

Member Spotlight: Urs Breitsprecher

New Practice, New Horizons



Urs Breitsprecher is managing partner at AQUAN Rechtsanwälte, forming the business after 15 years of legal practice in Düsseldorf.

He has more than a decade of experience working on complex M&A transactions, and, due to his dual qualification as a German lawyer (Rechtsanwalt) and English Solicitor, he is specialised in cross-border deals. He also has considerable expertise of company and group restructurings, and their tax consequences as well as in insolvency matters.

Urs Breitsprecher chose his profession against the wishes of his father, a business owner with a healthy disrespect for lawyers.

“My father always said that businessmen make deals and lawyers break them” says Urs, who also considered becoming a cook before settling on legal training. Despite this attitude, his parents were keen to instil a sense of justice and the need to defend the weak, which, ultimately, led him to the law.

More than a decade later, as an experienced corporate lawyer specialising in cross-border M&A, insolvency and restructuring, Urs is finally becoming a business owner himself, as he and his team launch a new legal practice, AQUAN Rechtsanwälte.

AQUAN is a boutique law firm built around an ethos of honesty, integrity and professional ethics. A flat hierarchy encourages lawyers to work closely with clients, solving problems in a practical and pragmatic way, rather than with heavy legalese or academic jargon. This philosophy also owes some-

thing to the influence of Urs’s father, with its emphasis on strong commercial solutions and entrepreneurial thinking.

Urs says he was ready to start up on his own three years ago, before he joined his previous firm (MKRG), but decided that working in a large corporate department with 30 lawyers was a good opportunity for him.

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He says, “The additional three years were very important to me, but in the end it did not work out. I came to realise that the size of the law firm does not matter, but the team and trusted partners that you work with do. That always seems to be the case, even with magic circle firms. When I receive work from big law firms, I always ask the question, ‘why do you not use your firm’s Düsseldorf office?’. The partner, who I usually know personally, will say ‘because I know you and I know you will do the job to a first class standard, as if it were your case.’”

"In bigger companies, there is always internal politics and that means people pulling in different directions. That's why I wanted my own firm with its own ethos. We don't want politics and neither do our trusted partners; we prefer to work as a team to get the most out of everything. We don't fight internally, but externally, to get more clients, find better solutions for them and generate more profits."

The positive encouragement of colleagues, family and friends played a significant part in helping Urs to go solo with his team. He attributes advice from colleagues with their own practices as crucial in his decision-making process.

"One of our Dutch partners, John Wolfs, told me to do it immediately and offered any advice and assistance I needed, even financial. Howard Coleman in London also gave up a lot of time to talk me through how he did it. When I met my Californian colleague Bob Freitas at a recent IR Global conference, he gave me the benefit of his experience. IR Global and its members have helped me a lot to establish my own law firm."

AQUAN has plans to grow slowly, retaining boutique status by employing no more than 10 lawyers. The firm's focus will be corporate and M&A, insolvency and restructuring plus inbound and outbound investments. Urs has a particular interest in the Middle East and will use this as a major driver for AQUAN.

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Urs is dual-qualified as an English and German lawyer, a skill that will prove useful in his new venture, particularly as he specialises in cross-border

transactions. It gives foreign clients more confidence in his ability to see and understand their point of view.

He says, "Being dual-qualified helps me to understand the case law better. I see the differences between opinions and understand why clients question things in German law. I have found that English-speaking or Asian clients trust me more when they know I am an English solicitor, because they believe I will have a better feeling for the different legal systems and cultural differences between Germany and their country."

The strong trade links between The Netherlands and Germany will be another crucial part of AQUAN's strategy to build a thriving legal practice. Urs cites a deal starting this month, as evidence of this, in which a Dutch family-owned operation is selling a German daughter company to a corporation listed in England. One AQUAN office will be in Venlo, on the Dutch/German border, a drive of just 35 minutes from Urs's home.

AQUAN may open an office in London for one or two years to help English companies move to Europe.

The current economic environment is also conducive to growth plans, according to Urs, since issues like Brexit should create opportunities for European legal practices with an outward-facing approach. He is a self-confessed Anglophile and, while Brexit disappointed him personally, he sees plenty of opportunity in the situation, especially given his expertise in German and English law.

He says, "I like that the British people are really pragmatic and I even prefer English beer. I almost opened an office in England two years ago, but

Brexit stopped that. If there is eventually a hard Brexit, then AQUAN may open an office in London for one or two years to help English companies move to Europe."

While starting a new business is always time-consuming, Urs intends for his philosophy of teamwork and work/life balance to apply to himself as well as his lawyers. He is an early riser and often finds himself in the gym by 6am and the office by 7am. He tends to work long days, but tries to be home by 7pm two nights a week to put his children to bed, before working from his home office.

One of his other major passions is nature, specifically the ocean, and he enjoys spending time with his family at their house on the Dutch coast. While he is there, he is able to indulge his love of surfing and scuba diving, or just simply relax on the beach. He is an active member of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and takes a serious interest in conservation and animal protection. When time allows, Urs plays a round of golf.

"My wife is from Bavaria, so she also loves the outdoors and the mountains. People are able to look after themselves, but no one takes care of nature and animals, so I like to do that. The ocean is one of my favourite places to be, where I feel most free, so it is important to protect it."

As Urs embarks on the next phase of his career as a lawyer and, now, an entrepreneur, he will undoubtedly appreciate the freedom that comes from being in charge of his own destiny. While he owes thanks to everyone who offered encouragement, perhaps he will reserve the most gratitude for his father, the businessman who must surely be proud of a son who has finally followed in his own footsteps.



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AQUAN is a new concept of legal practice, committed to assisting mid-market companies and international investors alike achieve their goals with the delivery of legal advice at the highest level. They are specialised in all areas of corporate/M&A and commercial law with expertise in restructuring and insolvency law and advising on inbound/outbound investments.