

Practical application of law is key for post-Covid success

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In 2020 [Forbes](#) predicted that Covid-19 would turbocharge transformation of the legal industry, propelling law into the digital age and reshaping its landscape with widespread industry deployment of underutilised technological tools.

In South Africa and indeed across the world, this has certainly been the case. The pandemic and extended national lockdown have forced lawyers and their employees to transition to remote working and to rely more heavily on tools that enable them to work more efficiently. While many firms have noted a slowdown in business, those that have embraced technology will be best poised for success when the economy begins to recover.

Yoni Balkind, head of practical guidance at LexisNexis South Africa, says: “This is a period that has been characterised by great uncertainty and unpredictability. Remote working, coupled with constant legal and regulatory developments, have had many practitioners scrambling, and more so now than ever before clients expect practitioners to have quick access to the answers and to be able to provide fast, actionable legal guidance.”

Numerous studies and surveys have shown that lawyers across the board agree that technology is needed to overcome the challenge of coping with the increased volume and complexity of information this year, while improving efficiency and productivity.

“Even at the best of times attorneys, small and medium law firms and corporate counsel are under enormous pressure to keep abreast of increased regulatory complexity in local and global jurisdictions. Covid-19 has only quickened the pace,” says Balkind.

Knowledge is no longer enough

The proliferation of legal information online has seen legal professionals facing a heightened need to be in a position to not only know the law, but to interrogate and apply it practically.

“In a Covid-19 world, being knowledgeable as a lawyer is just no longer enough of a value proposition on which to build relevance and credibility. Legal experts need access to a wider range of legal information and must understand how to apply it practically in their area of law,” says Balkind.

“To have a competitive advantage lawyers need to optimise their information gathering process. It is now about gathering legal information and identifying the best practices efficiently, accurately and quickly, using technology to augment their existing expertise, collaboration and delivery. This will help to ensure customer satisfaction that produces results at a cost clients are happy with,” he says.

A further challenge in the new Covid-19 reality is that many firms have had to rethink their knowledge management and research approaches. This is especially true when practitioners have been required to seek answers outside of their specialty, where the time required to get an answer becomes prohibitive. Not having easy access to physical law libraries and knowledge teams – typically comprising library managers, knowledge managers and practical support lawyers – during the lockdown meant that many practitioners had to accelerate their own learning around legal knowledge management and practical application of the law.

Practical application of law has, therefore, taken on new importance. “Many areas of law have a practical application that is simply not captured in textbooks, or from the traditional variety of primary research materials such as legislation and case law, or secondary resources such as precedent banks, legal encyclopaedias, text books, academic works and journals.

“Workflows and best practices are typically learned on the job – and with Covid-19 ‘on the job’ has taken on an entirely new meaning, where legal professionals have been cut off from their familiar spaces and ways of working,” says Balkind.

This, he explains, is why outsourced practical legal information offerings are in even greater demand. Practical law resources take the best of primary and secondary material, pulling together case law, legislation, commentary and precedents, as well as other material not typically found elsewhere such as decision trees, checklists and policy templates. These are consolidated into guides that highlight prevailing law, set out best practices and workflows, and tackle law from a practical angle.

Online resources such as [Lexis® Practical Guidance](#) provide a quick overview of areas of law that have been front and centre during the world’s handling of the pandemic, including civil law procedure, family law and labour law.

Authored by leading practitioners from the top legal firms in South Africa, and focusing on the practical application of the law, Lexis® Practical Guidance provides smart, all-in-one guidance for professionals across more than 30 broad areas of law. Short overviews of legal topics provide quick insights which can then be followed by deeper searching through an expansive collection of case law commentaries, legislation, precedents, checklists and additional analyses for users wanting to engage further on a specific topic.

Lexis Practical Guidance is designed to bridge the gap between understanding the law and knowing how it applies, helping lawyers to upskill and embrace a learning-for-life mindset that will help to ensure their success in a post-Covid-19 world.

Want expert opinion on the real world application of a point of law? Find it [here](#).

About Yoni Balkind:

Yoni Balkind (BA LLB PDM) is an attorney, entrepreneur and an expert in digital content. He currently heads the Lexis Practical Guidance product suite at LexisNexis South Africa.

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