

Halifax seeks firms for nationwide panel



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The Halifax is looking to build a nationwide law firm panel to support its new Legal Express service, the *Gazette* can reveal, enabling solicitors to 'ride on the coat tails' of the bank's brand power.

The move is seen as countering those who warn that the entry of big brand names into the legal market will spell the end of high street law firms.

Halifax Legal Express was launched in July and offers an online 'pay as you go' legal document production and advice service. It was initially supported by the six-strong MyLawyer network of firms created by legal IT provider Epoq, whose technology underpins the service. The firms are Pannone, Hugh James, Nelsons, Minster Law, Last Cawthra Feather and Brethertons.

However, HBOS has now tasked Epoq with enlarging the geographical spread of the panel to cater for customers who want a face-to-face consultation. Firms will need to offer a wide range of private client services and sign up to Halifax's service standards.

Solicitor Richard Cohen, joint chief executive of Epoq, said: 'We don't believe the end of the high street firm is in sight. Instead, savvy and nimble small firms can ride on the coat tails of the marketing of the big brands like Halifax who enter this space.'

'On the whole, the brands do not seek to employ solicitors, but instead are looking to work with forward-thinking firms, as their strong marketing ability can only serve to unlock the latent market and increase demand. Those firms that get on the panel of these brands can secure an increasing stream of work.'