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Gina Baldassarre | 10th Sep 15 | 3 MIN READ



## Melbourne startup DivorceRight wants to make divorce cheaper, more efficient and more amicable

Lawyers in pop culture are often stereotyped as smug and greedy, stretching out cases for as long as possible to get as much money as they can. But in the real world lawyers, just like many other professionals, are looking to work as efficiently as possible, and are doing so by completing more work online for fixed fees.

While LawPath and LegalVision provide general and business-related legal services, recently launched Melbourne startup **DivorceRight** has a very clear niche. Founded by Anne-Marie Cade of Victorian online legal firm Daniel Lew Le Mercier & Co, DivorceRight aims to focus on healing instead of legal wrangling, and as such, wants to make the divorce process as easy as possible and keep families out of court. The startup does this by completing as much of the divorce process online – clients lodge forms and interact with each other and their lawyers and mediators online through a client portal.

When face to face meetings are required, they're conducted in designated meeting rooms at a location convenient to the clients. DivorceRight also uses an algorithm to assist in the division of property. The algorithm takes into account how each party ranks a list of non-allocated marital property from most to least preferred and divides it.

Cade said the idea for the platform came from watching families tear themselves apart during the divorce process.

"The court process and the traditional adversarial approach does little to help families through the healing process and sometimes makes their problems worse. No matter what the status of your relationship is with your ex-partner, you will always be parents together which is why a different approach to divorce is so necessary," she said.

"Marriage did not begin with lawyers and legal papers so there is no reason for it to end that way. Divorce is not all about the paperwork. It's about a major life transition and I want to make difference in the way divorce is done."

After making initial contact with DivorceRight, clients are sent a questionnaire they can fill out online. Based on the responses, the mediator DivorceRight connects them with is able to develop the approach they'll take in dealing with the clients. Clients are then assigned a wider team of legal professionals to help them reach a settlement. Once a settlement is reached, they're referred to individual lawyers so they can receive independent legal advice and then file their divorce papers.

Paperwork associated with each step of the process is filed on the DivorceRight platform for easy reference, with clients also able to receive and send notifications and messages, view their case status, schedule conferences, and pay bills. Cade also encourages the use of Skype and video conferencing.

DivorceRight clients are given a costs agreement detailing what the process will entail and how much it will cost at the beginning of the matter; a divorce conducted through the platform can cost between \$3,000 to \$12,000.

Cade began her own practice, Le Mercier Legal & Conveyancing, in 2006 while at home with a three year old. She then took over the practice of South Yarra lawyer Daniel Lew in 2013, and has since expanded by putting her practice online. It was this year named a finalist in the Lexis Nexis Legal Innovation Index.

"I have a virtual law firm and understand the benefits of this and how receptive clients are to the way I deliver legal services and I had a good understating of what works well. I don't have a traditional bricks and mortar firm but rather since I operate 'virtually' I am always accessible to my clients. Having adopted technology into my practice early and seeing the benefits of it, I wanted to apply and use the knowledge I had to DivorceRight. In this day and age I feel innovation is the key to achieve growth and success in my firm," Cade said.

Some might say that divorce is far too complicated and emotional a legal process to be conducted online – what if one party doesn't want to use such a method in the first place? – but Cade believes DivorceRight removes the barriers people often face when looking to access legal services delivered via a traditional approach – as well as cost, many people can feel intimidated working with lawyers.

DivorceRight currently operates in Victoria only, but is set to expand to New South Wales over the next month, and from there, around Australia.

Cade said, "I am always open to having discussions with firms or potential investors but is important that they share my vision of making a difference in the way divorce is done as I am very passionate about what I am doing to make a difference in this area of law through the approach that I am adopting."