

May 2011

Why we need to move away from the legal profession's 'stuffy' stigma

David Green, managing partner at MTA Solicitors and LawStore project leader believes access to legal services should be made less intimidating and more convenient for everyone

According to a recent survey¹ by the Legal Services Research Centre (part of the Legal Services Commission) consumers don't realise many of the problems they face are 'legal' and so don't consider approaching a lawyer for help. David Green agrees this is a common scenario for many people but believes the reluctance to approach a solicitor in the first instance is a reflection of how the legal profession traditionally operates.

"Unfortunately the legal profession embodies an often serious and intimidating environment that many people find uncomfortable to be in the presence of. There is also a stigma attached to visiting a solicitor's office and an expectation that we'll be left feeling bamboozled by legal jargon that we don't fully understand along with a hefty price tag at the end of it. It's no wonder that many people avoid picking up the phone to make an appointment with a local solicitor, even when legal advice might be the only answer".

The survey also pointed out that there is clearly confusion for many consumers in the way that they characterise some problems as 'legal' and not others. It also found that respondents would seek help from the broader advice sector with the majority of their problems, demonstrating the need for good legal advice that is accessible to everyone.

Green continues, "Wondering whether or not you should seek legal advice for a particular problem can often be a daunting prospect and depending on the nature of the situation, might well be frightening or upsetting (particularly in the case of family-related or marital cases); the added stress of speaking to a 'legal professional' in an alien environment doesn't help matters. For many, the issue comes straight down to how much it is going to cost to obtain the advice they need in the first instance – what if they have to pay a hefty sum only to discover they don't have a case anyway?"

What Green believes is crucial, is that anyone should have access to legal advice that helps them to evaluate in the first instance whether their problem is in fact a legal case or not and it is this type of help that has been severely lacking in previous years.

¹ Survey of 1,031 people titled 'the future of the legal services sector – emerging thinking'

“Law firms in general need to understand the apprehension that many people face when seeking legal help. Often the problem can be personal and emotional and in many cases people are worried about looking stupid in front of a professional, there are so many factors to consider. These issues have led to the need for an alternative option for consumers to deal with their legal worries”.

Green claims that bringing legal help to the high street in an unconventional but approachable setting is the best solution. “As legal professionals it should be our job to change the face of legal services and create a friendlier, more informal environment for those that need to obtain legal advice; it should be no different to going to your local high street optician for an eye test”.

Using the analogy of the optician, Green reflects on the past process for visiting your optician, “You would invariably be sitting in a large Victorian building at the back of a high street waiting in turn rather like a visit to the doctor’s surgery. Today we can simply visit the optician in most high street stores or shopping centres and choose from a wide range of frames and designs as part of our shopping trip – and we think nothing of it. It makes sense to adopt a similar approach to shopping for legal services and advice and instead bring the solicitor to the everyday shopper who will find the whole experience a lot less daunting than they might have imagined,” explains Green.

The benefit of bringing legal advice to a ‘shopper-friendly’ environment is that everyone and anyone can obtain greater access to a certain amount of free advice on any legal issue in a relaxed and informal setting before discovering whether or not they have a case. For the legal profession, the end goal should be to provide high quality legal services (that you would expect from any good solicitors), make the process as easy as possible for people and to finally put an end to confusing, meaningless legal jargon and unnecessary costs.

- ENDS -

Notes to editors:

The MTA LawStore offers advice on anything from conveyancing, drafting a will or what to do if facing an impending driving prosecution. A 30-minute free consultation should ascertain the merits or pitfalls of the legal issue and should the matter need to escalate in appointing a solicitor, LawStore offers extremely competitive rates which in most cases are recoverable from the other side.

The MTA LawStore is now open at: LawStore, Unit 81, Regent Arcade, The Glades, Bromley BR1 1DD.

Legal Clinics include:

- Property Law and Conveyancing
- Personal Injury and Clinical Negligence
- Commercial / Consumer Law
- Wills and Probate
- Commercial and Personal Debt Recovery
- Employment Law
- Driving Law

For further information contact:

Catherine Greenwood:

Head of PR and Marketing

0208 466 4377

catherine.greenwood@mtasolicitors.com