

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

For law firms around the world, the legal market is an increasingly complex and challenging place to navigate. With relationships more important than ever, partnerships, strategic alliances and legal networks are becoming more common.

However, firms are beginning to realise that to truly reap the benefits of membership, joining the right legal network is key. BY ELIZABETH BEATTIE

■ The benefits of being a member of a legal network can be seen from different angles. Southeast Asian firm Tilleke & Gibbins was one of Lex Mundi's founding members when the network was launched in 1989. Today, Tiziana Sucharitkul, Tilleke's co-managing partner and director of its regional dispute resolution and litigation group, remains a strong advocate for the firm. This is perhaps unsurprising given that she previously held the position of chair of Lex Mundi and remains a board member chair emeritus of the network to this day.

"At that time [1989], we recognised that Thailand's economy was especially reliant on incoming foreign direct investment and that the pace of globalisation was quickening. By joining Lex Mundi and working with other member firms around the world, we were able to grow our client base, and assist multinational companies that were seeking to invest

in the growing markets of Southeast Asia," Tiziana says of her early relationship with the network. Today, she views a key advantage of the members as "the guarantee of quality that you get from other members."

"Every Lex Mundi firm undergoes a thorough vetting process before being invited to join the network and is then periodically reviewed to ensure that it remains among the very best firms in its jurisdiction. Additionally, as all Lex Mundi member firms are local, independent firms, clients can be sure of benefitting from in-depth local knowledge which international firms often cannot possess," Tiziana explains, adding that it these high standards are also something clients expect too.

"Of course, clients also expect clear communication, responsiveness, and a high degree of client care, and Lex Mundi firms excel in all of these areas. When we work with other Lex Mundi firms on

multijurisdictional matters, we know that we are working with a top-tier firm, and we're confident that our clients are receiving the same excellent service that they get with Tilleke & Gibbins," she adds.

EVOLVING BENEFITS

Agustin R. Montilla, IV, senior partner of Philippine firm Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura Sayoc & de los Angeles, is currently a board member at Lex Mundi. He says the benefits of being a part of a member network has evolved.

Mulling over the key advantages he says: "We would have answered this question differently 10 years ago. At that time, referrals were a key advantage. Today, we receive instructions from all over the world from clients that may not know about Lex Mundi."

Today, Montilla breaks it down into two main benefits: "First, it is the close and consistent interaction that we have



with the brightest legal minds in the most capable firms across the globe. Many of the same law firm leaders gather at Lex Mundi events that are much more focused and relationships that are consequently deeper than the wider associations that hold events attended by thousands of lawyers. The second main advantage is the opportunities for training and exchange of best practices between firms as facilitated by a highly capable, professional and pro-active team at Lex Mundi itself," he says.

Tiziana considers the most tangible benefit of being a part of a network is the reach it offers, with her firm getting "the ability to act on a wider range of cross-border matters than we would otherwise be able to, without compromising on quality."

"In one recent example, we were approached to advise on a matter that affected Tilleke & Gibbins' jurisdictions, as well as several countries in South America, North Africa, and Eastern Europe. No global firm was able to offer advice in every country selected, but Lex Mundi was, and what's more, we could vouch for the quality of everyone involved," she says.

ONGOING SUPPORT

According to Montilla, there are three main areas that the Lex Mundi membership supports. "First, skills development: All of the lawyers that have experienced intensive training at the Lex Mundi Institute give the program high marks. Not only does the program deliver skill development focused on a law firm partner audience it also provides networking opportunities. Participants in the intensive programs have become good friends and advocates for each firm," he says. "Second, improved execution of cross border matters: In terms of actual work, partners that manage cross-border matters can help one another collaborate much more closely to deliver the best results for clients if the matter is not the first time these lawyers have interacted with one another. Third, the network itself is focused on constantly improving each member's client service capabilities. The network has developed a client service

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platform that shares best practices and innovations across Lex Mundi."

Janet Looi, senior partner at Malaysian firm Skrine, says that being a part of the Lex Mundi network enables the firm to provide legal services to clients internationally "with the added advantage compared to an international law firm being that each of the member firms have strong local knowledge and connections as the leading local firms."

"Lex Mundi also allows member firms to keep abreast and share knowledge on the latest legal developments of importance to our clients," says Looi. Among the notable positive impact the firm has noticed has been the ability to act swiftly under pressure.

"On cross-border transactions, we have been able, through Lex Mundi firms, to put together a team of lawyers from various jurisdictions in a short time to respond quickly to our clients' needs. Also, through Lex Mundi, our firm has been able to participate in various RFPs for international local counsel panels, with Lex Mundi helping to coordinate and bring alive our seamless service protocols," she says.

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

But even with reinforcements, firms still face challenges. When it comes to navigating these, innovation and planning remain priorities for firms.

"To succeed as a valued advisor, one needs to be more client-focused than ever. Understanding each client, their businesses, their needs and their concerns are skills that no law school teaches. This understanding is what we

emphasise with each member of the Romulo team," says Montilla of thriving in the current legal landscape.

He adds: "It sounds basic, but you'd be surprised how much of a differentiator this is when our clients give us feedback. That's another initiative that is starting to gain momentum — client feedback."

When it comes to facing big challenges, Looi counts retention of lawyers, "rising costs and tracking the fast-paced legal developments and trends not just locally but around the world, given we are operating in a connected world."

"The firm has had for many years a talent management programme and client alerts — these look to providing an objective criteria which is aimed both to encourage the lawyers to have personal development (such as giving talks, writing articles which are on latest legal developments, being on committees) and also helps us to meet the needs of the firm and the lawyers as part of retention and being ahead of the curve in legal developments," she adds.

Sucharitkul meanwhile says constant innovation so firms can stay competitive, is a top priority. "The challenge is identifying and applying the right tools and resources to stay on top of the latest trends—all while also keeping an eye on approaching developments," she says, adding "We meet these demands in a number of ways. We are fortunate to be able to partner with our clients on issues of technology and innovation—whether as solution providers working with us to implement our technology, or even as end-users seeking to adapt our in-house software to their ends." 