a sheriff. Though often instructed to utilize a sheriff's services without indication of an alternative, paralegals should consider every option when choosing who to trust with service of process. With legal risks involved and differences in customer service, pricing structure and communication, there are a number of factors to evaluate in each professional. Findings from a recent survey outline what legal professionals have to say about each option. The unprecedented study provides a clear indication of whether a process server or sheriff is the best option and why.

The Process Server vs. Sheriff Project

The study outlines the differences between process servers and sheriffs in the categories of success rate, fees, knowledge of related laws, communication and customer service. The data was collected through a survey of 100 paralegals, legal assistants and legal administrators who have documents served on a regular basis. Process servers were also surveyed about their fee structures and turnaround times while sheriff pricing was collected from public records.

Process Server vs. Sheriff By the Numbers

78% of the legal professionals surveyed selected the process server as their preferred provider, while 19% would rather hire a sheriff. Multiple participants, including legal assistants, expressed her reasons for only using a sheriff in necessary situations, saying, "The only times I use a sheriff is if it is an area where I cannot locate a reasonably priced process server, or [if] it is someone in jail or a government entity."

Participants also ranked process servers higher in terms of speed of service, listing the process server as the faster option 9 times out of 10. The legal professionals surveyed described process servers as more diligent, organized and dependable than sheriffs. "Over my career I have found private process servers to be much faster in getting process served," One paralegal explained. "The sheriff's office generally has other things going on."

In the provided ranking system of 1 to 5 stars, process servers received an average customer service rating of 4.28 out of 5 stars compared with the sheriff's 2.55. "Private process servers have to compete in the marketplace and know they can be replaced if they don't give good service,".

Perhaps the most surprising statistic was regarding knowledge of related laws. 13% of the legal professionals surveyed listed the sheriff as the more knowledgeable professional, while the remaining **87% described process servers as having an equal or better understanding of relevant rules and regulations**. "This is one of the most important aspects of service of process," when service of process is not completed in accordance with due process requirements a court case can experience a costly delay or be dismissed from court. Additionally, professionals who hire process servers generally experience a higher success rate of 92%, with sheriffs effectuating service an average of 74% of the time.

The average fee for a process server is \$53.99. The fee structure for process servers is different than that of sheriffs, as process server pricing often includes multiple attempts and mileage while the sheriff's does not. When you account for additional fees, the process server's higher cost, a difference of \$14.41, becomes practically negligible.

In conclusion, the process server was ranked higher in speed of service, customer service, knowledge of laws, success rate and was selected as the preferred provider. The sheriff has a lower average cost, ranking better in the only category that was based on written reports rather than the preference and experience of the surveyed legal professionals.

