

Need a fast debt collection? Well, here's who you can call

By Alicia Doyle
Correspondent

When it comes to debt collection, Toni Shaw doesn't have the time to write letters and make follow-up phone calls to clients who owe money.

So, she hired Spiwak & Iezza, a Westlake Village-based law firm that specializes in collection cases.

"They are very aggressive and try to collect immediately without litigation," said Shaw, credit services manager for Sysco Food Services of Ventura Inc.

Spiwak & Iezza has had a 60 percent success rate with collections, "which is a really excellent percentage because they haven't had the accounts very long," Shaw said. "Once it goes to a collection agency or an attorney, it gets the debtor's attention ... they know they don't have a lot of time left and need to do something."

Shaw is among a growing number of Ventura County business people tapping into the services of Spiwak & Iezza, founded by attorneys Lisa Spiwak of Camarillo and Nick Iezza of Thousand Oaks.

After graduating from the same law school, the two started working at a firm in Encino. While rising

through the ranks as top producers, they became good friends and began discussing ways the firm could be more cost-effective and serve clients better.

Go-getter attitude

Aggressive in their front-end collections, Spiwak and Iezza said they have no problem getting on the phone, talking to debtors, gathering information and attempting to collect the debt before moving forward with the legal process.

"Most lawyers don't have that go-getter attitude," Spiwak said.

"They file a lawsuit and wait for an answer. We realized that time was of the essence. ... We believed that in order to be successful for our clients, we gotta get them the money. That's what clients want."

Spiwak and Iezza originally opened a firm in Encino, but relocated to Westlake Village seven years ago when they decided to live in Ventura County.

Located at 2660 Townsgate Road, the 20-member firm has several hundred clients nationwide and has grown approximately 10 percent to 20 percent annually over the past three years, Iezza said.

About 10 percent of the firm's clients are located in Ventura County. Locally, clients include a credit union and bank, Internet technology firm, hardwood floor manufacturer, medical equipment distributor, property management company, airline industry cable provider and various legal and medical professionals.

The firm has collected more than \$75 million for clients and has engaged in some 10,000 collection law cases, Iezza said.

"That includes bankruptcy," he said. "People think when a bankruptcy is filed, they can't collect. But we have a lot of success going after people in bankruptcy court."

Free manual

To complement the firm's services, Spiwak and Iezza also publish a free manual on debt collection based on their experiences. The latest is "Spiwak & Iezza's Complete Guide to Effective Debt Collection: How to Get What's Due You."

The lawyers decided to offer the handbook after realizing many small- to medium-size companies do not have proper systems in place to handle collections.

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Lisa Spiwak, attorney and partner at Spiwak and Iezza, a law firm that specializes in collection cases

"We've heard hundreds of stories about problems these companies were having," Iezza said. "So we decided to put our knowledge down on paper in an attempt to give credit and collection professionals some tips to help them collect on overdue receivables."

The handbook provides business owners with a course of action, walking them "through a simple A-Z approach on what to do when your account first becomes past due, all the way through obtaining a judgment against your debtor and collecting on that judgment," Spiwak explained.

It also provides business owners with realistic expectations of a collection lawyer's role and appropriate time frames for work performed, Iezza added.

A wealth of information

"Our handbook provides a wealth of information for the small business owner that helps the business owner manage his overdue accounts and preserve his cash flow to keep his business running smoothly."

Spiwak and Iezza said in the 12 years they have published the handbook, more than 6,000 have been distributed. They decided to offer the manual locally so credit and collection professionals in the Conejo Valley and Tri-Counties could benefit from their combined 40-plus years of experience.

"We firmly believe that most creditors can handle debt collection themselves," Spiwak said, "if they follow the principals of the handbook."



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