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Local lawyer leads global referral network

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In the early 1990s, Jay A. Frank, Mitchell J. Melamed and several other lawyers set out to create a national network of small and midsize U.S. law firms to refer cases to each other.

Legal Netlink Alliance launched with about five law firms and now consists of about 100 firms in the U.S. and overseas, said Frank, an Aronberg, Goldgehn, Davis & Garmisa member and the organization's president.

The plan for the organization developed after Frank's firm at the time, Frank, Miller, Melamed, Tabis & McDonnell P.C., referred clients to a California law firm after locating the firm in the Martindale-Hubble directory, he said. The California firm did not handle the matter well, he said.

"It was very difficult to pick someone out of a book not knowing them personally for a matter we may need help with in another state," said Melamed, an Aronberg, Goldgehn member.

Legal Netlink Alliance began with lawyers in the Midwest who knew each other, Frank said.

"The idea was for the firms in the group to recommend

(lawyers) who they knew were good in different states," he said.

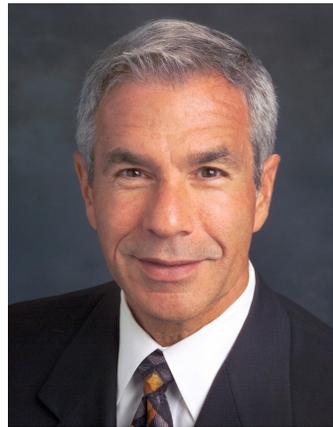
Edward L. Volk, another Legal Netlink Alliance founding member and partner with Newby, Lewis, Kaminski, Jones LLP in LaPorte, Ind., said he particularly likes how that network helps him locate a lawyer in California or New York.

"It's a very big relief to me to know that I can hand the ball to somebody who will get the job done and who will also (treat) the client like I would," he said.

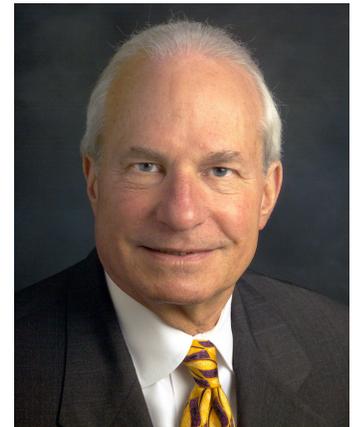
Legal Netlink Alliance members get screened for quality and must possess experience in litigation and transactional matters, Frank said. Its members pay \$1,250 each in annual dues and referral fees are not allowed, he said.

Only one firm in each major city can become a member of the organization, Frank said. It now consists of about 50 U.S. law firms and another 25 to 30 European law firms with the remainder of the firms scattered across the world, including China, Israel and the Philippines, he said.

About a decade ago, a European-based lawyers' network approached Legal Netlink Alliance and the two



Mitchell J. Melamed



Jay A. Frank

organizations joined forces, Melamed said.

"Because of the growth of the organization, now I'm handling matters from foreign countries that have connections in Chicago," he said.

Most of the U.S. law firm members consist of 30 to 40 lawyers, while European firms generally are smaller, Frank said.

"It's a great (instrument) to expand your practice," he said. "We have a 40-lawyer firm in Chicago but yet we have a global reach because of the network."

Aronberg, Goldgehn currently

defends a client from Belgium in a case here, Frank said. A Legal Netlink Alliance member from Belgium contacted Frank about the case, he said.

"You meet lawyers from all over the world," he said. "You make friends with lawyers all over the world."

The organization conducts several meetings each year both in the U.S. and overseas, which allow for networking opportunities, Frank said.

The next meeting, set for May 11 in Chicago, will consist mostly of U.S. members, he said.