



From the Bar to the boardroom: the British barrister turned entrepreneur

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Many of us dream of inventing the next iPhone; but few, in the aftermath of that beer-fuelled epiphany, have the nerve to enact those ideas in reality. Robert Stokell is the exception to the rule: he first conceived of his business idea as a law undergraduate at the University of Oxford, but it was only when he got to the Bar that *Archie* began to take shape.

A practising commercial law barrister, Mr Stokell was driven to test his entrepreneurial acumen after attending a Corporate Finance course at the London Business School. He is now encouraging other aspiring entrepreneurs in the professional services industry to put their business ideas into practice and give a boost to the UK economy.

“There’s real entrepreneurial spirit in the UK and it’s important that we encourage it and show people that starting a business is doable, even alongside the day job, and the knock on effect for other industries is huge”, he explained to *eprivateclient*.

As with most good inventions, Mr Stokell’s is a simple solution to a common problem – a problem that plagues an estimated 12,000 barristers, 125,000 solicitors, and countless students and professionals across the UK: broken lever arch files. *Archie*, a reusable carbon spring steel clip, binds together the misaligned metal arches to ensure the smooth transition of the pages within.

“I’ve always been the guy who tinkers with things to figure out why they’re not working. I first identified this frustration as a student but it was the course, which included case studies of businesses from inception to launch, which gave me direction to go out and find the best solution.

“The paperless revolution remains a long way off in certain areas and so paper still plays a strong role for professionals, including during Trials in court.”

In 2006, Mr Stokell began dedicating his free time to travelling to manufacturers around the UK and testing various prototypes, including stainless steel clips and plastic tubing. He eventually settled on carbon spring steel, which is formed and heat-treated by a manufacturer in West Bromwich to make a clip 12mm long and 0.2mm thick. The clip is then coated in zinc to prevent rusting and stamped with the name *Archie*.

“I’ve been really enthused by how encouraging the British manufacturers were. Typically in my day job I deal a lot with dispute resolution and business deals that haven’t worked out but the great thing about my experience with Archie is that so much was done on handshake and trust with total clarity from the manufacturers.”

Applying his law training, Mr Stokell was responsible for drawing up his own contracts with manufacturers. *Archie* is now patented and trademarked, and has design protection. *Archie* was also granted accelerated review by the Intellectual Property Office, given its green benefits in reducing the disposal of lever arch files.

Mr Stokell did all this alongside his day job in Chambers.

“I actually found the whole process very doable alongside the day job. It helps that it’s very different and much more practical but it was also down to the ability to visit manufacturers in the UK and give my feedback face-to-face.

“We’re an amazing manufacturing nation and it’s important to celebrate and contribute to that.”

Archie is available in packs of 10 from www.archielondon.com. It is also available for corporate orders.

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