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From The Times
May 20, 2010

Law firms take up the supermarket challenge

Frances Gibb, Alex Spence

2 COMMENTS | RECOMMEND? (16)

Solicitors are taking on supermarkets and banks in a High Street war for customers with a "superbrand" network of law firms in England and Wales.

More than 200 law firms have signed up to relaunch themselves under the brand QualitySolicitors, providing "no frills" legal advice on conveyancing, consumer and contract disputes and family law.

The first 15 branches will open today with a further 35 in August in an attempt to head off competition from the Co-op supermarket chain and the Halifax, which are poised to enter the legal market.

The Co-op is hiring solicitors and predicting a £200 million turnover within a few years in the first real sign of the expected shake-up after the Legal Services Act 2007 was passed.

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Craig Holt, barrister and chief executive of the new QualitySolicitors network, said: "What the legal market is desperately missing is a recognisable, customer service-focused national brand name — a 'household name' — that people can rely on without having to spend hours researching and choosing between dozens of local law firms."

Branches in shopping centres will offer extended opening hours, free consultations and a range of fixed-fee services.

Mr Holt said: "Already the likes of the Co-op and Halifax are starting to offer legal services. They view the legal market as 'easy pickings' because of the traditional stuffy image of a law firm.

"We can do everything they can do in a customer service sense — only better, because our branches are real law firms, not supermarkets or banks playing at it."

The Legal Services Act has been predicted to herald a "Big Bang" in legal services, shaking up the provision of services and paving the way for lawyers to join with others in new business ventures.

Mr Holt said: "Going to QualitySolicitors for legal matters will be as familiar and as easy as going to an opticians for an eye test or Thomas Cook for a holiday."

Professor Stephen Mayson, director of the Legal Services Policy Institute, said that the launch was a "game changer ... that could leave traditional law firms wondering where their business has gone". John Baden-Daintree, managing partner of Burroughs Day in Bristol, one of the firms in the network, said: "Creating a 'household name' legal brand will fundamentally transform the legal market."

The Co-operative Group bought Somerfield in 2008 and merged its financial services business with the Britannia Building Society last year. Despite the tag "Tesco Law" it is the Co-op that has forged the way with legal services.

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Eddie Ryan, managing director of Co-operative Legal Services, said: "Yes, we are a threat, [but] are we going to try and wipe out small firms? No."

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Tom Thumb wrote:

Great a true revolution for the customer seeking fast effective legal advice and services, but only for England and Wales; as usual Scotland drags its heels behind the rest of UK in legal reforms.

May 22, 2010 11:56 AM BST RECOMMEND? (1)

Nick Jervis wrote:

Great. We have seen what changes happened to butchers on the High Street disappearing when the supermarkets came in. However, in time they have reinvented themselves in farm shops and with home delivery and have come back in many cases stronger. Rather than see all solicitors disappear from the High Street this could bridge the gap.

Anything like this scheme and LoyaltyLaw.com to help solicitors promote their usually excellent service is a good thing.

May 20, 2010 10:41 AM BST RECOMMEND? (5)

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