



## Field of Dreams



[John O'Hanlon](#) - - 17 hours ago

The law profession used to be a clearly mapped out career, rather like banking. That model no longer suits business clients, nor does it suit the brightest new entrants: we asked Orlando Casares, founder and Principal of 70-member global legal network FLI International to share his vision for a new and more effective corporate legal methodology

*What prompted you to build your own legal network?*

Orlando Casares: The idea behind FLI was the need in the market place for an integrated network with the primary view to offer the in-house legal team an extension of their department, but cross-border. This was initially conceived while I was the EMENA GC [General Counsel, or CLO] for a US Fortune 500 company. As I looked for a cross-border solution (I

was responsible for over 30 countries), there was nothing available, aside from the usual suspects, the mega law firms which provided in-house legal departments like mine with the stale usual solutions: lots of paper pushed my way, no businesslike responsiveness, and, of course, inflated bills.

What was needed was a network of law firms which were all full service, leading in their individual jurisdictions, linguistically strong (English would have to be their internal working language), foreign-qualified (their partners would have to be educated and preferably licensed abroad through LL.M.s or law degrees from accredited universities), accustomed to serving publicly traded multinational companies, understanding the meaningful trends and upcoming winds of change in the legal industry, and overall possess a working ethos of team-spirit. And yes, all this for a fraction of what the mega firms were charging. Piece of cake, right?

At the beginning this was nothing short of an epic journey. Everything one could imagine, I encountered. But like the proverbial flywheel, with a relentless commitment to build the top network in our class, eventually the globe was combed, the profiled partner firms were found, the team-spirit was knitted (through a series of annual gatherings, including Partners Conferences as well as client-driven, practice group business development meetings), and the clients came. Today, FLI is ranked as at the Elite Global Network by [Chambers & Partners](#). Our upcoming

general Spring Conference, to be hosted at dual venues in London and Birmingham will bring together members, clients and VIPs from over 60 jurisdictions, making it a global event by any standard.

*What current challenges and opportunities in the legal industry are you noticing?*

Orlando Casares: The landscape post-Lehman Brothers is not a pretty sight. The economy has not recovered and some sceptics (or pragmatists, depending who you listen to) predict will never return to what it once was. For many in-house legal departments this spells re-inventing themselves. With little or no budget to secure competent cross-border legal support, most GCs and their supporting corporate attorneys are having to do more and more in-house, cutting corners and, in some cases, yes taking chances (due to not being able to afford the hefty bills for outsourced legal assistance by the international law firms). This leaves the legal departments with a dilemma: how to maintain a healthy level of legal supervision throughout their cross-border jurisdictions within the much thinner budgets allocated for legal. This is where a viable, well-established and proven network of integrated law firms, whose only goal is to assist the GC, come into play. Another significant trend in our industry is that the average age of the GC has dropped by about a decade since Lehman and also for the first time one in almost four of the top legal posts has been redefined and is now led by a woman. This means the key

gatekeepers of legal spending are younger and/or female. Their purchasing patterns differ significantly from their predecessors and our industry needs not only to cater for them but be one step ahead and understand their needs.

*Which day-to-day challenges are you facing while managing a global company?*

Orlando Casares: Mine is the same problem every head of industry faces each day: give me a 25 hour day instead of 24. Time is the most valuable commodity available to man. I'm reminded several times a day that it has already been 14 years since FLI was born and while I'm proud of its achievements thus far, I never really take stock because I feel there is yet so much more to do. We've only touched the surface and the best is yet to come.

*What has working across several continents taught you about the industry and business in general?*

Orlando Casares: Perhaps the most elucidating truth learned throughout this incredible process is that the members of our team, while all very successful attorneys both financially and in terms of peer recognition, share a common thread of enthusiasm for FLI's business model.

Otherwise, why would the managing partners or senior partners (heads of legal departments) travel at least twice a year to join us somewhere in the world to listen, learn and share best practices that keep making FLI

better and better? We are approaching the 70 law firm threshold. The strength of the network is in its diversity and while we have members with significantly different local models, practice focus, staff and direction, there is one thing that defines us all. Like a skein of geese in flight, everyone in the network is flying together in a V-line formation. And when you can harness the power of 70 of the world's leading, independent law firms and channel the energy, best practices, and talent, you've got something quite remarkable.

*Who do you admire most as a business leader?*

Orlando Casares: There have several individuals I've come to admire during my life-time, be it early days underdogs-turned-to-self-made-success stories such as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, Harry S Truman or contemporary men and women with similar backgrounds such as Sam Walton, Richard Branson, JK Rowling, Oprah Winfrey or Elizabeth Holmes. They all share a common DNA. Tough star, dismal changes of success, relentless drive and yes, huge passion for what they do. While there are many self-made rich people in the world, to me it's about the contribution back to society that weighs heavier in my mind. I am a firm believer that as in *Field of Dreams*, if you build (the right solution, the right business model, the right approach, etc) they (the clients, the money) will come. I for one, am trying to build a field.

*Thereâ€™s been a lot of talk about innovation in the legal profession â€“ how do you see it from your perspective?*

Orlando Casares: The Financial Times publishes a feature article on Innovative Lawyers and Law firms every year. Yet, year after year the selected â€ˆ innovatorsâ€ˆ are the usual suspects (mega law firms) which allocate budget to yet additional software or other technology to further automate the delivery of the work product. I think if you were to ask the beneficiaries of the work product, the GC or in-house corporate counsel, they would say this is no innovation. To me, delivering top quality legal support 24/7 across 70 jurisdictions, in proper English by a group of talented service providers giving unprecedented client satisfaction, and a business-partner attitude tempered with humility â€ˆ and yes, for a fraction of the cost the alternative charges, that's innovation.

*Speaking of innovation â€“ what makes your network different from other major networks?*

Orlando Casares: Most other networks are subscription-based. The firms pay a sign-up fee and then wait for the referrals to fall from the sky. This model is risky since geography plays a big part in successfully tapping the source of revenue. If your law firm happens to be the leading IP law firm in Munich, chances are you will get work; if you are the top law firm in a remote area, fledgling economy, or politically

unstable jurisdiction, recovering the investment will prove a bigger challenge. Every year, the firm will struggle to justify the renewal fee, and since the network is only able to survive through the administrative funding, there seems to be a conflict of interest. FLI does not charge any sign up fees to any of our members.

*What behavioural change have you noticed in clients who are "shopping" for legal services?*

Orlando Casares: Due to the economic reality or the in-house legal department and recent age and gender changes, shopping for legal services is not even close to what it was, eight to ten years ago. GCs are not interested in lengthy paper solutions preferring simple emails or quick phone calls. They are looking for pragmatic enablers in their outside counsel, not the traditional three-partner circuit where the law firms assigns three lawyers to every memo, call or query from the client (billing triple). They expect a fair amount of proactive work (at no cost) to justify the relationship with the service provider. Law firms that are accustomed to charge for everything will find themselves out of a job. In the good old days, clients used to be the kings; nowadays in the current economic climate, they have moved up to emperors and empresses. And unless their traditional services providers who may still be living on the (false) notion that "my client is not going anywhere" realise this they will soon find themselves having kindled the wrath of a tyrant who's awakened from a bad dream where he or she (the GC) did not

appreciate having been abused over time by their former law firms  
(whom by the way they quickly fired for a new service provider more in  
tune with the times).

*What is the one piece of advice you would give to a law student graduate  
about to enter the job market?*



Orlando Casares: The legal industry remains one of the very few that has not undergone a remake. Most industries, automobile, semiconductor, accounting, finance & banking, IT, have peaked and imploded and collapsed, yet lawyers for half a millennium have been going to work to log their time sheets and sending their invoices for time and materials as if immune from the downturn in the economy. This is no longer sustainable. Young entrepreneurs will be needed, and welcomed, to re-write the rules of engagement in the legal market, just like the creators of Facebook, LegalZoom, and other initially niche-driven opportunities. In a way, I'm convinced FLI is one of those forces that will help disrupt our industry and reshape the way we do business. If there are young law students out there with the passion to join this exciting time, welcome aboard. On the other hand, if they are currently in law school, counting the days to join a mammoth law firm with dollar signs in their eyes because they want to charge their clients exorbitant sums simply because their law firm is a mega firm, they should think again. That model is under attack by a very savvy, equally passionate and driven forty-something â the new GC. Watch out.