

Elite firms back away from website offering £10 legal advice

The Brief team

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Lexsnap claimed to offer cheap advice from senior partners at some of the UK's leading law firms
MATT DUNHAM/AP

It seemed too good to be true. Three blue-chip London private client law firms, whose partners charge up to £500 an hour, appeared to be involved with a revolutionary online platform that offered fixed-price advice on Brexit, immigration and family issues for £5 or £10 a go.

Now two of those firms may have bitten off more than they could chew with the Lexsnap website and are backing away.

The deal was billed as being part of an innovative online venture that would “bring much-needed transparency to the legal market”.

The brainchild of Tetiana Bersheda, a Cambridge-educated Ukrainian lawyer practising in Geneva, Lexsnap claims to offer “instant legal advice, access to a comprehensive library of legal questions, requests for in-person meetings with recommended lawyers and free video tutorials from top-tier lawyers”. The most striking element of this deal was the statement that “fees are fully transparent, capped and start at £4.99”.

The Lexsnap marketing statement said that “senior partners at some of the UK's leading law firms” would be providing that cut-price expertise. The named players

were Macfarlanes, Withers and Farrer & Co, the practice renowned for having advised members of the royal family.

But when The Brief asked Withers — which had revenues of £174.5 million last year and where senior equity partners have average annual drawings of more than £380,000 — about its participation, a spokesman gave a curt response. “We have contacted Lexsnap to request that they make it clear that Withers is not associated with their service,” he said.

Macfarlanes, annual revenue figure of £167.6 million and average senior equity partner drawing of an eye watering £1.38 million, did not respond formally to queries about Lexsnap. However, it is understood that the firm provided a video clip on immigration law as a favour to a contact and that its lawyers are not giving advice on the website.

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Farrer & Co, the smallest earner of the three with annual revenue of about £57 million, did not respond to queries about its involvement with Lexsnap. However, when the platform was launched last week one of the firm’s partners hailed the service as “an innovative idea for intermediating lawyers and potential users of legal services”.

Bersheda adamantly denies providing confusing marketing. She told The Brief that “in some instances we work with law firms while in others we work with individual lawyers. This explains why certain law firms, especially international ones, might not be authorised to associate their brand with us given their internal marketing policy.”

She said that one of the three leading firms had “provided assistance in preparing the content of the legal questions ... and packages of questions from our library but the content belongs to Lexsnap”.

She added that the platform “is making the work of lawyers more interesting and more efficient by using technology to answer basic questions arising in most frequent legal situations that people face in their relationships. For users, Lexsnap provides access to top quality legal advice for a fraction of its real cost.”



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