

How can online legal research save you time? Young lawyers share their insights

Issued by [LexisNexis](#)

5 Oct 2016

Legal careers are time sensitive and highly pressurised and that means there is little margin for error. As demands heighten, a new breed of legal professionals have come to recognise and appreciate the efficiency, simplicity and accuracy of online legal research.

“While 30% of attorneys report that they use a combination of all research formats, a sizeable 54% said they prefer online research, according to new data from a study conducted in partnership with the Law Society of South Africa,” says Thabo Molefe, Commercial Director at LexisNexis South Africa.

“In addition to online, mobility is a growing trend, especially for the new breed of legal professionals, and devices such as tablets and smartphones are now a crucial aspect of the modern practitioner’s toolset,” added Molefe.

LexisNexis’ recent [vox pops](#) with young attorneys from leading South African law firms showed that the key features demanded of legal research solutions are speed, time-saving, ease, confidence, quality and relevance. “They want to be able to access accurate and up-to-date legal material at their fingertips quickly and efficiently,” said Molefe.

Spencer Cason of Cox Yeats and Romane Kelly Paul of Bowmans said online research allowed them to save time and to complete more tasks, while Megan Osborn of Norton Rose Fulbright said it provided a very good start for developing an argument. Partner at Shepstone & Wylie, Zama Mgwedli, agreed: “You have a source that you can go to and everything is there as long as you know how to find it. It makes life much easier.”

Ugendran Odayar of Norton Rose Fulbright shared his experiences: “There are often situations where your directors, your principals and even clients want quick answers to questions and you don’t necessarily have the ability to go into a library and sit for hours with the books.” His colleague, Danielle Ebrahim, concurred: “Your director is coming to you not for a dissertation. He wants a quick and concise answer.”

Quick access and the depth and breadth of online research were seen as key assets. Nicola Nel of Bowmans related humorously that sometimes one had no idea where in the firm their text book was at any given point. “With online search functions you’re able to look at such a broad range of case law and even international law,” said Cox Yeats attorney, Cherese Thakur, while Cason supported this, saying one could just punch in a few keys, hit the enter button to search and find everything they need in front of them.

Today, leading South African firms are investing more aggressively in technology that enables remote working and mobile research. “Online research has tremendous value especially among professionals and firms who might not have the time and resources to sift through reams of information all the time in order to stay up to date with the latest legal developments and opinions,” said Molefe.

But beware unverified, freely available sources. “Some of us find out the hard way that Google is not actually a vetted source so the information that you’re getting off there can’t be trusted,” said Tsele Moloi of Cox Yeats.

A solution such as LexisLibrary provides professionals, corporates and government with all-in-one access to legislation, commentary, case law and more.

To view the video interviews of these young lawyers sharing their experiences, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxZax5N8W_E.

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