



FRONT SECTION

MARKETPLACE

MONEY & INVESTING

TECH CENTER

SPORTS

PERSONAL JOURNAL

- NEWS
- FAVORITES
- PORTFOLIO
- PERSONAL PATH



September 27, 1999

A New Portal for Huddled Masses: Foreigners Troll Web for Green Card

By **MARJORIE VALBRUNN**
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Luca Barbera, an Italian national, had long dreamed of moving his family to the U.S. But he had no relatives here to sponsor him, he wasn't a political refugee and he didn't qualify for temporary work visas.

From his home in Milan, he went on the Web three years ago and learned about a visa-lottery process. Along the way, he discovered a trove of information: immigration lawyers, regulatory forms and electronic newsletters on the latest in U.S. immigration policy.

With the help of a Tennessee attorney he found on the Internet, Mr. Barbera won a U.S. green card. "It's easier to cross the Mexican border," the 40-year-old Mr. Barbera says, than to get that little plastic card that bestows permanent legal residency.

Mr. Barbera is part of a growing class of well-informed, tech-savvy foreigners using the Internet to boost their shot at immigrating here. The online activity is starting to revolutionize how people immigrate here, offering a vivid example of how the Web is shrinking the world and speeding up life. Some foreigners have become so entangled in regulatory red tape that marketplace forces have swooped in, via the Internet, to offer solutions.

"The Internet is a Rosetta stone that helps immigrants crack the code," says Carl Shusterman, a Los Angeles immigration attorney.

Online legal advice can improve the odds, some lawyers say, if only by helping applicants maneuver around the paperwork minefield. For example, roughly a third of visa-lottery applications routinely get thrown out because they aren't filled out correctly. Because the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service uses electronic sorters to process forms, any staples on an application form will automatically disqualify it.

If you still manage to win, moreover, the State Department will send only one

TECH
CENTER
SEARCH

- Article
- Quote
- Compa

W
Join a d
would h
commer
employe
shopping

Join E-V
Tom We
discussi
p.m. ED

Ad

- In this Section:**
- [Tech Stocks](#)
 - [Tech Briefs](#)
 - [Personal Technology](#)
 - [Dodge's E-economy](#)
 - [Year 2000](#)
 - [Under the Radar](#)
 - [Tech Extra](#)
 - [Net Interest](#)
 - [Watching the Web](#)
 - [Company Profiles](#)
 - [Tech Timeline](#)
 - [Issue Briefings](#)
- wsj.com Audio:**
- [Business Update](#)
 - [Markets Recap](#)
 - [WSJ on Audible](#)
 - [Learn More](#)
- Journal Atlas:**
- [Table of Contents](#)
 - [Headlines](#)
 - [Business Index](#)
 - [Search](#)
 - [News Search](#)
 - [Past Editions](#)
 - [Briefing Books](#)
 - [Quotes](#)

Resources:
[Help](#)

[New Features](#)
[E-mail Center](#)
[Your Account](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Glossary](#)
[Special Reports](#)
[Weather](#)

STOCK QUOTES

Select exchange:

U.S. ▼

Enter symbols:

[Symbol lookup](#)

Other wsj.com Sites:

[Careers](#)
[Homes](#)
[Personal Tech](#)
[Starting a Business](#)
[Travel](#)

The Print Journal:

[Subscribe](#)
[Customer Service](#)

More Dow Jones Sites:

[dowjones.com](#)
[Barron's Online](#)
[DJ University](#)
[Publications Library](#)
[Reprints](#)
[SmartMoney](#)
[Dow Jones & Co.](#)

[Corrections](#)

written notice -- and if you move or the notice gets lost in the mail, the department will neither send another one nor confirm it by phone.

The INS says many applicants can be helped by the agency's own site, www.ins.usdoj.gov, which has free information, and forms and applications that can be downloaded.

Russ Bergeron, a spokesman for the agency, says that if people have "a problem they need to overcome or a unique circumstance, then they probably will benefit from expert legal advice."



Luca Barbera, an Italian national, found an immigration attorney on the Web.

Rejected at First

The first time Mr. Barbera applied for the visa lottery, he did it on his own and was rejected. The second time, he found lawyer Gregory Siskind over the Internet and, with his help, reapplied. Out of the six million applicants annually, Mr. Barbera won one of the coveted 55,000 slots.

He and his wife, Reine, and their two children moved to the U.S. this summer. He now works as a consultant for [Aetna Inc.](#) in Hartford, Conn., using his international business experience to review the purchasing practices of the insurance company's branches abroad.

Mr. Siskind is a founding partner of Siskind, Susser, Haas & Devine, an immigration law firm in Memphis. Its Web site, visalaw.com, was launched in 1994, and today receives more than 175,000 hits weekly from visitors from more than 60 countries.

"More than half of our business is on the Internet," says Mr. Siskind. "It's always been hard to get any information from the INS, and the information people could get wasn't always reliable," he says. Problems of distance, and different times zones, he says, are also much easier to negotiate online.



After winning a green card, Luca Barbera is settling with his family into a new life in America.

Mr. Siskind stresses that people don't need an attorney for every service, but says the immigration process often gets progressively more difficult. Also, because U.S. immigration policy is highly politicized, the rules change often. "Every few years there is a major overhaul by Congress," he says.

Some immigrants themselves have gone online to share what they have learned. Ellie Azoulay, a South African, and her husband, Walter Marin, originally from Chile, started the American Immigration Center to help fellow immigrants. The official-sounding "center" is actually an online bookstore in Rio Rancho, N.M. It has immigration and self-help products, including videos, software, audio tapes and how-to guides, as well as immigration-law and federal-code books for attorneys.

The site also offers a bulletin board for job hunters and employers to post resumes and job openings. On other areas of the site people can post questions and answers "and share their real-life experiences and learn from each other," says Ms. Azoulay. The site, www.us-immigration.com, gets between 250,000 and 260,000 hits weekly.

Other Internet immigration entrepreneurs have developed niches. Mr. Shusterman, the Los Angeles immigration attorney, hosts monthly online chats presented by Careerpath.com, an employment-related Web site that combines the job listings of large daily newspapers. Last month, Mr. Shusterman hosted a session called "Cracking the Code: Getting Your Green Card."

Not a Client

Daniel Worthy, who moved a year and a half ago to Lincoln, Neb., from New Zealand, credits Mr. Shusterman with helping him get here -- even though he's not a client.

Mr. Worthy, who now works as a network technician managing the University of Nebraska's computer server, says his Web search yielded many sites and attorneys who "were looking for pay. But I remembered reading that the [lottery visa] application was free, so I kept searching for a site with clear information" and no cost, Mr. Worthy says. In hot pursuit, he landed on Mr. Shusterman's page, and subsequently on U.S. soil.



[Return to top of page](#) | [Format for printing](#) Sponsored By:
SAVIN.

Copyright © 1999 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.