

The Conversation

Capturing interesting conversations in the course of my work...

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Chris Sherliker



Chris Sherliker (@London_Law_Firm) likes to shake things up. He and his partners at **Silverman Sherliker** are famous for disrupting the status quo in ways that would make **Professor Richard Susskind proud**. This is the man who took a leap of faith in the 1980s, leaving a prestigious establishment legal career (an MA in Law from Cambridge University, roles at **Herbert Smith**, the **European Commission** and **Cameron McKenna**) to join an ambitious and forward-looking but sole practitioner, **Jonathan Silverman**. Risky for sure. But a phenomenally successful move, the autonomy that comes with working in a small, entrepreneurial team giving him the opportunity to show off his flair for innovation and make a name for himself. Quite literally: the firm changed its name to Silverman Sherliker soon after he joined.

Swapping stories about our journeys in law, I tell him mine began in 1988 assisting the first ever in-house marketing professional hired after a Law Society rule first changed allowing solicitors to advertise. "My firm went on the telly the very next day!" he astounds me. Talk about not wasting time! But his track record of innovation goes beyond wizzy new ways to do legal business and includes setting new case law precedents. In the early 1980s he took on a competition case (thanks to his Brussels credentials) challenging the monopoly of the opticians profession over the market for reading glasses. In those days, by law only registered opticians could dispense them, even though no prescription is involved - they only magnify. His case was successful and the stranglehold broken, so next time you buy a pair of stylish, cheap reading glasses over the counter at Boots or at Waterstones, you know who to thank! I was particularly impressed by this because a number of legal futurists I know will say that the removal of the opticians monopoly is a much better parallel for what's happening in the legal market post-**Legal-Services-Act** than the supermarket analogy that the "Tesco Law" tag suggests. I'm thinking in particular of **DLA Piper's** Head of Proposition Development and Creative Services **Stephen Allen** (love the job title btw), but there are significant others too.

Chris was one of the first lawyers to take to Twitter in the early "glory" days, as @London_Law_Firm. (How did he manage to snaffle such an enviable Twitter ID? First Mover Advantage, that's how!) I'm always interested in gleaning an insight into "where next" from these legal pioneers.

When we met up for lunch, he had just that morning hosted a live discussion branded #coffeebreaklaw, structured as a timed event on Twitter, "Smoothest Moves: Legal Tips On Buying A Property". He told me he was overwhelmed at the level of interest it generated and the quality of names getting involved, bringing new contacts to the firm. **Zoopla** to name one. Fantastic way to make new connections in areas in which you're serious about doing business!

Being such an early adopter of social media, can he point to any examples where he's won business directly? "Most definitely. But I have to say, how we have done it at Silverman Sherliker is not necessarily a model larger firms can follow. Our best examples of success are where we've been sufficiently fleet of foot to respond to a market change, eg setting up a portal for affected people to come together and explore options/solutions. Larger firms often struggle to move quickly enough to make the most of these opportunities. For example, when the News of The World folded, the very next day we set up a News of The World Employee Action Group, tweeting a link to a page on our website inviting the paper's former workers to join the Group, and offering help and advice. Future career opportunities for these innocent workers were blighted because of management's alleged wrongdoing. Many felt they were effectively being scape-goated and punished when they had done no wrong. They themselves were not responsible for the circumstances giving rise to the closure of the paper, yet they were suffering a detriment. So we thought they may be entitled to claim Stigma Damages. In fact the marketing initiative opened the door to all manner of other types of employment claims on behalf of these people, aside from the Stigma issue. So a marketing success story. But for large law firms, by the time large firms have cleared all the internal approvals necessary for an initiative like this, the window of opportunity has often closed! I have to say it's one of the reasons I so enjoy being in a small firm."

But there are plenty of small firms that don't move as smartly in the marketplace as Silverman Sherliker, I point out. In many cases, other firms' "where next", especially when it comes to smart use of social media, is a matter of catching up with Sherliker et al. Thanks for showing us how it's done Chris!
