

Sohila Zanjani

is the Managing Director of Prime Law Brokers, a legal referral service that has established a prodigious reputation for effectively sourcing the "right lawyer for every case" on behalf of her clients.

www.primelawbrokers.com

PS My next guest on *Talking Business* is the Managing Director of Prime Law Brokers, Sohila Zanjani. A legal referral service, Prime Law Brokers has established an impressive reputation for effectively sourcing what they believe to be the right lawyer for every case on behalf of their clients. The service aims to remove the common frustrations people encounter when involved in a legal dispute and ensures they receive the right advice.

Welcome to *Talking Business*, Sohila.

SZ Thank you.

PS Sohila, what is your background? Are you a lawyer?

SZ No, I am a new graduate from Monash University Melbourne.

PS Okay, so you understand the crafty minds of lawyers and you also understand the minds of customers who want to get the right lawyer?

SZ Definitely. [laughter]

PS Okay. So tell me where the business came from.

SZ Oh, it's very interesting. This business was started by a lawyer from Corrs Chambers Westgarth. The idea came to his mind, and his name was Uri Rapaport. This is back in 1996. When I came from Tehran, Iran, in 1981, I was basically in Australia in 1981 and then — I won't go through this whole story — I had to study law before I realised I am familiar with my rights as a person living in Australia, as a mother of four children. So after my marriage breakdown, even though my background was in computers — I was always a computer programmer — I decided to study law. It was very difficult of course to get into the law school with my background — my degree was not recognised — but somehow I was so determined to get into law and I did. I had to do the VC again, you know, but finally in 1997 I graduated and when I graduated from law school I had to do my articles. I sent 52 applications and never reached any interview until one day I saw an advertisement in the Monash University Law School

**Sohila
Zanjani**

by Uri Rapaport. He wanted a law graduate, and this is 1996. I went to his home-office and he said to me he had this idea, and ever since I believed in his idea. But soon Uri left Australia and it was me with no business background. Then I was basically a sole parent relying on a pension with four children, living in a cooperative house, so desperate, really. I said, Uri...I stood by him basically when he left. I stood by and established by working really hard — I really truly worked hard — and I was determined, so the business flourished.

PS So tell us about the business now? Do you have a number of employees? What kind of customers do you deal with?

SZ The business as you rightly said refers clients to lawyers. People — 24 hours, seven days per week — this is a national business — are calling me. They're asking who is the right lawyer for their matter, and I have in the past ten years been running this business. The most common question I have come across is how to find the right lawyer. People want direction, people want to make an informed decision, and legal issues are sudden issues — suddenly you face a problem and you don't know where to go. So these are the very people calling my business, and I tell them who is the right lawyer for them. So, as I said, it's a free service for the public and directing clients to the right lawyer. I listen to the clients very carefully — my medium with them is just the phone, I never see their faces — so by listening carefully to what they want, I then connect them to the right lawyer for the particular matter.

PS We're talking to Sohila Zanjani from Prime Law Brokers. And so I guess, law firms must pay you when you present customers to them?

SZ You see, the business is free for clients; lawyers pay Prime Law Brokers what we call advertising costs, yes they do. However, by having Prime to promote them, if they're a good quality law firm, they minimise their advertising and administrative costs by screening clients for the particular need or the particular branch they want. See, sophisticated clients call Prime also a lay person calls Prime Law Brokers. From business matters to litigation in, say, the purchase of

**Sohila
Zanjani**

a business to drink driving, family law, injury, employment law and so on and so forth. These are then lawyers who are confident and have experience in particular areas would be connected to the client that needs that service, so this is about matching the requirements of clients to the lawyers' expertise.

PS Yes. I'm often told by experts that it's important that you have a lawyer that has expertise in the area of franchising where a franchisee might be disputing the franchisor — to go to a suburban solicitor, they often just don't have the skills to pull off the job.

SZ Absolutely, absolutely. And ten years, we have a database where information about lawyers and clients are stored and this information really has two pillars, if you like. One pillar is the lawyers' objective assessment of performances — what this lawyer is really good at. This objective information about the lawyers is one pillar. The other pillar is the feedback by the clients. So, clients regularly tell us what they think of our lawyers, so this is a subjective understanding by our clients, and by balancing and putting these two pillars together we are in a position to direct the client to the right lawyer for that specific matter that the client has a problem with.

PS Is there much competition for this sort of service in the country? Are there many others doing what you're doing?

SZ None. There are new law brokers in Australia; we are Australia's number one lawyer broker. There are other referral services, like the Law Institute of Victoria and all the referral services, but none really provide really personal and professional services together. See, we listen to these clients. What they want is so important. It's not just a detached call — go to this lawyer, go to that lawyer. This idea of requirements that the clients have, and sophisticated clients want to know why I refer them to a particular lawyer whereas a lay-person client is happy with the opinion that I have, he or she just wants a starting point.

PS And do you think over time you've learnt something about the nature of people when it comes to the panic response

**Sohila
Zanjani**

that they have when they're in trouble and how they can easily make the wrong decision in selecting lawyers?

SZ Definitely, Peter, definitely. I think an example is very good to clarify this for people. Suddenly there is drink-driving, suddenly there is a death in the family, divorce, you lose your job. Suddenly you receive a letter that somebody is suing you — you have a business and somebody comes and breaks his leg. It's the very nature of legal problems being sudden, and that is where you need to have a service to pick up the phone and say, Hi, I have been sued. What should I do? I have a bankruptcy matter. Who is the right lawyer for bankruptcy matters? For a commercial lease matters? This sudden nature is totally different from accountants really. With accounting you have 12 months to think about it really, or four months I suppose with GST, but with lawyers you've got to know there is a service that you can call, you can trust, and learn from their experiences. We have done the running around for clients. I mean, honestly, how many lawyers do you call? Do you select one? How many?

PS Generally none.

SZ You're a very lucky man, Peter. But finding the right lawyer, I think, is like finding an address with a directory — you find your address quicker with less headache. We have done this running around to find the right lawyer for any particular matter and clients enjoy this free service and basically they save time and money.

PS Sohila, is there a website for people if they want to check out what you're doing?

SZ Yes, of course — www.primelawbrokers.com and I have the pleasure to inform you that in the future we will have our website modified to have information about lawyers, the rating that we have for the lawyers — we give them stars if they perform good and then of course the feedback of their clients.

PS Fantastic. Thanks for joining us on *Talking Business*.

SZ My pleasure.