



FROM THE IUSTORIA BLOG

Why We Publish Our Rates — and What It Says About Those Who Hide Them

Ask a lawyer what an hour of their work costs and watch what happens. Nine times out of ten you will hear \"it depends\". It does — but that is no reason to stay silent.

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Ask a lawyer what an hour of their time costs and watch what happens. Nine times out of ten you will hear "it depends". It does, but that is no reason to keep quiet about it. We publish our rates on our website, surcharges for night and weekend work included. Here is why, and what the exercise taught us about our own work.

"It depends" as a business model

First, in fairness, let me explain why most firms keep their prices to themselves, because not all their reasons are bad ones. Legal work really does vary: an hour of an associate's research and an hour of a partner's time in a crisis negotiation are two different products. Firms worry that a figure on the website will tie their hands on complex matters, that competitors will undercut them, and that it will scare off clients who would happily have paid once they had talked it through.

Alongside those rational reasons, though, there is one nobody says out loud: **information asymmetry pays**. A client who does not know the price in advance finds it out once they are already committed to the matter. They have handed over documents, confided in the lawyer and lost a week, and by then the balance of bargaining power has shifted. "It depends" is not always a description of reality; sometimes it is a commercial strategy built on the fact that a client in trouble finds it hard to turn around in the doorway.

We decided we did not want that model. Idealism had little to do with it. It was a calculation, which I will come to at the end. First, though, let me show you what an hourly rate actually contains, because without that there can be no honest conversation about what lawyers cost.

What you buy when you buy an hour of a lawyer

To a layperson, an hourly rate looks like a wage: what this person earns in an hour. In fact it is the price of a product, and it has several layers packed into it that nobody talks about.

Layer	What you are paying for	How you notice when it is missing
Liability	A lawyer is liable to the client for any damage they cause and must be insured by law	When a neighbour advises you badly, that is your bad luck; when a lawyer does, you have a claim
The unbilled iceberg	Tracking legislation and case law, training, the systems that make the answer fast	The answer takes a week and is generic anyway
Review	Every significant work product is reviewed by a second lawyer	A legal text with no opponent looks finished and is not
Confidentiality infrastructure	Secure filing systems, data boxes (the Czech government's electronic mailbox system), file discipline, archiving	Dull and invisible — and critical at exactly the moment something goes wrong

When I answer a difficult question for a client in two hours, the client is paying for two hours of access to years of preparation, not for two hours of work. The old joke about the repairman who charges a dollar for tapping with the hammer and 9,999 for knowing where to tap is, in law, a literal description of how the price is calculated.

Add up those four layers and it becomes clear why a good hour of legal work in Czech commercial practice costs thousands of crowns, and also why a suspiciously cheap hour should make you suspicious. Something on that list had to be cut, and you do not know what.

Why urgency carries a surcharge

The most sensitive part of our rate card is the surcharges for work needed by the next day, at weekends or overnight. I have heard people say that charging extra for speed is unfair, since "it's the same work, after all". It is not the same. Work delivered by the morning is a different product from the same work delivered within a week, for three reasons.

First, urgent work pushes aside planned work. The hour spent on your matter at night did not come from nowhere; it came out of someone's sleep or weekend, and those hours cost us more as well. Second, working to an urgent deadline carries more risk. With less time for a second read, it needs more concentration and more senior people, not fewer. Third, if urgent work cost no more, everyone would ask for it on everything and it would stop existing. The surcharge is what keeps night-time capacity free for the matters that really need it.

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

A surcharge you know about when you commission the work is the price of the service; a surcharge you discover only on the invoice is a trap. That is why the whole urgent regime (when what is charged and how it is calculated) is in both our rate card and our terms of business. A client calling on a Friday evening with a crisis knows what they are saying when they say "I need it by Monday".

A confession: I wrote the terms to be readable and nobody read them

Now for something I only learned by running a practice. I wrote the first version of our terms of business hoping clients would read them and understand everything: plain language, questions and answers, as few references to statutes as possible. Over the years I found out what anyone who has ever published terms of any kind will tell you: **almost nobody reads them**. Not even the friendly ones. Clients decide on the strength of a meeting, a recommendation and trust, and they open the terms for the first time when there is a dispute over an invoice.

You can draw two conclusions from that. The cynical one: if nobody reads them, write them in your own favour and bury them in legalese. And the honest one, which is where we ended up: if nobody reads them, it matters all the more that they are fair, because terms a client first reads while angry about an invoice have to stand up at precisely that moment.

So we rewrote them. The rules are precise, the rates match the public rate card to the crown, and there is not a sentence in them we could not defend to a client's face. We kept them readable, but we dropped the illusion that readability solves anything on its own. You do not have to read us. You can check us at any time: our [terms of business](#) and [rate card](#) are public, dated and downloadable as PDFs, with an archive of previous versions.

What transparency did to our client base

Now the calculation I promised. A published rate card works as a filter, and it filters in both directions.

It filtered out enquiries that were never going to go anywhere. Someone looking for "something quick and cheap to draft" sees the figures and does not call. That sounds like lost business, but it is not. An hour spent in a meeting that cannot lead to an engagement is the most expensive hour in the diary, because we are the ones paying for it.

And it brought in exactly the clients we want: people who look up what we charge before the meeting and call *because of it*. A transparent price sends a signal that is hard to fake. A firm that publishes its rates, night surcharges and all, is telling you it has no need to set the price according to how desperate the client seems.

One thing we had not expected: open prices do not invite haggling, they invite trust. People haggle when both sides suspect the price is inflated. When the price is public and the same for everyone, there is nothing to haggle over.

How to measure any legal proposal

While we are on the subject, here is a tool that works on any firm, ours included. Ask these four questions before you instruct anyone, and pay attention not only to the answers but to how willing the firm is to give them:

Question	A serious answer	The warning sign
What is the rate of the people who will work on my matter, and who exactly will they be?	These tasks are done by this tier at this rate, those by another tier at that rate	One rate for everything — often the partner rate for an associate's work
What is the estimated scope and what could change it?	A range, plus a list of what could blow it: the other side's activity, an expert, an appeal	"There's no way to say" in its pure form = "I don't want to commit to anything"
What happens if I need it fast?	Concrete numbers, agreed in advance	Silence now and a surprise on the invoice
What does your billing look like?	A sample, itemised, with times and descriptions of each task	A single line reading "legal services as agreed"

The last question is the most underrated. A firm's invoices tell you more about its culture than its website does.

What to take away

If you take one thing from this as a client, whether ours or anyone else's, let it be this: **you are entitled to know the price of a legal service before it starts.** That means the hourly rate, the surcharges, the estimated scope, and the rules on when that estimate may change. A lawyer who cannot or will not tell you these things is not telling you anything about how complex the law is. They are telling you about their business model, and it is up to you whether you want to play the part it has written for you.

On how to work out whether a dispute is worth pursuing at all, see [Litigation as an investment](#). On what loses value in a dispute and for whom, [Tempo belongs to whoever time is working for](#), and on why it pays to concede a weakness before the other side finds it, [Admitting a weakness as a weapon](#).

Our rate card is [here](#). By all means, measure us against it.

Want to know what your matter will cost before you instruct? We'll tell you the price range and what can change it, before you send us the first document. [Get in touch](#), or go through the [rate card](#).

This text is a general commentary, not legal advice. The firm's current rates and conditions are set out in the rate card and terms of business on this website; in case of conflict, their wording prevails.

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