

What to look for when selecting a solicitor



*If you can imagine it
you can achieve it!*

Isn't it annoying when people, having done something for you that you did not ask or necessarily want them to do, say, "You're welcome," thinking they were actually doing you a favour? For many years lawyers were regarded, and acted, as that almost heavenly body of people to whom your presence was an inconvenience and their company was your pleasure; then they charged you for the time they condescended to spend with you. As a profession, lawyers are moving away from this attitude and becoming, I sincerely hope, businesses.

You are unlikely to have the skills to know if your prospective solicitor is 'technically' competent, which is why you are going to them in the first place. So what initial processes can you take your prospective solicitor through to establish if they are a 'you're welcome' practice or a business with real understanding that you are the customer?

Communication

When you make that first call, what is said to you? Did the receptionist ask if you were an existing client or a new enquiry? When the receptionist establishes that you are a potential client do you get through to the lawyer? Do you get through to anyone at all? A good firm will ensure someone takes your call, even if the solicitor can't as he or she may already be on the phone or in a meeting. Do they then return your call within a very short space of time? Are you greeted as if you are a prospective customer or someone whose call was not expected, but simply interrupted the normal 'lawyering' day? A good firm will welcome the call and respond accordingly.

Proactive

Ask them how they communicate. If they respond by saying they will write out to all concerned and each time a letter comes in will forward you a copy and await your written response and then write to the other side, politely say thanks and move on to the next name on your list. In this time of emails, voicemail, mobile phones, PDAs and laptops, responses to queries should be swift. You should not have to speculate about what is happening, you should be told. Does your solicitor ever offer to visit you rather than always expect you to visit them? Your relationship with your lawyer is based on their time so be aware that you may pay travelling time if they do visit you - but at least see if it's offered.

Accommodating

Someone with customer service in mind will try to accommodate your needs. Ask if you can have appointments outside of normal office hours. If the answer is no, then politely say thanks and move on to the next name of your list. My dentist now stays open until 7pm! My doctor's surgery is open on Saturday morning! Lawyers who provide good customer-focused service will be those recognising that you, the customer, cannot always get away from work and will try to accommodate this.

Management and IT infrastructure

Feel free to ask about the 'back office stuff'. What support staff are in place to assist the lawyers? What IT infrastructure is in place to support the business? What business continuity plan do they have in place? Do they have a structure in place to deal with your case and deal with it and you effectively? As a profession, solicitors should change to meet the needs of their 'customers' and that means accommodating your needs.

At the end of your first conversation with your prospective solicitor, have they indicated to you that you are a 'customer' or is their rhetoric that of 'you're welcome'.



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Avalon Solutions supports your business by looking at your business support and administrative processes and improving them. Avalon Solutions also offers business coaching and seminars on a variety of management topics.

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