

Attorneys continue to embrace technology - LSSA survey

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An increased appetite for online services, smarter use of technology, and the entrenchment of digital research, are just some of the continuing shifts among the attorneys' profession in South Africa. This is according to a new survey of close to 750 South African attorney firms, conducted by LexisNexis South Africa content and technology solutions provider in partnership with Law Society of South Africa.

Drawing comparisons against a 2014 survey, the 2016 study analysed the evolution of South African law firms as they responded to the challenges facing the profession. Respondents were primarily from firms characterised as 'small law' firms.

The survey once again revealed that smarter use of technology is seen as a key catalyst for growth by the overwhelming majority of these firms, with networking second and marketing a close third.

South African attorneys had an increased appetite for online services in the last two years, with 19% more firms indicating this is a high priority in 2016. A key area to watch was social media use, with 15% more law firms identifying this as very important to business growth compared to the 2014 survey.

Advances in technology appear to have made researching the law more efficient and less time consuming. In 2014 attorneys surveyed said they spent 63% of their legal research time using digital and 37% using print, while this year there was a more even split with 51% of time spent on digital research and 49% on print.

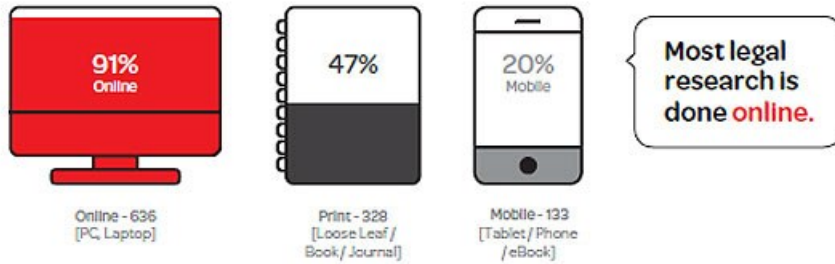
Online legal research was overwhelmingly the most widely used method among attorneys, at 91%, nearly double the proportion of those who used print research in formats such as loose leafs, books or journals, at 47%.

While 30% of the attorneys reported that they preferred to use a combination of all research formats, a sizeable 54% said they prefer online research.



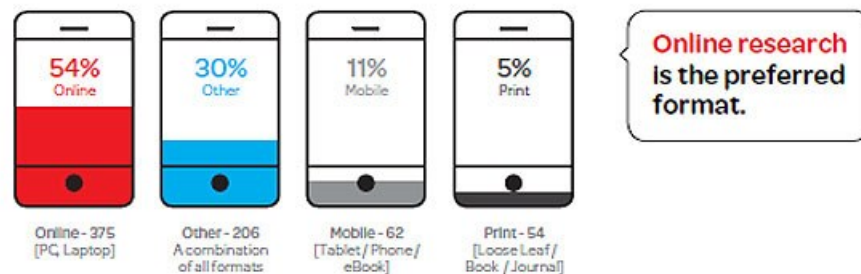
Research formats

Which formats do you currently use for legal research information?



Format preference

If the same information was available in all 3 formats, which one would you choose? [Select one]



“As a profession driven by billable hours and ‘always urgent’ tasks, attorneys must constantly juggle time pressures, therefore there is a high demand for customised tools to help them manage increasing volumes of information in the workplace,” said Thabo Molefe, Commercial Director at LexisNexis South Africa.

“Not being able to access the right information at the right time wastes time and impedes productivity, and when research takes up too much time attorneys cannot always bill for it,” he added.

“Digital and online solutions can help filter information intelligently, thereby saving attorneys time, which is increasingly important in a tough environment where companies need to cut down on research costs, yet still be more productive in their research efforts,” said Molefe.

While free online resources such as Internet search engines are used widely among attorneys to gain context as a starting point ahead of deeper legal research, Molefe said caution should be practiced as these sources were not always vetted through expert input.

Case law is the most critical legal information required for court. 76% of respondents said they needed access to case law in court, while 60% said legislation and 41% commentaries.

More than half (54%) of attorneys preferred to access legal information in court via mobile devices such as cellphones and tablets, or else online, with the remainder preferring print formats for court.

Respondents reported that the most legal research is conducted by equity partners (37%) or professional assistants (21%).

In 2014 87% of attorneys and/or firms surveyed had increased their investments into technology and processes or were planning to do so within one to two years. By 2016 most had already done this, as there were 37% less firms reporting a

recent ramp up in such investments. However, 30% of this sample indicated that it is planned in the near future.

“Technology and the online world have become central forces in almost every industry, and the legal fraternity has eagerly embraced this proliferation of digital methods of working, alongside online marketing, service provision and the use of social media which are now regarded as a priority for many firms,” said Molefe.

In response to changing professional needs and technology developments in sectors such as small law, LexisNexis develops tools that enable legal and tax practitioners to search, sift and filter through the most up-to-date information quickly, efficiently and more cost effectively on various devices.

The full Law Society of South Africa survey, can be downloaded at <http://www.lexisnexis.co.za/pdf/LexisNexis%20-%20Infographic%20Report2016.pdf>.

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