



**Ravenna**

# **SEVEN STEPS**

The Ravenna guide  
to selecting your lawyer,  
the right way

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# SEVEN STEPS TO SELECT YOUR LAWYER

If employees had their own websites would you recruit simply by comparing them? Probably not. If anything, recruitment processes are becoming more elaborate and time consuming because businesses know that cutting corners to save time or money, when recruiting, risks costing them much more in the long run.

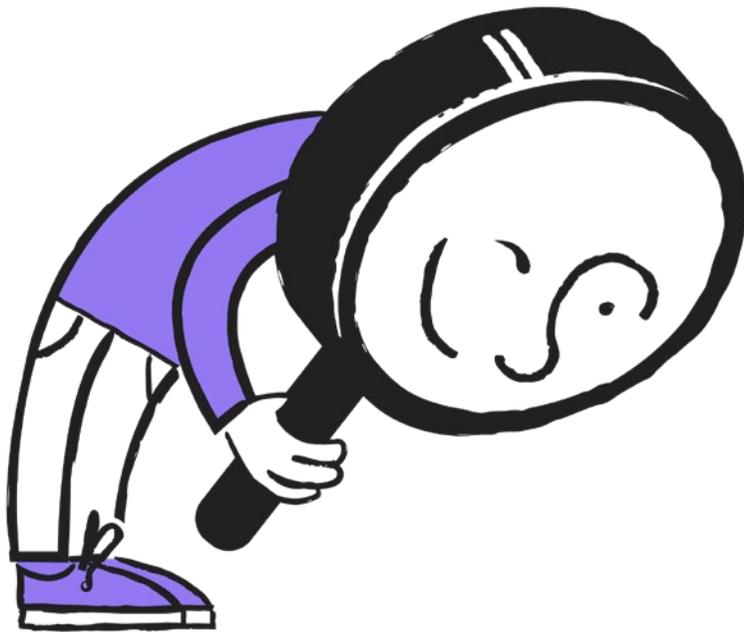


Yet, when it comes to selecting a lawyer most smaller businesses rely on a recommendation or - worse - trial and error. Why? When the difference between the right lawyer and the wrong one can be at least as significant as between hiring the right or wrong employee?

The problem is that searching for the right lawyer is time consuming and difficult. We've talked about some of the challenges facing businesses when choosing a lawyer, in our recent blogs on [ravenna.co.uk](https://www.ravenna.co.uk). Most businesses have a pretty good idea of what they want from an employee and the kind of person who could do the job but for lawyers it's a different story.

This guide gives you a step-by-step process to follow when selecting and retaining your lawyer. If you have the time and resources then following it should reduce the risk of you making a bad decision.

# STEP 1:



## Narrow the field

There are a lot of solicitors and other types of lawyers to choose from - around 150,000 practising solicitors in England and Wales and in addition there are other types of regulated legal advisers such as Licensed Conveyancers and direct access barristers.

**Identifying your criteria is a first step.** Do you want to choose a firm or an individual lawyer? What type of lawyer do you need? Does location matter? Do you have knowledgeable contacts who can provide reliable recommendations for a “long list”? Do you have preferences in terms of the range of services offered or the likely expense relative to other law firms? Is genuine expertise in and knowledge of your business sector important? What kind of firms would be motivated by your likely annual legal spend to provide their best service? Is some kind of formal selection process appropriate and practical?

## STEP 2:

### Identify the kind of legal problems for which you will need a lawyer

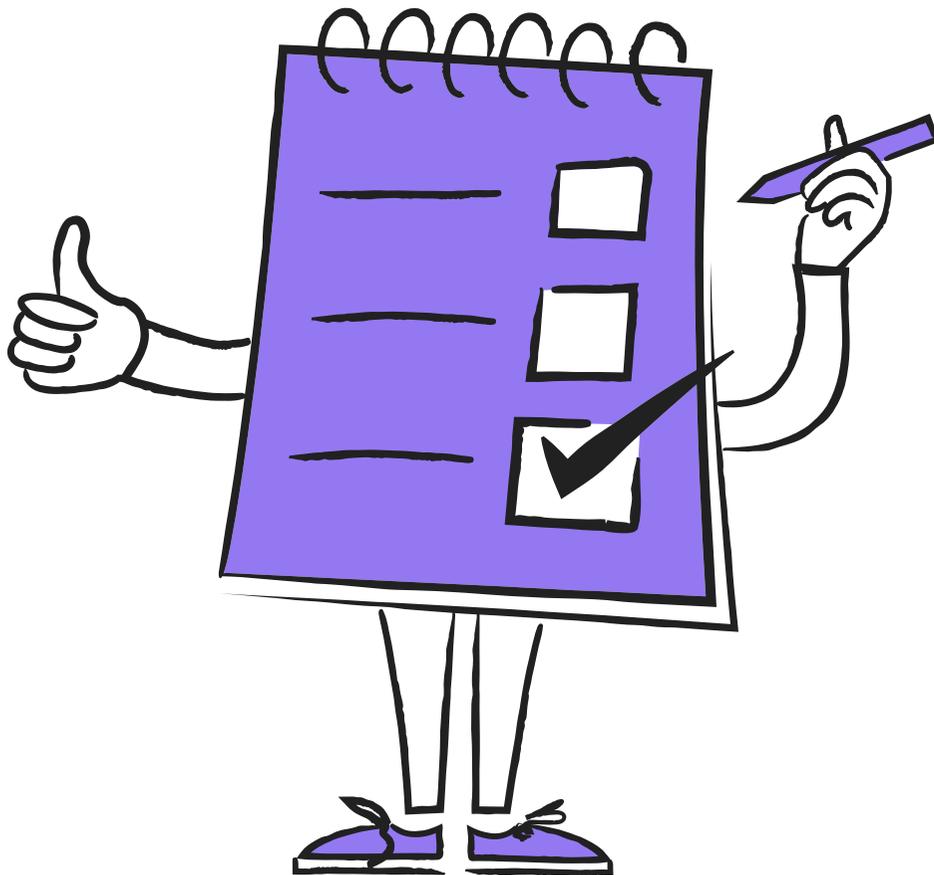
Lawyers that advise businesses tend to be at least as specialised as doctors. You wouldn't go to your GP for an operation or to a neurosurgeon to advise on your cough. Once you have identified the kind of legal problems you expect, you need to decide what degree of specialisation is appropriate.

A very narrow specialisation is fine if your legal needs happen to match but tends to be more expensive because you may then need a range of different specialists. Too broad a range of expertise and a lawyer may need to reinvent the wheel because an issue is new to them.

As well as specialisation you need to consider the evidence of the lawyer's experience in dealing with issues similar to the ones you expect.

**Do you need someone who knows your industry or sector?** While this can seem a 'no-brainer' be aware that law firms operating in your field could be representing your competitors which may give rise to formal or informal conflicts of interest.

## STEP 3:



### Create your shortlist

Once you have been through the above process and asked around for recommendations you may well have a long-list of possible law firms or lawyers to review. **Creating a shortlist from this requires detailed consideration of your potential law firm websites.** Considering websites is not straightforward. Firms may have made a substantial investment in their website to produce something which looks really good but the look of a website is not a reliable basis for choosing the right lawyer. The actual evidence lies within the biographies of individuals, information on previous work and the extent and quality of relevant briefing materials. Is communication clear and authoritative? Are accreditations impressive and relevant? Does the firm provide evidence as to its client satisfaction results, its values and its approach to fees?

# STEP 4:

## Selecting from the shortlist

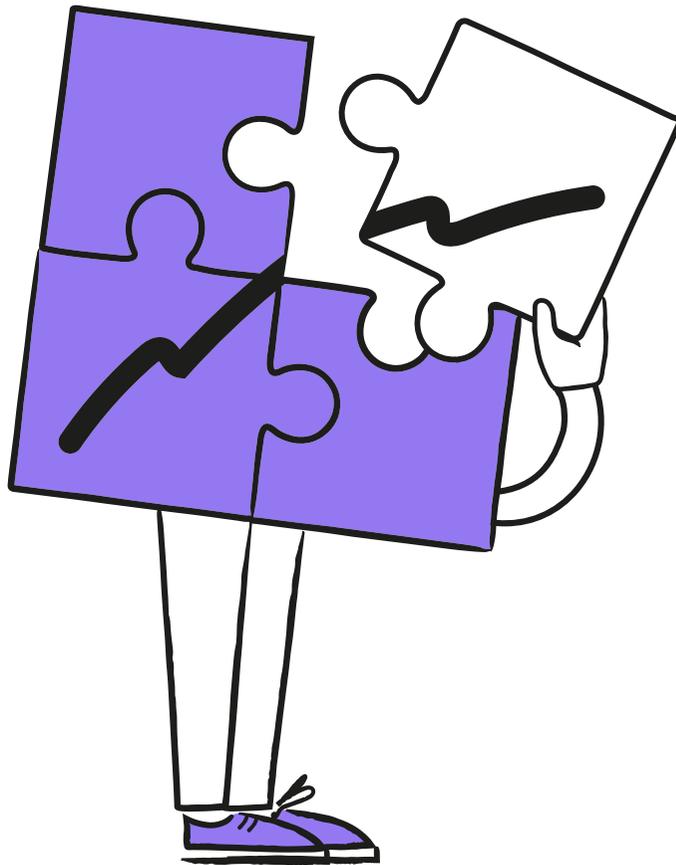
Once you have a shortlist (and the length of that will largely depend on how much time you have available for the next stage of the process) you need to get a better feel for the firms and the lawyers you might be working with. If you are not ready to form a relationship with a law firm, and are only looking to commission a single modest piece of work, a telephone discussion and an email describing the work and confirming a cost estimate or fixed price for the job from each firm may be enough.

Most firms will have an initial discussion about what they can do, without charge. Likely price is just one of a number of factors and you should expect to get what you pay for. The lawyer will have limited knowledge of your business and the opportunities to add value through advice may be limited. You may find it difficult to interpret the strength of their advice - whether to do or not to do something - if you are dealing with them for the first and perhaps only time. The lawyer is unlikely to share responsibility with you for judgment calls where risks and rewards have to be balanced. On a single job, the lawyer may want to draw

all of the risks to your attention and leave it to you to decide rather than risk criticism later from a person they don't know.

The better approach is to look for a relationship in which you get to know the lawyer and they get to know you and your business. In the long run this will save you time and money and should add value to your business by helping you combine business and legal judgments.

## STEP 5:



### Getting the right relationship

#### Lawyers come in all sorts of shapes and sizes.

You need a lawyer that fits the culture of your business. Mutual communication and understanding do matter. The right lawyer should understand where you're coming from and how you see things. This cannot be assessed simply because the lawyer has dressed up themselves or their office to look like you or your workspace.

One approach is to look for brand compatibility – is the law firm consistent with your brand? Another is look for a personal rapport with individuals

The best way to establish this is to meet with the lawyer in person (or at least on Zoom). Unless your legal needs are very limited you should aim to do this with at least a couple of lawyers, to talk through what you're looking for and what they can offer.

# STEP 6:

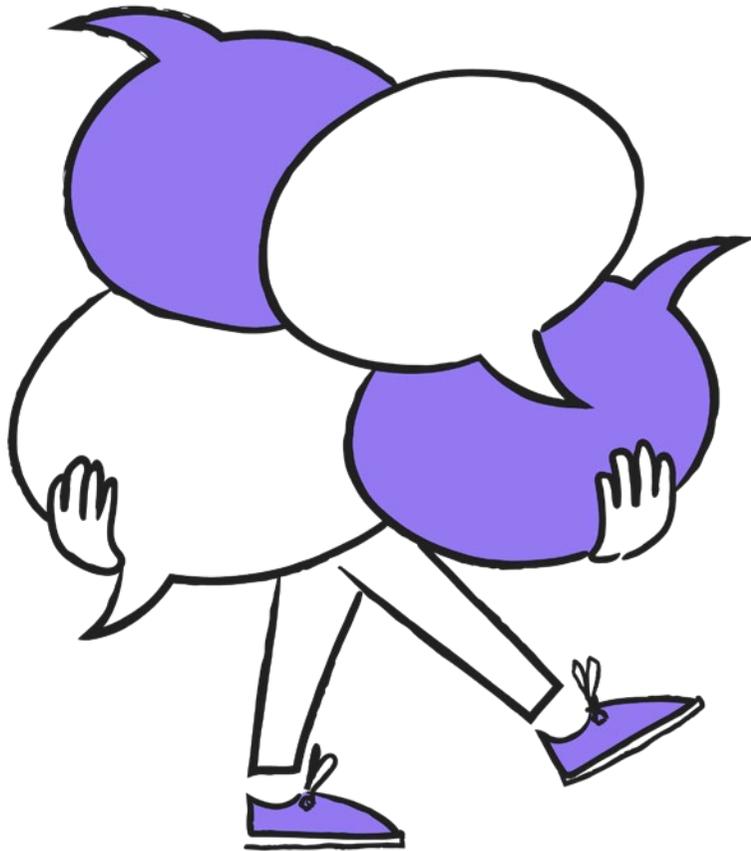
## Getting value for money

Good law firms prosper by being set up to add value to their clients' businesses. Value may be added by mitigating risk in the same way as an insurance premium may be reasonable even if you do not make a claim. Value may be added by saving you time, effort or anxiety so that you have the confidence to concentrate on the business. Good legal advice should identify opportunities to improve the value in your deals and business or minimise unnecessary expense. Being charged more than the value received is the problem, not the price.

You will need to ensure that you understand the charging structure being applied. A good lawyer will be prepared to discuss any charging structure which is fair to their business and yours. A fixed price for a well-defined job may suit both of you. If that is not possible then budgets and regular updates or billing are essential. The structure needs to keep you in control of your spend and avoid any nasty surprises. All of this can be established at the start of the relationship, giving you choices for each item of legal work as it arises.

Remember - you don't have to guarantee your preferred lawyer any future work... but lawyers provide the best service to those they both trust and like dealing with, so the relationship is key.

## STEP 7:



### Changing Lawyer

You can always sack your lawyer even though, at times, it will be inconvenient.

It is sensible to hold a regular review discussion with your lawyer, for which you would generally not be charged. Good practice would be to review whether your needs have changed periodically (perhaps once every three years) and see what the legal competition has to offer. If the relationship is working well there may be no reason to move and you will have built up the kind of mutual trust and knowledge that gives you a resource unavailable to the one-off purchaser.

Getting the right relationship with the right lawyer is worth the investment of time because it will not only save you time and money but make it more likely that your business is both dynamic and successful.

*Emma Shipp is CEO of Ravenna* a consultancy which specialises in helping growing businesses find the right lawyer relationship.