

# SwissYou: an App for expatriates and locals in Geneva

*2019. Two friends are eating together at the Café du Soleil in Petit-Saconnex. They talk about their lives and their work in Geneva.*

**CHRISTIAN DAVID, UNOG\***

**KAMELIA KEMILEVA**, a lawyer by training, has worked for two years in a variety of local and international, public and private institutions in Geneva.

**XAVIER PÉCLARD**, an advisor on business strategy, has created three businesses and is an expert on Geneva's ecosystem.

## **A platform for brokering advice**

They discuss the fact that expatriates find it difficult to get good advice on how to solve the different, notably administrative obstacles, that confront them when they arrive in Geneva. Professional advice is available but it is very expensive.

Both Xavier and Kamelia regularly receive calls for help from "expats". They conclude that an online tool is required to connect those who need advice with local experts who can answer their questions. They agree on the importance of "personal advice" that will support people who are struggling with administrative or language problems.

The idea is a good one. However, numerous challenges must be resolved before it can be implemented. Language is an obvious issue. In addition, the project must offer real expertise and a peer to peer service. The application must be simple to use. Those who use the tool need advisors who speak their language, know how things are done in Geneva, and can help to resolve their problems cheaply.

Kamelia and Xavier begin to plan what needs to be done. During their careers, each has developed a sizeable professional network, and they have complementary expertise. Those they consult are enthusiastic. The task list lengthens. A web developer is commissioned to build the site. On the strength of their professional reputation, they assemble a first group of advisors to test the model. The advisors include people with experience of administration, politics, bars and cafés, shops and commerce, small business, editing and translation, real estate and property management, insurance, languages. The project is registered in Geneva as SwissYou ([www.SwissYou.ch](http://www.SwissYou.ch))

## **How SwissYou works: peer to peer, or expert advice**

### **The clients**

Clients may be expatriates or local. They are abroad or already in Geneva and need advice or accompaniment to resolve local administrative issues (with respect to government regulations, finance, employment, welfare, translation, accommodation, property, moving, mergers, acquisitions or sales). SwissYou combines administrative with linguistic advice.

Clients can contact SwissYou seven days a week. They select the profile of the advisor, choose a language, state when they are



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available, and place a request. They can speak to an available advisor on the spot or make an appointment.

## **Advisors**

Advisors are paid for the services they provide. They signal their availability and operate as self-employed consultants. Working with SwissYou generates complementary income and enables them to add to their expertise, widen their networks, and in some cases extend their social and professional activity.

Where an advisor is not able to resolve a client's problem, or the problem requires a legal input, SwissYou draws on professional partners. This step necessarily involves additional costs that may include fees for translation as well as time. SwissYou offers clients a range of professional options. The final fee therefore depends on the services that are required and the choices clients make. SwissYou explicitly declare all costs and fees on its website and on the App.

Clients confirm each transaction and electronically authorise payment before work can start. Payment is made to SwissYou which remunerates advisors. SwissYou has established strict confidentiality standards to ensure that clients' personal information is not divulged or exploited.

### Future developments

Though their evolution is difficult to foresee, networks are naturally dynamic and SwissYou is likely to develop additional features over time. It is clear, for example, that many people who work in International Geneva, notably Europeans, are not visible to the Swiss Mission because they do not need visas. SwissYou can help such people. The current health crisis has also underlined the relevance of digital services, especially to public authorities. Covid 19 is destroying the barriers between physical and digital services and reliance on the latter is very likely to increase.

### Examples

#### Clients

- Fabrizio is coming from Argentina to work for a Geneva NGO. He has received some advice but must contact different institutions to arrange accommodation, open a bank account, find a school for his children, help his wife to find work, and buy a car. He does not speak French well and the websites of the Canton, the City, the Confederation and welcome centres make him dizzy. SwissYou helps him to sort these matters out before arriving in Geneva.
- Angela, who is German, has a job in Geneva but has been posted to Asia for two years. She has a property in the Valais and wants to decorate and rent it, but does not know who can help her to do this.
- Jessica and Brian from the United States have lived across the border in France for ten years. She works at WIPO, he has part time jobs in several private schools. They want to buy a house in Switzerland and need help to prepare the paperwork and negotiate a mortgage.
- Bakr, a former diplomat from Senegal, is organising an international online seminar in French, for which some participants need translation. Bakr hires SwissYou advisors to translate into English via Zoom. At the last minute, a Brazilian who speaks only Portuguese joins the seminar. SwissYou supplies an experienced Brazilian student to provide translation and support.

#### Advisors

- Dimitri, a Russian, has lived in Geneva for 20 years. He is a freelance UN translator. Douglas, an American, has just been appointed to a post in the Red Cross. Dimitri explains to Douglas how he can

rent a flat in Geneva and agrees to accompany him to an accredited *régie* (estate agent) the following week to sort out his dossier and translate for him.

- Natasha is Swiss. She accompanies her husband, a Swiss diplomat, based in Pretoria. From there, she wants to assist people who have just arrived in Geneva. She can't find work in South Africa. Through SwissYou she uses her skills and makes new contacts, helping her to prepare professionally for her return to Switzerland.
- Ian, a retired Scot, has lived in Geneva for 40 years. He is bilingual. He worked all his life as an oil executive and now translates for small Geneva NGOs. He wants to use his Swiss and international

experience and knowledge to help other working or retired expatriates to settle in Switzerland or change their career.

- Anne, from Geneva, is a student at the University of Geneva. She wants to meet people because it might help her find a job – and to make some money! She speaks excellent English, French and Italian. ■

\*English version drafted by Robert Archer, Plain Sense, SwissYou

<https://www.swissyou.ch>

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