

# STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

As face-to-face meetings are reduced to a distant memory and continue to be substituted by video and phone calls in some offices, the global pandemic remains an unmistakable challenge for law firms. And legal networks are stepping in to help them out during an uncertain time. **BY ELIZABETH BEATTIE**



■ This past year has seen clients grappling with a raft of challenges as the pandemic continues to develop and the impacts grow increasingly complex.

While there are hurdles ahead, opportunities also exist in this rapidly evolving climate. But in order to make the best of the ‘new normal’, seeking support, asking difficult questions and looking ahead to the future are key, says Adam Cooke, executive director of law firm network Multilaw.

As parts of the world emerge from emergency restrictions, cases subside and vaccination drives ramp up, “clients are grappling with the immediate challenges of whether to re-open their offices and encourage staff to return to them or to keep them closed and continue to encourage staff to work from home for the moment,” he notes.

Meanwhile, with furlough schemes

beginning to wind down clients are turning to legal counsel for employment law advice on redundancies and terminations, and on complex issues such as “whether or not it is lawful to mandate that all their staff are vaccinated against COVID-19 before returning to the workplace.”

“This is uncharted territory for many clients, and they are turning to their trusted legal advisors to help them navigate a course through to a degree of normality,” Cooke says.

The pandemic, which continues to linger, has triggered “vast amounts” of government legislation spanning health and safety in the workplace and support schemes for businesses, requirements around national and state borders and changes to court procedures; and these are all complex areas for clients to navigate.

“Our law firms have worked extremely hard at producing up to date guidance in real-time so that clients can quickly pivot their businesses where necessary so as to continue functioning effectively in challenging environments where circumstances can literally change by the hour,” Cooke says.


Meanwhile, “urgent” cross-border work during the pandemic has made legal networks even more critical as “clients during a crisis don’t have the time or the inclination to shop around looking for firms in different countries, they need a network they know and trust who can deliver advice quickly and efficiently across the various jurisdictions where they require it.”

For lawyers, an inability to travel and make connections with the same ease remains an ongoing challenge, and one that networks are eager to help mitigate against.

“Multilaw’s network events have continued virtually throughout the pandemic and, in fact, we have tripled the number of events we have had in the last year compared to the number we had in 2019. Firms have been able to send many more lawyers to our virtual events than they were able to send to our in-person ones and as a result the proportion of lawyers who now have direct contact with the network via attendance at events has increased dramatically,” says Cooke. “As a result, the engagement between our firms and the network and with each other has increased considerably.

The network has also developed its own COVID-19 Global Resource Hub, and emphasized developing tools for clients, tasked with navigating the various and evolving challenges.

These approaches will “absolutely” stay in place post-pandemic, Cooke tells ALB, noting that the network’s brand was “propelled...into the modern age,” as it looks to “put an end to distance in cross-border business.”

“In some senses, there is no going back. In fact, the whole experience of the pandemic prompted us as a network to think about how we could emerge stronger and better able to serve the needs of a post-pandemic world.” 



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