

**MICHAEL BULA SOLICITORS
MELBOURNE**



Michael Bula is many things: thespian, family man, international lawyer and notary.

But it is his love for all things international and cultural - and his gift for mastering foreign languages - which has catapulted him into the position in which he is today: principal solicitor at Michal Bula Solicitors, International Lawyers and Notaries (MBS) in Melbourne, legal advisor to numerous consulates and embassies in Europe, the Pacific and West Africa, and official National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters French translator.

And while the vast majority of Australian international law firms primarily claim footholds in Asia, MBS's market rests in far-flung and exotic locations spanning the globe, including New Caledonia, Reunion, Senegal and continental Europe.

Bula acknowledges that MBS is an anomaly in the Australian legal landscape and is quick to point out this is no accident.

"[MBS] is unique, and I wanted it to be unique. I set out very early - not by accident but by absolute design - to promote this, and part of the goodwill of this practice is the [global] structure and network," he says. "If I couldn't speak another language or do something of an international nature in my work, I wouldn't be practicing law."

Of Franco-Italian heritage, Bula is fluent in French and Italian and - as if that wasn't enough - on his way to conquering Spanish and Portuguese. "In international law, the more languages you know and the more legal systems with which you are familiar, the better it is," he says.

And such is Bula's commitment to creating a genuinely international firm, all of MBS's staff members are bilingual.

"I made a conscious decision that I wanted to have an all-French practice. Everyone in my office - without exception - is either French or French-speaking and we only speak French," he says. "[Employees] get interviewed and if they can't cut it [linguistically], it's goodbye."

While speaking a foreign language is one thing, it is Bula's grasp of different legal systems from around the world that is most astounding.

With MBS's practice being dominated by African mining law, French real property law and multi-jurisdictional succession law, Bula is constantly required to keep abreast of the latest developments in jurisdictions into which most Australian lawyers would never have ventured.

"When you are in international practice, the challenges are even greater than in a local practice, especially in professional development and keeping up with the law," he says.

"My approach to these challenges is that I am never alone. I always work in a team and I always have consultants," he says.

To this end, Bula has established an incredibly diverse global network of lawyers, notaries, translators and consulates which form not only an endless source of business, but also a reliable and accurate source of knowledge. "Understanding the families of laws and what the civil law entails is a great challenge. It is a constant learning curve, but that challenge to me is actually a great pleasure."

And the satisfaction Bula derives from his work is obvious.

"I have a very strong attachment to Europe, so to be able to work constantly in French and Italian ... is what I enjoy most," he says. "I enjoy being a legal cultural centre." Visit MBS at www.mbsols.com.au

Claire Chaffey