

THE PRIVATE CLIENT PANDEMIC: WFH?

The Global Elite, in collaboration with Schillings APRIL 2020

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS:

*Tech Hurdles & Cybersecurity
Client Relationships
Opportunity & Productivity*



Many private client lawyers are finding that working from home isn't a simple transition for the uninitiated. Besides balancing work-life and juggling child care at home, technology challenges, productivity levels and cybersecurity concerns have further complicated the daily workflow and disrupted billing. But is there a silver lining?

1. TECH HURDLES



As private client lawyers learn to work remotely during this unprecedented pandemic, limited network capacity, internet speed slowdowns and other technical issues have started to hinder workflow.

Along with slower speeds, providing additional VPNs and access to collaboration platforms have taken time. Another issue faced by one leader in the private client industry is that they just don't have enough computers available for their workforce of 'enterprise-quality.' There now seems to be an ethical obligation for a basic level of tech competency, and some firms are finding out if they satisfy that requirement or not.

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2. CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

Whilst private client work has always been driven by in person relationships, has the Coronavirus pandemic turned this dynamic on its head? As top firms continue to encourage lawyers to work from home, some now say that the informality of the home working set-up has driven more personal interactions – and trust – between lawyers and their clients.

Face-to-face contact has always come with the condition of formality, which sometimes draws a barrier between lawyer and client. In 2020, relationships are now being digitally developed in the informal confines of the home – much like you're welcoming the client into your home.

Additionally, “there is a lot of panic in the media and out there in general, so I think that feeds into your interactions with clients,” says a senior associate based in the London office of a U.S. firm. “Everyone is trying to make tough calls and make sure that the client’s interests are being protected. There’s that sense of being in the trenches together, and it brings people closer.”

But it isn't just clients who might benefit from a more relaxed culture among lawyers. Managers, including senior partners, are now required to check in with their teams more to ensure they have the resources to work from home. This may lead to deeper and more pervasive remote-working freedoms for private client lawyers when the coronavirus outbreak subsides, as firms recognise the effectiveness of their IT systems.

3. OPPORTUNITY AHEAD

“Every crisis reveals an opportunity to do things better in future”, states Amy Pope – Partner at Schillings and former Deputy Homeland Security Advisor to President Obama.

While these are undoubtedly challenging times, it's also the time to get your house in order and think ahead for your clients too.

Amy advises creating a crisis management team, with clear roles and responsibilities for all involved.

“It's something every company needs in situations like this. You need to know who in your organisation is looking at risks, who's looking at what employees need, who's thinking about clients and who's thinking about the opportunities”.

As well as an opportunity to bring your firm together around a common cause in the short term, she also recommends horizon scanning – both for your business and your clients. *“You need to be thinking ahead – what will the opportunities be 6 months down the line, and what can you do now to prepare for that”.*

Think about your clients' needs and anticipate them now. Everyone needs a little extra support at the moment.

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4. PROVEN PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS

Flexible working in the private client advisory world has been quietly on the rise, but the inertia on this trend has been how private client lawyers are wired to think about work, defaulting to being 'on site' as the norm. What are the best tips from private client lawyers when there is no central office to go to?

WORKSPACE IS KEY

Try to find a dedicated desk and ensure you have your ergonomics set up well and have a window view. The science supports it, views are good for our brains – especially if you can see into the distance.

OVER-COMMUNICATE

Manage the disorientation of losing the office environment with regular check-ins with colleagues. This will not only help build structure into the day but also provide important human interaction... which leads to the next tip.

HANGOUT

Use a video-conference platform suggested by your firm. We communicate so much via body language and it adds much more when you can see your team.



USE MEALTIMES

Mealtimes help to add structure to your day and stops you from getting lost in a merged home and work life.

CLAIM BACK TIME

Even those of us that live relatively close to work can spend an hour or more a day commuting. Use this extra time to do some exercise, decrease stress levels and improve productivity.

GET DISCIPLINED

Schedule in specific times for checking news to help you from constantly checking and disrupting your flow.

TRY PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS

To help you focus, you can consider workflow managers, like Trello, timing techniques like Pomodoro, or work methodologies like "Getting Things Done".

5. CYBERSECURITY

Hackers love exploiting weaknesses and they know the entire world is distracted. They know that when people are under stress, security can be overlooked.

"Hackers and scammers are no less active under the global lockdown than they were a few months ago", comments Peter Yapp, a partner at crisis firm Schillings, and a former Deputy Director of the UK's National Cyber Security Centre.

"With swathes of the workforce switching to full time remote working, some of whom having never experienced it before, it's important to be vigilant with your online security. Indeed, with computer protection in the home being traditionally weaker than in the workplace, it's more important than ever to keep employees on board with cyber security measures".

The virus outbreak has exposed chinks in the armour of the confident legal profession where vulnerabilities exist. Peter advises it's vital that workers at home use only approved platforms and use two step security authentication on devices – particularly if using person ones for work. Doing this and ensuring all operating system are up to date seem like simple steps – but can make the difference between safety and a massive data breach.

How can a remote workforce still protect UHNW client information to the same degree? What are private client law firms doing to address data security risks as they balance making data available for remote access?

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In the absence of peers and co-workers, firms are being more creative about how they remind employees to think carefully about cybersecurity threats. Over at Day Pitney, for example, CIO Kermit Wallace said the only "technical" security change the firm has made in response to the Coronavirus is to update the colour of the external email notification banner found at the bottom of communications originating from someone outside the practice. The brighter hue is intended to serve as a reminder of the potential danger lurking just around the corner of every unfamiliar email.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD YOU BE DOING TO STAY SECURE?

Revisit- your business continuity plan. Can you secure a remote workforce to the same level as within the confines of your firewall?

Keep everyone up to date – and minimise risk by updating everyone weekly on Coronavirus-related scams, phishing schemes and fraudulent websites.

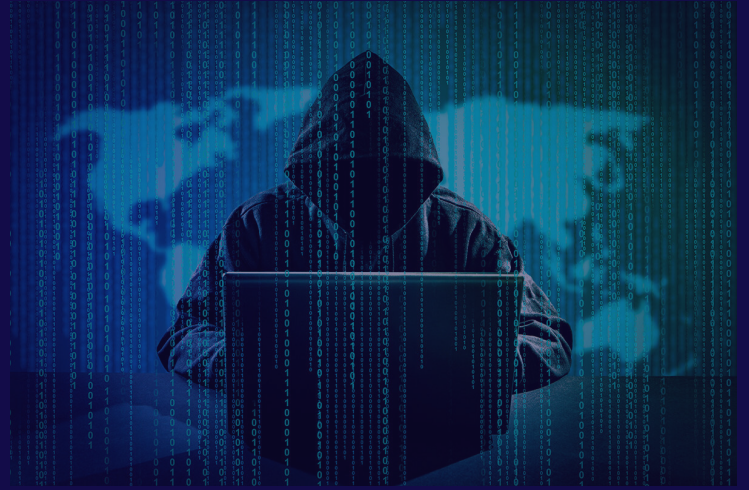
Stay protected – and prohibit working from public places, using trusted, password-protected internet connections.

Use a VPN – to encrypt your data.

Protect remote software - Most firms are well protected within the confines of their office spaces, but make sure your mobile endpoints, like laptops and smartphones, are protected outside the firewall.

Manage BYOD - if you allow personal devices, consider limiting access to critical systems from these devices and enforce security controls on the devices themselves.

Run a tabletop simulation- get managing partners to understand challenges by facing the worst-case scenario in a safe environment, and build an appropriate response.



CONCLUSION

As private client lawyers adjust to the new reality of 2020 life, it is important to expect some hiccups. You will not instantly be a “working-from-home warrior,” but you might take solace in developing new, or tricky, relationships with clients from the comfort of your homes.

We hope that these tips from will help you adjust to your new working situation. Who knows, perhaps private client lawyers can find some hope that this experience might give them longer-term freedom in how they choose to work and interact.

Like all disasters and major global events, Coronavirus will pass. Let us use this event as a call to arms and ensure we are prepared for a world of distributed and productive workforces, always-connected systems and critical assets stored outside the confines of traditional security walls.