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## INVESTMENT & PLANNING

# Finding a lawyer

Yuri Rapoport

FINDING the right lawyer is like searching for an address without a street directory. And throwing a dart at the yellow pages won't solve the problem.

Our proposal presents an answer: we provide a broking and consultancy service that specialises in assisting consumers to select a solicitor with the necessary skill and experience to satisfy the client's needs in a timely and cost-effective way. The service caters to both the sophisticated and unsophisticated user of legal services and involves the following procedure:

- \* an interview is conducted with the client to identify specific needs;
- \* a proposal gives the client a range of alternative solicitors appropriate to the client's needs, comparing and explaining these alternatives;
- \* an initial approach is made on the client's behalf and a proposed fee or pricing structure is negotiated;
- \* the results of these negotiations are discussed with the client who is assisted in making an informed decision;
- \* regular interviews with clients monitor the continuing relationship between client and solicitor to ensure that the client's needs are being met;

Prime Law Brokers provides a forum where lawyers and clients are matched. Analogous to other brokering institutions such as insurance brokers, finance brokers, stock brokers and merchant banks, law broking provides clients with easy access, through referrals, to a wide range of legal practitioners.

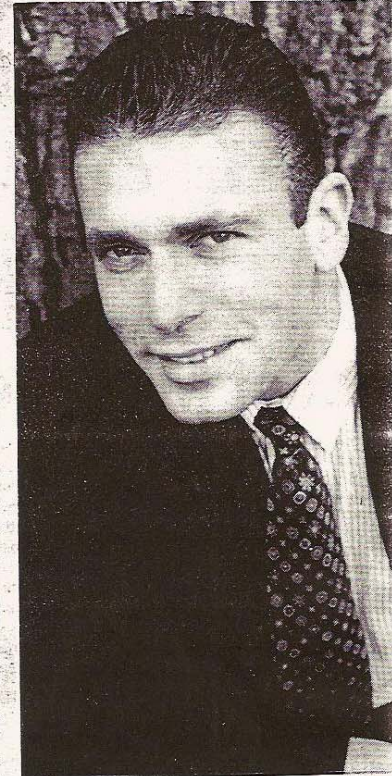
Prime Law Brokers provides its service *free of charge* to the consumer. The reason it can do this is because the legal profession generally supports this type of reform.

The benefit to the law firms is that once their service quality, efficiency and charge out rates are adjusted to meet public needs, they obtain access to a stream of work they may otherwise not have. The benefit to the client, we would argue, is an overall better and more cost-effective service.

The registration fee comprises an initial listing fee of \$95 and an additional fee which is indexed to the number of referrals a lawyer receives during a year (calculated on four per cent of the work cost estimate).

Prime Law Brokers personnel are qualified independent lawyers (ie unassociated with any law firm), who are able to identify and assess clients' legal requirements.

Prime operates on the basis of an extensive panel of lawyers who undertake the referred work. Lawyers are selected to participate on the Prime Panel, but



Yuri Rapoport: law broker.

Prime Law Brokers encourages participation by as many lawyers as possible.

To ensure that the process is fair, all lawyers who meet the client's requirements receive a notification of the pending referral. The lawyers are then invite to respond to the notification by expressing an interest to undertake the work, quoting additional information which may be required. Ultimately, it is the client who makes the decision about which lawyer is most suitable.

As a precaution against non-genuine inquiries, clients may be asked to contribute a deposit to the lawyer (held in trust by Prime Law Brokers) before the referral is made. The deposit is then transferred to the lawyer (in trust) as part of the referral process. Upon rendering a bill for professional costs, the lawyer credits the client with the amount held in trust on an agreed basis.

▲ Yuri Rapoport is a principal of Prime Law Brokers. Further information on 9824-1206.