

STACKS THE LAW FIRM

Why become a member of Stacks -The Law Firm?

Branding

- ✚ Stacks The Law Firm (STLF) has been in operation as a Law Firm since 1931 and has 20 offices throughout NSW, the ACT and Queensland, with 75 Professional Staff and the best part of 250 total Staff.
- ✚ STLF is a well recognised Brand. Independent research confirms that in NSW in particular there is high recognition of STLF, even in areas where the Firm has never had an office.
- ✚ The Brand is guarded and developed by care in the selection of those who join the Group and an emphasis on Professional development within the Group.
- ✚ The media profile of STLF is enhanced by the fact that its Managing Director, Maurie Stack, is invited to comment on a range of topics having been a Past President of the Law Society of New South Wales and a Past President of the Australian Lawyers Alliance (NSW). Likewise with Tom Goudkamp (of Stacks/Goudkamp) a Past National President of the Australian Lawyers Alliance, the inaugural and longstanding Chairman of the Personal Injury Division of the Solicitors Specialist Accreditation Scheme and a Co-Author of the standard Personal Injury textbook. Likewise with Richard Faulks (of Stacks/Snedden Hall and Gallop) another Past National President of the Australian Lawyers Alliance.
- ✚ STLF is particularly well known within the legal profession, its 3 Directors, Ray, Maurie and Tim Stack and the around 20 Directors of Members of the Group having a wide network of contacts within the profession.
- ✚ STLF maintains a website for the Group and a related website for each member of the Group and is actively involved in continually developing that and associated websites which now include Stacks/Compensation, Stacks/Commercial and Stacks/Wealth Protection.
- ✚ As the Firm continues to grow, so too does its brand recognition.
- ✚ The Firm celebrated 75 years in Practice in 2006 with a glittering reception at the Sydney Town Hall addressed by the Chief Justice of Australia and the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia.
- ✚ STLF prepares weekly a 550 word article on matters of topical interest. STLF arranges for the production of same in local newspapers of Members of the Group under a banner which includes the name of the local Firm, the face and name of the Managing Director or nominated representative of the local Firm. The cost to the member is the amount charged by the local newspaper for a small advertisement at the bottom of the article. This service is currently taken up by a number of Members. In the case of Stacks/Taree a calculation by our Public Relations consultant indicates that for a cost of \$3,500 annually that office received the equivalent of over \$50,000 worth of local advertising in a format which is far more likely to be read than an advertisement.
- ✚ Public Relations – STLF retains at its cost a public relations consultant who continually advises on the best means of promoting the Group in the media. The Consultant is available also to Members of the Group at their cost. One of the proposals presently under consideration is podcasting to clients ie. sending video clips as an alternative to traditional newsletters, utilising the client database already maintained by each Office.
- ✚ TV Advertising - Producing and making available TV advertisements in different work areas with the local 1800 of any member of the Group who wishes to use them.
- ✚ Print Advertising – Co-ordinating and desktop publishing for advertisements in White Pages and Yellow Pages covering a number of offices. Likewise with shared TV advertising including paying the cost and collecting contributions.
- ✚ Brochures – STLF prepares and prints brochures for User Groups eg three in the Wealth Protection Area and one in the commercial area.
- ✚ Holding annual drinks for the Sydney media who cover the Courts.
- ✚ We co-ordinate and support members in arranging stands eg in the past at AgQuip and for the last three years at the Financial Planners Annual Conference. We have a STLF small marquis which is easily transportable and is available to members.

Luxury of small Practice with the resources of large Practice

- ✚ Practising and managing a small Practice, whether in a rural or city area, can be stressful, unrewarding and inefficient due to isolation and lack of the support services available to larger Firms.
- ✚ Becoming a member of STLF enables your Firm to share in the extensive and expanding range of Group activities.

Knowledge Management

- ✚ A key objective of STLF is to share knowledge experience and precedents across the Group. This is achieved in a number of ways.
- ✚ We maintain Branding and Quality policies, covering such matters as Letterhead, Signage, Document and Deed Presentation, Referrals, Crisis Management, Media, Insurance and Quality Assurance.
- ✚ User Group Meetings – There are presently User Groups in the areas of Personal Injury, Commercial and Wealth Protection, Property, Family Law and Planning and Environmental Law. These Groups meet by telephone and increasingly video conference and in face to face meetings and receive lectures on relevant topics as well as discussing common or individual client problems and the best means of addressing same.
- ✚ Precedents – a wide range of practical precedents in the areas in which the Members of the Firm commonly take instructions have been prepared. They are maintained and continue to be developed on an ongoing basis particularly in the commercial area. They are made available to Members of the Group through distribution of the latest version of precedents on CD format for storing on local servers. In addition latest updates of precedents are immediately available to those who subscribe to LEAP Legal Software.
- ✚ We have a Group arrangement with LEAP Legal Software which enables new Members to join at a significant discount and Members are encouraged to use this software which we have found both efficient and cost effective. LEAP Legal Software provides up to date Court forms and up to date Government forms in a format which enables client details to automatically upload onto these forms. In the Conveyancing area there is a comprehensive package provided. LEAP servers at the premises of Members using this product are updated on a regular basis by web base contact to the LEAP server in Sydney. Those who use LEAP can likewise update their Stacks Precedents by connection to the Stacks server which is set up in the same way as the LEAP server.
- ✚ Web Based Intranet – there is a User accessed part of our website which is available only to Members of the Group. This provides two important products. The first is a knowledge and skills indicator listing the Professionals across the Group, their Professional Qualifications and training and their areas of experience, expertise and interest. A simple search engine enables users to find for example anyone in the Group who has the words town Planning or Environmental in their details. The second data base available to users is the third party data base which lists in the different work areas the contact details of experts who are recommended by Members of any particular User Group. There is for example a comprehensive list of Specialist Doctors and other experts available in the Personal Injury area.
- ✚ Member Intranet – Our IT staff have developed an internal Member Intranet which is progressively being rolled out to Members of the Group, providing staff in each office with ready access to matters of day to day interest and importance to each Office. Although developed by us, this tool is modified to suit the individual needs of each Member and is maintained locally.
- ✚ Lexis Nexis – as a Group we subscribe to Lexis Nexis Online Services providing access to 26 products including Australian Corporation Law – Principles in Practice, Australian Family Law and Reports, Australian Family Law State Legislation, Australian Immigration Law, CaseBase Case Citator, Australian Stamp Duties, Civil Liability Australia, Civil Procedure Queensland, Conveyancing Service NSW, Criminal Law Queensland – Carters, Criminal Practice and Procedure NSW – Howie and Johnson, Halsbury's Laws Australia, High Court Federal Court Australia (including annotated Trade Practices Law), Licensing and Gaming Law NSW, Motor Vehicle Law NSW, Motor Vehicle Reports, Local Government Planning and Environment NSW, NSW Law Reports, Personal Injury NSW, Personal Injury Queensland, Riley Solicitors Manual, Richies Uniform Civil Procedure, Succession Law and Practice NSW, Unreported Judgments and Mills Workers Compensation NSW. These products have been provided at a competitive Group price by Lexis Nexis and more than half of that cost is met by STLF. The cost to Members is something in excess of \$300 per Professional per annum – a fraction of the cost of this wide range of products for Firms not in the Group. In simple terms there would be very few small Firms outside the Group with access to this range of online material. Our contract includes provision for training of those who want to become familiar with the system, regular reporting of usage of each of the products and an opportunity to swap products for other products required by the Group. In addition Lexis Nexis makes available a 20% discount on duplicated paper products purchased by Members of the Group.
- ✚ Seminars – different User Groups hold seminars which are financially supported by STLF. The Personal Injury User Group has met a number of times at Port Stephens and most recently in Newcastle with a range of in-house and external speakers on topics of current interest. The Family Law Group usually has a one day seminar each year. The Planning Group has held a successful seminar with an external speaker and also attended by Local Government representatives in the local area. The Future Development Group which comprises effectively a

Managing Director of each member of the Group has an annual face to face meeting usually in the Boardroom of the Law Society in Sydney as well as meeting by video conference.

- ✚ Group Seminar – each second year all Solicitors in the Group are invited to a Group Seminar which to date has been held at Diamond Beach and every other year the Directors of the Group go away for a one day conference all paid for by STLF.

Attracting High Quality Lawyers

- ✚ Young Lawyers now need top marks for admission and value Professional development as much if not more than salary.
- ✚ The Professional Development available through the various services listed here and through being part of a much wider Group of Lawyers provides much wider opportunities for Professional Development than is available in most legal offices outside the Mega Firms.
- ✚ The STLF Scholarship Scheme has been developed to attract the brightest students from local high schools to develop a connection with Stacks. Each year participating Members invite each high school in their area to nominate their best and brightest student interested in a career in the law to apply for a STLF Scholarship. Applicants make a presentation in the Local Court on a topic nominated by us each year and are judged by a panel chaired by the Dean of the Law Faculty closest to that office. This is followed by individual interviews to select the winner of the Scholarship – entitling the student to \$1000 each 6 months whilst at law school plus an opportunity for work experience in STLF. When mature, each office will have 5 students at different stages of their law degree and recruitment opportunities amongst them and their associates. Over time the Deans become more familiar with Stacks as an employment destination for their bright students.
- ✚ We are still considering establishing Graduate Positions across the offices to entice Young Lawyers to test out regional areas they might not otherwise consider.

Office Management

- ✚ We maintain an extensive Start Up Manual for new firms starting into practice and for firms joining the Group plus a Quality Assurance Manual and a set of our own Branding and Quality Policies.
- ✚ There is an emphasis on tax effective practise – and Firms must become solicitor corporations to join. Expert advice has been made available to Members through our own business and tax consultant the inimitable Graham Brown of GPB Partners.
- ✚ Stacks The Law Firm pays half the costs of strategic planning sessions with our Consultant Rosemary Howell of Strategic Action also attended by our Maurie Stack.
- ✚ Members learn from other Members of the Group
- ✚ We organise face to face seminars for Receptionists, Senior Accounts Staff and Office Managers from the Group, so as to lift their performance and to give them others with whom they can discuss common problems.
- ✚ Stacks The Law Firm arranges seminars for LEAP users within the Group including importing trainers from LEAP at the cost of STLF.
- ✚ We run a Quality Assurance Program across the Group and the substantial cost of external auditors is met by savings on Professional indemnity premiums.

Wise Counsel

- ✚ The extensive experience of Ray Maurie and Tim Stack over 110 combined years of very successful practice in the law is available to Members of the Group.
- ✚ As Chairman, Maurie provides a role of wise counsel to each member of the group in a wide range of areas based on almost 40 years of successful private practice and Law Society involvement.
- ✚ Providing links to experts in areas such as advertising/public relations/tax advice/costs issues/web design.

Social Interaction

- ✚ Biennial Summit – each second year we take all the Lawyers their partners and children away for a joint weekend at our cost. This builds relationships across the Group and makes Professionals more relaxed about seeking and giving advice to others in the Group as well as cross referring. There is also a half day seminar.
- ✚ Biennial Directors Conference – each other year we take the Directors of all our Members and their partners away to look at what we are doing and how we can improve our services – and again to build key relationships across the Group.

- ✚ Football – We arrange and pay for Group bookings for Waratahs or Wallabies Matches, again to build relationships.
- ✚ Christmas Party – to date we have held a combined Christmas Party for Staff of all offices in Taree.

Protection against Professional Indemnity Claims and Professional Conduct Complaints

- ✚ We maintain Group Insurance with Law Cover at a premium, often one-quarter of the costs otherwise paid. This currently costs about 1% of gross fees. Many Firms find that a third of the consultancy fee paid to STLF represents a direct saving in Professional indemnity premiums otherwise payable.
- ✚ Claims are personally handled internally, if less than \$75,000, by Maurie Stack who has extensive experience in the area or otherwise supervised by him. We are able to ensure that any potentially dangerous claims are settled early with a minimum of legal cost but that unjustified claims are fully defended.
- ✚ Complaints to the Legal Services Commission or to the Law Society are personally handled by Maurie Stack who has a wealth of experience from his different roles at the Law Society including Membership of its Professional Conduct Committee.
- ✚ Maurie maintains ongoing relations with both the Law Society and the office of the Legal Services Commissioner, not to enable Members to avoid the consequences of misconduct but to facilitate a ready hearing in the bulk of cases which really arise from misunderstandings.
- ✚ STLF provides advice and assistance to members on a wide range of practical matters to ensure practice in accord with high ethical standards and with a focus on service to the clients but with an understanding that businesses that aren't financially successful don't ultimately serve anyone.

Is Membership of Stacks/The Law Firm for you?

- ✚ At a cost of 7.5% of gross, you will want satisfy yourself that on a long term basis your gross fees will increase by at least 10% (or your costs will drop by a similar amount) by joining the Group - or it is not an economic proposition.
- ✚ You need to be a Firm which is interested in growth, in technology and in the mutual advantages of the sharing of knowledge and services.
- ✚ You need to be a Firm with a real commitment of service to your clients – as distinct from Lawyers who see clients as a means of making money. Financial success in our profession should be the result of providing benefits to our clients which are greater than the fees charged.
- ✚ You need to be committed to the pursuit of excellence whilst at the same time maintaining a friendly relationship with your clients.
- ✚ You need to seek to become more efficient.
- ✚ More than anything you need to be a Firm with an enthusiasm for the future - the possibility of remaining at a modest size and independent and yet increasingly utilising the type of services which are taken for granted by Lawyers in large national Law Firms.
- ✚ Ultimately STLF will be what its Members want it to be - within economic reason! - but developing technology means that top Lawyers of the future will be able to maintain a high level of Professional Practice and the type of client presently attracted to the large National Firms, whilst still maintaining a lifestyle outside a large metropolis.
We can help make that dream a reality.

For More Information

- ✚ Visit our website www.stacklaw.com.au phone 02 6592 6511, fax 02 6592 6635 or email maurie@stacklaw.com.au. Look out for and listen to Maurie Stack on television and radio and look for Stacks advertisements in print media or make contact with a STLF office nearest you.
- ✚ Go to our web site, click on *Joining Stacks* and complete and email the *Preliminary Expression of Interest* form: