

# IBB rated one of the top law firms for small businesses

Law firm IBB faces similar challenges to its business clients. Managing partner Joanna DeBiase says this helps the firm understand what corporate clients need, so it can provide legal advice that delivers the desired outcomes

Uxbridge-based IBB supports businesses along the M40 and M4 corridors and deep into the Thames Valley. It may be a relatively small-sized law firm, but is regarded by *The Lawyer* magazine as "one of the best in the region" for SME and owner-managed businesses located in west London and the wider Thames Valley.

The firm dates back to 1774 and has grown through a combination of organic growth and mergers with other local firms. "I have continued to use the same blueprint to grow the firm. We are always looking for complementary skills and clients," said Joanna DeBiase, who joined IBB in 1999 as a dispute resolution lawyer and was appointed managing partner in 2016.

"As a small business, with £19 million annual turnover and 235 employees, we face similar issues to many of our clients and can identify with the challenges they face," she said.

IBB's growing corporate and commercial team is led by partner Adam Dowdney. Other service areas include real estate, private client and community legal services.

Business clients use the firm for everything from protecting IP, dealing with regulations, employment issues, executive incentive packages, shareholder agreements, and handling paperwork for business start-ups, sales and succession planning. The firm has supported many companies from their early first steps through to national and international growth.

## Lawyers who listen

Asked what makes IBB popular with smaller and owner-managed businesses, DeBiase points to two characteristics: "Traditionally, people think lawyers are expensive and don't listen," she said. "Our approach is to offer flexible fee structures and demonstrate to clients that listening is one of our core values."

IBB's vision is to make law work for clients by understanding what they want and delivering "bolder, brighter, better solutions". DeBiase said: "We want our clients to view us as a trusted adviser."

The firm trains its partners and staff to think about managing client expectations by 'standing in their shoes'. "We try to get away from a 'you must do this' approach by looking at what value we are delivering," said DeBiase.

She added: "I think lawyers can be very task focused, for example looking at winning cases or obtaining certain results. In contrast, clients are often going through an emotional journey and are more focused on the experience during this journey. That means there can be a mis-match in expectations unless you fully understand your clients' priorities."

## Cost effective

Central to IBB's approach is making sure clients understand the choices available on costs. Fixed fees, where appropriate, are increasingly popular. "Fixed fees can be preferable so long as everybody understands the scope of the work and the assumptions we make regarding pricing in certain risks," said DeBiase.

Good examples are projects that target a certain level of profit where fixed legal fees provide certainty on costs. While paying a fixed fee for risk management advice early on in areas like negotiating employee share option schemes or intellectual property matters can help protect businesses in future negotiations.

## Networking supports local businesses

IBB is actively involved in the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, where it networks with clients and puts them in contact with other businesses in the region. "This is particularly useful for clients looking to buy and sell



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companies or for services that support their businesses," said DeBiase.

Regular seminars and updates also provide useful client support. Current thorny issues include GDPR and recent rule changes on employment tribunals. "GDPR disproportionately affects smaller businesses that often have fewer resources available to manage compliance. We've been very busy helping our smaller company clients. They like the fact that we won't always charge them every time they phone us for advice," said DeBiase.

IBB's pro-active approach and intuitive understanding of business issues is at the heart of all its client relationships.

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