



Adv. Zohar Fisher  
Robus Legal Marketing

## Foreign law firms' in Israel - behind the curtains

More than 60 foreign law firms have a presence of some sort in Israel, ranging from huge international practices to lesser-known boutiques. For some, this presence is nothing more than a desk temporarily occupied by a partner who only comes to Israel every few weeks.

For others it's a full-time representative on the ground. Close to ten law firms so far have gone further still and set up offices in Israel where attorneys practice the law of their home country – a phenomenon only possible since market deregulation in 2012.

This is not bad for a country the size of New Jersey. The truth is that there are plenty of business opportunities for foreign firms in Israel, with potential work in a whole range of sectors.

The market is famously fuelled by high-tech and biotech, but this is not everything: foreign investors have also taken an interest in the country's food, insurance, defence systems and, most recently, natural gas industries. Fee rates tend to favour the client, but the treasure can lie in massive outbound and inbound international M&A.

Lawyers from abroad who come and practice in Israel are frequently impressed by the country's entrepreneurship, desire to create something new and profitable, persistence in driving ahead with an idea and will to cut out inefficiencies. The down side is that Israelis drive a hard bargain and will probably be skeptical of your pitch, but that's all part of the fun.

But these are not just stereotypes; foreign lawyers on the ground have been taken by the country's business potential and cultural uniqueness.

### As solicitor Daniel Turgel at Linklaters' representative base in Tel Aviv explains:

"From angel investments to billion-dollar exits, Israel truly has something to offer every firm in every segment of the market."

He adds that both the entrepreneurial culture in the legal market and the "sophistication of the local law firms" are unique to Israel.

"We at Linklaters view Israel as a particularly interesting market with opportunities across numerous sectors," Turgel says. "From a personal perspective, I just love the juxtaposition between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. But don't ask me to pick a favourite!"

One of the known features of the Israeli market, in addition to its international outlook, is how fast it moves. As one Israeli attorney recently told London's *The Lawyer* magazine: "In some parts of Israel, looking six minutes ahead counts as significant forward planning."



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Daniel Rubel, managing attorney for US firm Zeichner Ellman & Krause's Israel law practice, echoes this view.

"The Israeli market is filled with attorneys who have impressive international experience, many of whom were trained internationally, and are able to seamlessly work alongside foreign attorneys," notes Rubel, whose firm operates a permanently-staffed Tel Aviv office. "Additionally, Israelis generally thrive in the fast-paced atmosphere that is well suited for foreign law firms."

Rubel adds: "In the corporate realm, it's important to recognize that Israeli law firms often retain foreign licensed attorneys who are very capable of handling the majority of the foreign corporate work, and a foreign law firm needs to realize that they may need to play a secondary role."

One of the characteristic challenges of the Israeli market is the predominance of established and close relationships between certain lawyers and their clients that mean new market entrants cannot just walk into a beauty parade and expect to win the next mandate based on quality and price alone.

But every problem has its solution, explains partner Paul Miller at Berwin Leighton Paisner (BLP), one of the few firms to open an active office for practicing foreign law out of Tel Aviv: "In all instances, it's important to build relationships with local firms. There are a number of reasons for this, the most important being that most Israeli businesses have a local trusted adviser and it is often as important to earn the local adviser's respect as it is to earn the client's respect."

It would be wrong, of course, to let this opportunity go without mentioning that making connections like these is one of the ways that Robus can add value to a foreign law firm's Israel business.

Robus represents both Israeli and foreign law firms in their marketing activities in Israel, advising on developing the business and brand awareness, guiding market entrants through the licence application process and providing consultancy on running the firm.

And if the market opportunities are anything to go by, there will be many more firms entering the fray in the coming years.

*Adv. Zohar Fisher is the founder of Robus, Israel's leading Legal Marketing company, which represents Israeli and foreign law firms alike*



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