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Your guide to collaborative working in a **post-pandemic world**

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INTRO

Typical ways of working have transformed.

Organisations in the legal space have long been considered slower to change than their peers in neighbouring sectors – in fact, they've been notorious for it.

But in 2020, a global pandemic and sweeping lockdown measures made the situation non-negotiable.

Firms and in-house teams were left with no choice:-

If they wished to survive, they had to evolve.

After an intensive process of reshaping systems, attitudes and infrastructures, we now find ourselves in the early days of the post-pandemic future.

Day-to-day happenings have finally settled into a more steady, stable and predictable long-term norm.

And that norm is one where hybrid working and remote collaboration have firmly cemented their place.

There have been many upsides to this sea change, but there are still imperfections to be ironed out.

While the worldwide shift to hybrid working and remote collaboration has certainly made a positive impact, it's also given rise to a number of distinct challenges.

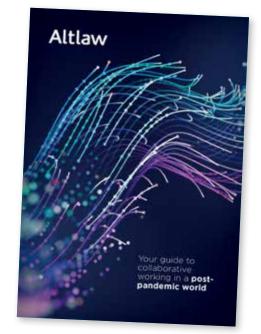Challenges that, for the legal sector, are particularly important.

Thankfully, the question of how Associates can hope to resolve these issues is answered in this helpful eGuide.

Read on to find out how you can…

Deliver remote review and collection processes securely and effectively

Recreate in-office dynamics among hybrid teams, keeping collaboration smooth and seamless

Control the growth of data volumes and prevent silos of unsecured and unsolicited data within your organisation.

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A LOOK AT THE POST-PANDEMIC LEGAL SECTOR

Want to ensure you and your legal team are fully equipped for the years ahead?

Then you need to be fully aware of what lies on the horizon for the post-pandemic legal sector.

We will begin by laying out the most pressing trends and challenges, before going on to explain what Associates can do to address them.

Challenge: Lawyers want hybrid working to stay

Hybrid working models have been overwhelmingly embraced by legal professionals.

In a recent survey of 350 in-house lawyers across the UK and the US, 66% claimed that they wanted their employer to adopt a work-from-home policy.

Responses were split equally between those wishing for a hybrid working model, and those wanting to work remotely on a full-time basis.

The interesting takeaway point from this survey though, isn't just that hybrid working is clearly favoured by most lawyers, but that there appears to be a disconnect between employee and employer attitudes to hybrid working.

While there is clearly high demand for it amongst employees, the number of employers delivering on such demands is a different matter.

As a result, flexibility has become a valuable bargaining chip for organisations looking to attract the best talent.

So, if legal teams want to retain their best and brightest, they need to find a way to make hybrid teams work – facilitating such things as remote review and collection, without any drawbacks relating to information security or standards of client service.

Challenge: The loss of in-office dynamics

While we at Altlaw believe the move to hybrid working is an overwhelmingly positive one, we understand that this represents a monumental shift for many legal teams, and how they operate.

The ability to sustain the same levels of communication, collaboration and productivity across both remote and on-site environments is no mean feat.

And this is particularly true of litigation.

Processes of review, collection and discovery have all been completed for years, decades even, in person and on site.

For hybrid working to be a functional reality, lawyers need access to the same resources and tools, without compromising data security or compliance.

They also need ways to effectively recreate the dynamics of a physical office – so that collaboration, decision making, idea generation, and the sharing of knowledge aren't negatively impacted.

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Challenge: The growth of Shadow IT

With the rise of remote working, there has also been a rise of 'shadow IT' in the legal space.

For those not familiar with the term, shadow IT refers to the use of any system, service, software, app or device that hasn't been approved internally.

The biggest problem with shadow IT is, employees often add to the problem without realising.

It may be that they urgently had to contact a colleague, and used their personal mobile phone device without thinking.

Or, that they needed one specific software capability to achieve a particular task, and rather than contacting their IT function and potentially creating further delay, they simply downloaded an app they found online.
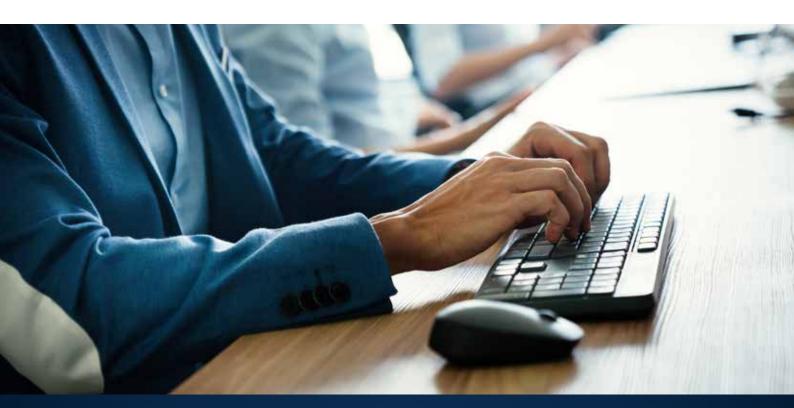
These are all understandable situations.

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But if they go on unchecked, they can contribute to significant problems.

Shadow IT makes it next to impossible for organisations to keep a handle of their data – from how it is being created, to where it is being stored.

This creates a very real danger of sensitive information slipping through the cracks, going undetected – compromising both your cybersecurity, and your ability to remain compliant.

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WHAT ASSOCIATES SHOULD DO NEXT

So, what can Associates do in order to address the issues above, and mitigate them as effectively as possible?

Well, we have a few ideas. Read on to find out what they are…

Solution: Clear policies for hybrid teams

Client requests for remote reviews and collections are becoming more frequent.

The key for legal teams to facilitate these, without compromising on the effectiveness of service, is strong and clear policymaking for hybrid teams.

At Altlaw, any reviewer partaking in remote review with us is given a 'work from home policy' document, which clearly states what is required of reviewers.

This ensures that everyone involved in a project is equally informed, and equally assured that the safety, security and quality of the review will be upheld.

Inside this detailed policy document, we clarify several important considerations for effective remote review, these include, but are not limited to:-

Operating system requirements, to ensure reviewer's devices are able to handle the data quantities associated with the review

Specifications on what qualifies as a secure remote office (we also request photos of workspaces to ensure they meet these standards)

A proposed schedule for regular video calls, to account for the usual stand up meetings that would take place in office.

Solution: Recreating office dynamics from afar

To account for the loss of in-office dynamics, Associates need to ensure their teams have a worthy suite of software capabilities.

So they can keep their colleagues just as connected and collaborative as they would be when physically in the same office space.

Many cloud-based eDiscovery platforms (such as RelativityOne) have features that can help recreate the 'roundtable' dynamics which teams need to bounce ideas off each other, and make the best strategic decisions.

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Examples include live document collaboration capabilities – as the name implies, these allow multiple users to work on the same document, from one secure and centralised file location.

Any actions that a user takes within the document, will instantly appear to all other users in the same document in real time – whether that's a redaction, highlight, annotation, or comment.

Combined with the use of other communications and instant messaging tools, capabilities such as this can help to keep collaboration seamless, sharp and swift – allowing remote teams to still effectively work 'in the heat of the moment'.

And as we're sure those of you reading this will agree, it is often within these dynamics that teams do their best work.

Solution: Approval processes for new tools

Another area which requires clear policymaking is the issue of shadow IT.

Legal teams need a way of vetting the different systems, tools and devices that are used internally by staff.

Otherwise, the issue will only continue to worsen.

Multiplied across several members of staff over an extended period, this can quickly equal exponential growth of data volumes that exist unmonitored, and unsecure.

If you want to put a stop to unknown and unaccounted for silos of data emerging within your organisation, you need to combat the growth of shadow IT with effective internal approval processes.

A key point to remember here is this: you should respond to approval requests from employees as quickly and clearly as possible.

One of the main reasons for shadow IT is impatience – when requests for new tools and technologies get lost in long-winded processes of corporate bureaucracy, employees often take matters into their own hands.

So be on the ball, and prioritise being responsive if you want to minimise the risk of this happening.

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ANY OF THE TOPICS COVERED IN THIS EGUIDE?

Contact someone from Altlaw today for further support and guidance. We're always happy to help.

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