

lawyers

weekly

FRIDAY 7 AUGUST 2009 www.lawyersweekly.com.au

ISSUE 448

news

New firm takes lessons from in-house

WITH THE virtues of the traditional law firm model increasingly called into question, a number of entrepreneurial lawyers are setting out to incorporate in-house practices into innovative law firm structures.

One of the more recent examples of such ventures is Bespoke Law, the brainchild of Jeremy Szwider. On its website, Bespoke Law is described as "a virtual legal boutique where the principles of an in-house lawyer merge with private practice". Szwider himself has worked both in private practice and in-house, as general counsel for FTSE 100 communications company The Carphone Warehouse Group.

A key feature of the firm, he explained, is that he works straight out of clients' offices, and this has allowed him to do away with overheads because the firm needs no significant office space.

"I move around and technology allows me to do that. And cutting out the overheads allows ... my model to be very cost-effective," he said. "I pitch myself as working out of clients' premises on a rotational basis. So the aim is that I get to know the clients' business as if I am their in-house lawyer."

Szwider said that when he launched the firm his aim was to bring together the best aspects of in-house and private practice and create a "hybrid" model – at the same time significantly reducing the costs of legal services.

"I thought the time was right to [launch] based on the economic downturn. I thought that legal

services have always been too costly, and a lot of the approaches, processes and models that private practice lawyers take are outdated and need to be advanced," he said.

"I felt the in-house model was a step in the right direction, but you're only working for one client. So, I decided to create what I believe is a 'third tier' to the legal profession. I feel quite passionate about the whole model and I want to revolutionise the legal market in doing that."

In keeping with his quasi-in-house structure, Szwider's aim is to practise more broadly than the norm at private practice law firms. "I'm trying to move away from traditional models of specialising in certain areas. I certainly have my areas of expertise – they would be IP, IT and general commercial. But I aim to be a generalist so that I can capture all the legal requirements of a business as if I was their in-house lawyer who they were going to on a day-to-day basis," he said.

Szwider is also targeting clients with a global presence who deal with global transactions, and he has a network of lawyers across the globe who he refers to as and when needed.

"What I've found in my experience is that, with global transactions, you'll end having your own lawyer, then that lawyer will need to call up numerous other lawyers in the jurisdictions that come into play with the global transaction. That ends up being extremely costly, you lose sight of what's going on,



and you don't have your direct relationship with a particular lawyer," he said. "So what I'm doing is trying to break down a few barriers to the legal profession, and one is global accessibility."

Bespoke Law officially launched on 1 April.



Businesses lack CPRS confidence

THE MAJORITY of businesses are taking some steps to engage with the issue of climate change. However, most aren't confident in their knowledge of the key legislative mechanism for tackling the incoming Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS), a recent survey has found.

The survey, undertaken by Australian Industry Group (AIG) and KPMG, found that almost three quarters of businesses currently measure, or plan to over the next three years, their carbon footprint. In addition, more than 60 per cent of businesses have taken steps, or plan to over the next three years, to invest in cleaner capital equipment as part of

Wilder, who believes many businesses have been put off by the turbulent politics surrounding the CPRS. "With so much uncertainty as to whether it's coming or going, a lot of companies just aren't doing anything," he said.

Wilder said there were also varying levels of preparedness surrounding the reporting framework underlying the CPRS – the *National Greenhouse Energy and Reporting Act 2007* (NGERS) – with the first reporting date coming up in October. "We've seen a group of companies who have been very, very proactive about it, and who have treated this in the way you treat GST im-