

A PASSIONATE ALLIANCE WITH A PASSIONATE AFFILIATION

Frans Knüppe and Giancarlo Agace TELFA



Most members of international law firm alliances share a common objective: to be able, when needed, to place the affairs of a valued client safely into the hands of a lawyer in another jurisdiction confident that the client's experience will rebound to the credit and glory of the referring lawyer.

What are the options for achieving this? If you are very big, you might try a global network of your own branches. If you are highly focussed and have a steady flow of one type of business in a particular jurisdiction, maybe a best friends approach will work. If you are mid-sized, without the resources or client need for your own overseas offices and without a consistent stream of work to pass to a particular law firm, how do you ensure that your client will receive in the foreign jurisdiction the quality of service he receives from you? One answer is to pass your client only to a lawyer you know well and trust.

TELFA, the Trans European Law Firms Alliance, developed in response to this perceived need among a certain number of independent European law firms to extend their capability beyond their domestic markets. Their clients had international ambitions and expected their local advisers to be able to assist when they took their business abroad. The service they wanted did not stop at the local frontier.

Over the years almost all lawyers build up an informal network of professional contacts abroad via their clients, participation in seminars, cooperation on international scholarly works or the strength of their golf games...

The founding members of TELFA realized that this approach was no longer enough.

All the initial member firms had international contacts but they found that that was not sufficient to ensure the sort of reliable service that their clients had come to expect. Referrals on the basis of chance contacts or third hand recommendations were more of a lottery than a professional response to what was increasingly perceived by their clients as being a required part of the service. What was needed were common standards, quality controls and a high degree of commitment to the maintenance and development of the alliance. On the other hand, none of the firms in question had the ambition to create its own integrated international network.

Having identified the need, the solution proposed by the initial members was to create a network:

- of likeminded, independent law firms, each with the skills and resources to provide key business related legal services;
- each of a size to ensure that clients received personalised service (even the biggest clients get tired of paying for an army where a platoon can do the job);

- and all federated in a legal structure with a fulltime permanent secretariat and strong board which would monitor performance and impose common standards and professional discipline. No one wanted simply to create yet another legal directory. Membership entailed not simply the payment of an annual fee but an on-going commitment, with regular structured meetings between firm members at all levels (including special professional events organised to ensure that the younger lawyers get to know each other).



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How do we maintain success? By systematically reviewing firms against our stringent membership criteria.



All of this started in 1989 and we have come a long way since then.

The Alliance has proved itself robust enough to deal with the inevitable changes that occur nationally (notably through mergers between domestic firms) and a stringent monitoring system has been put in place to follow the actual added value brought to clients.

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Perhaps even more significant is the fact that TELFA has won major contracts on a pan-European scale from demanding international clients in the face of beauty-pa-

rade competition from major integrated law firms. In other words, these clients, used to using a single brand for their international legal services, were sufficiently convinced that the component parts of the TELFA alliance would provide equally good or better cost effective services.

TELFA has grown to 26 members, covering almost all the European Union member States in addition to Norway, Russia, Switzerland and Turkey. Privileged relationships are being actively researched outside of Europe and one has been implemented for more than seven years with USLAW.

This relationship has proved to be highly successful. We have found in USLAW likeminded people sharing the passion for work, quality of service and, occasionally, fun.

It adds to TELFA's credibility as a strong European network if it is linked up with an equally strong US network. TELFA is happy and proud to have USLAW as its US network partner. There are not many other such reliable and well organised US legal networks around. TELFA cherishes its relationship with USLAW and is ready to develop it further. A very passionate affiliation indeed...



Frans Knüppe, President of TELFA, has been practising as a lawyer since 1978 and is a partner at Dirkzwager lawyers & civil notaries since 1985. Frans heads the corporate (litigation) and transactional department in the Arnhem office, specialising in (international) contract law, mergers & acquisitions and commercial litigation. He is also active in ADR as a registered arbitrator / mediator.

A Telfa board member since 1998, Frans serves as TELFA President since 2008. Prior to that, Frans was the chairman of the Dirkzwager board for six years and served as President of the Bar association in the district of Arnhem from 2005 to 2008.



Giancarlo Agace is the executive director of TELFA based in Brussels, Belgium. He has a dual citizenship (Italian-German) and has a masters' degree in economics. He joined TELFA in 1992 when there were just

six member firms. Giancarlo has been developing TELFA for 20 years. TELFA has now 26 member firms spanning from Lisbon in the west to Moscow in the East and from Helsinki in the North to Valletta in the South.

