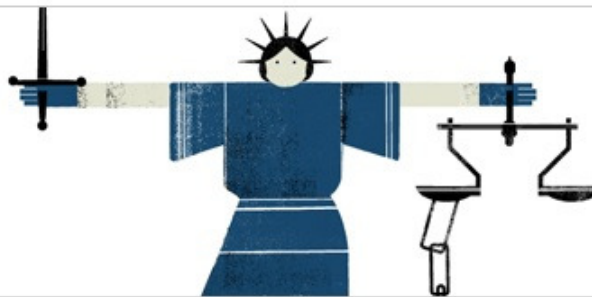


Law Central



Italian lawyers opt for 'la dolce vita' of legal assistance

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Italy is usually regarded as one of the most conservative of legal markets and certainly has been very difficult for the corporate UK and US firms to penetrate.

However, it is always unwise to underestimate the Italians when it comes to serving up a consumer product. After all, the nation which has developed pizza, pasta and ice cream – not to mention Leonardo and Michelangelo – must know something about how to please the crowd.

So while the UK is starting to take on board the arrival of High Street operations like Quality Solicitors, Italy can now boast AL (Assistenza Legale) which has just been announced as a Runner Up for the Managing Partners' Forum's award for 'Best New Market Entrant'.

According to the citation "Assistenza Legale is transforming the Italian legal sector through addressing the legal needs of consumers and small and medium businesses in an innovative way."

At a governance level AL embodies a fresh approach for lawyers to organise themselves arising from the liberalisation of the profession under the Bersani Decree. Meanwhile its modus operandi is to dispense with the stuffy formalities and make seeing a lawyer as routine as, for example, popping into the pharmacy. So there is no need to book an appointment – just turn up at one of its seventeen offices around the country.

There is also a strong emphasis on transparency and providing written estimates – something previously resisted by many lawyers. As the publicity points out, AL is based on three fundamental principles, namely that legal assistance is a right for all; the law is equal for everyone; and that everyone has the right to exercise their rights.

Under the Berlusconi regime those might have sounded rather empty claims. But Italy may be changing – and AL is a sign of that movement.