

INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AT SOUTH AFRICAN LAW FIRMS

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SUMMARY

Global and national law firms alike operate in a challenging business environment and managing the firm's information and knowledge assets is increasingly viewed as a key factor in efficient legal service delivery. In legal practice, information management technologies, for example intranets, portals, workflow management systems, document and content management systems, case and project management systems and online dispute resolution systems are becoming important means of legal service delivery. The reason for applying information management technologies and implementing knowledge management strategies in law firms is not only to satisfy clients' growing need for a trusted online platform to interact with legal service providers, but for law firms to capitalise on their intellectual assets, to continuously modernise legal practice management, to empower lawyers, to increase productivity, to use time efficiently, to transfer skills and knowledge from senior to junior professionals, to improve service delivery and to gain competitive advantage. This article firstly reviews the role of information and knowledge management in providing an effective legal service to clients and compares foreign and South African law firms' information management related contexts, challenges and benefits. Secondly, it presents the findings of a survey conducted at South African law firms based on their knowledge management practices. The aim of the article is to provide insights into law firm knowledge management and its effect on providing legal services in an online business environment.

KEYWORDS: Information management, knowledge management, law firms, legal practice, information technology, legal service delivery

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