

Start making sense

David Chaplin

Christopher Balmford, chief and founder of Cleardocs - a company that delivers online legal documents, likes to keep it simple.

As one of the chief proponents of plain-language legal documents in Australia, Balmford has stripped the meaningless jargon out of hundreds of corporate documents.

One of his most high-profile jobs was at AMP during that company's difficult transition to a listed entity. Balmford still consults to the troubled Australian behemoth at a time when it has much to communicate clearly to its stakeholders.

But it is Cleardocs that is now dominating his time and the dream is a big one.

"I want to enable at least 80 per cent of law firms to outsource their document needs," Balmford says.

Although he readily admits this is unlikely

to occur, Balmford believes the Cleardocs value proposition is a compelling one and not only for lawyers who struggle to make their papers comprehensible to the layman.

"Cleardocs target market is accountants, financial planners and lawyers," he says.

While planners are only a tiny part of the Cleardocs clientele, accountants have begun to latch on to the service - chiefly for delivering superannuation trust deeds at a fraction of the price normally charged by legal firms.

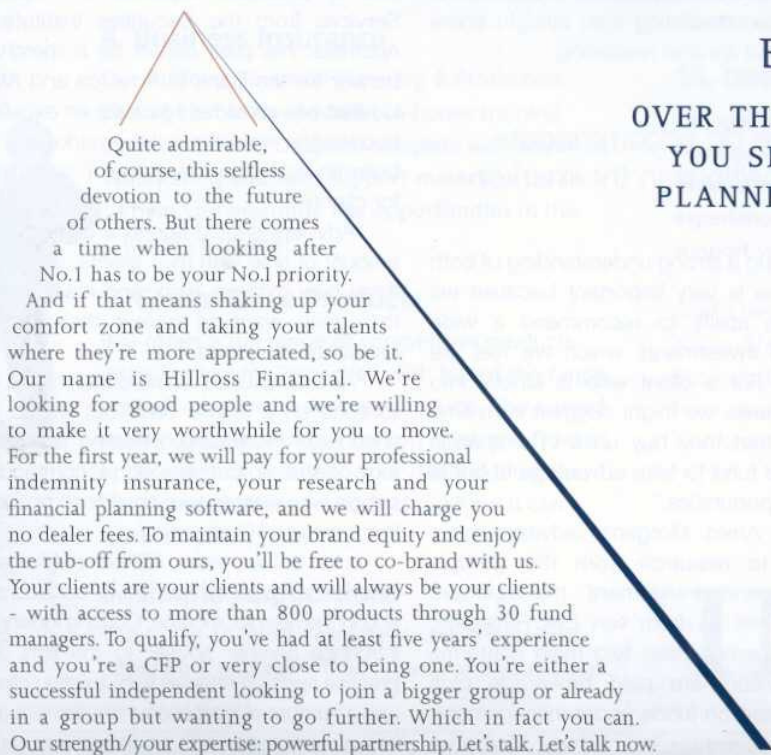
In fact, the company's biggest client was the now defunct accounting/financial planning listed consolidator Stockfords. While the loss of Stockfords was a blow to the start-up company (it was around only for the last nine months of Stockfords' existence), Cleardocs has retained many of that ill-fated group's individual accountancy practices on its books.

According to Balmford the company is

able to achieve a flexible, cost-effective and fast service with its online system that enables customers to tailor their documents and print direct from their desktop within 20 minutes of entering the appropriate details on the Cleardocs website.

And at \$125 per document the price, he claims, is anywhere from between \$100 and \$800 cheaper than that charged by law firms for the same service.

Balmford says there is a huge scope for adding other documents to Cleardocs' repertoire - for instance HR contracts and even perhaps the Financial Services Guides which advisers are now required to dish up to every client. And with the push on to develop more understandable communication - a move the Financial Planning Association is also behind - the Cleardocs message just might make sense. ☺



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