

10 Ways to Boost Your Legal Expertise for Optimal Client Service

Work smarter. Understand everything.
Miss nothing.



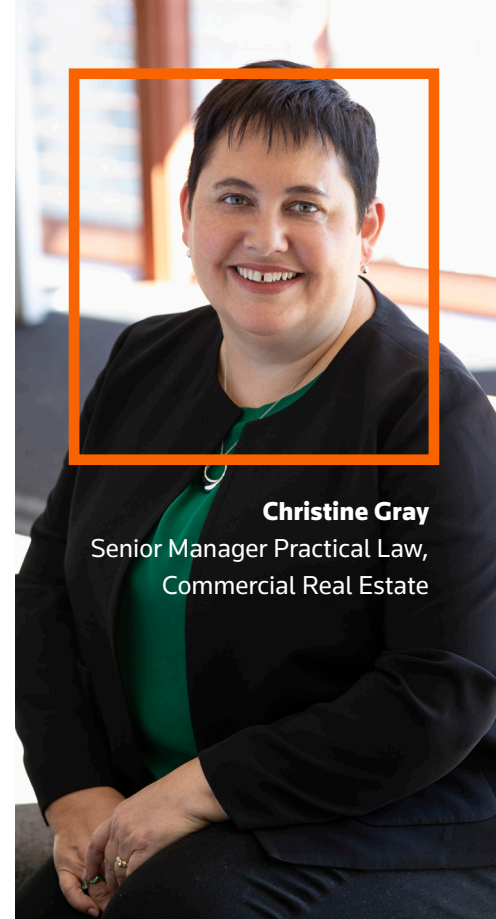
Tim Perry
Director, Practical Law,
Asia and Emerging Markets

10 Ways to Boost Your Legal Expertise for Optimal Client Service

Optimising client service delivery is essential for law firms looking to expand their share of their clients' legal spend. One way to approach this is to boost the legal expertise of lawyers at the firm.

Thomson Reuters' legal knowledge solutions are powered by dozens of experts who compile practical resources for lawyers at firms and legal departments.

The following guide unpacks the insights from a panel discussion held between three Thomson Reuters experts and a law firm customer, addressing how lawyers can serve clients with deeper legal knowledge.



Christine Gray

Senior Manager Practical Law,
Commercial Real Estate

1 Improve client responsiveness with deeper insights

Accessibility and responsiveness are pillars of law firm client service, says Tim Perry, Director, Practical Law at Thomson Reuters.

"As lawyers, we're in the service business and responsiveness is intrinsically woven into our DNA," he adds.

While being there for urgent client calls is expected, as a law firm adviser, you need to get the balance right to avoid burnout. It's important to set boundaries to ensure your accessibility is not taken too far and at the cost of your wellbeing, as evidenced in Thomson Reuters's 2021 Stellar Report. The responsiveness piece taps into your deep expertise required as a lawyer. This requires you to have quick access to the most current law and know-how, so that you can give a meaningful initial response to a client query.



“There’s no point being contactable if you can’t find the answers your clients need quickly,” explains Tim.

Another tip, Michael Solari, Director of Sydney boutique law firm, Solari & Stock provides, is to have good document and matter management systems in place, so that when a client rings to ask about matters, you can access their file and respond while you're speaking to them.

Extending your legal expertise into other practice areas

"It's critical to demonstrate your commercial acuity by developing a holistic view of your clients' needs and those of their business," explains Tim.

Tim advises lawyers to cultivate deep knowledge and expertise in their own area of specialisation, while knowing how to expand their offering. "You need to drill down into that deep expertise, but you also need to develop that breadth, that T-shape. Even if you ultimately involve an expert colleague to provide specific advice, being able to identify and provide an initial view on a legal issue, informed by your knowledge of your client's business and risk profile, is crucial."

Drawing on her time in private practice, Michelle Tat, a Senior Writer at Practical Law notes the value in expanding legal expertise. "Stepping out of your comfort zone for clients can have a plus side," she says.



“By rising to the challenge of extending our expertise for our clients, it really enabled us to build strong and lasting relationships with them.”



Lara Weeks

Analytical and Research Content
Manager Australia, New Westlaw



James Jarvis
Vice President, Legal Solutions,
Thomson Reuters Asia & Emerging Markets

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Shift the burden from the user to the technology

Channelling his experience in designing new Westlaw at Thomson Reuters, James Jarvis, Vice President, Legal Solutions highlights the following:



“Through shifting the burden to technology, lawyers can be empowered to work smarter and funnel the time saved into growing client relationships.”

“Doing this will save your firm time hunting through the haystack of information. If you can reduce your research process to a single application, so you can just ‘walk up and use it’, you’re effectively enabling the tech to simplify your workflow. You will save time finding information, so there will simply be more time to spend on advising your client.”

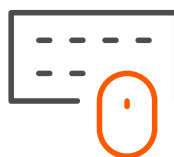
“This naturally leads to improving the quality of the work you’re doing for clients.”

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Gather the right legal research materials for clients seamlessly

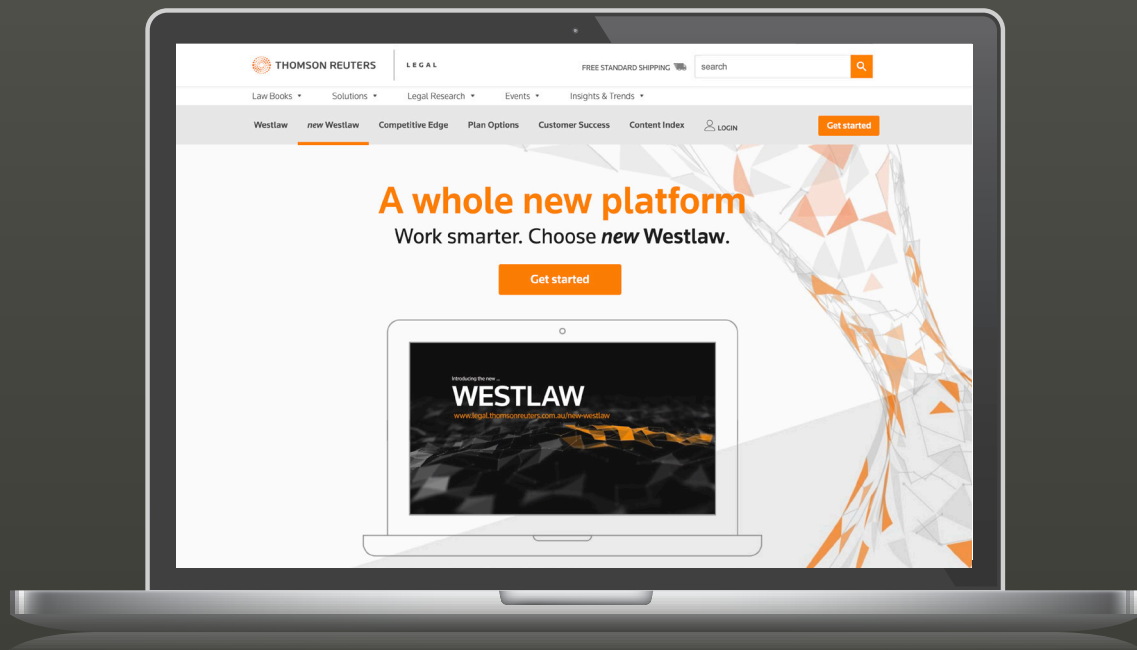
Michael knew that the missing piece in his firm’s client delivery was a reliable online research platform offering trusted content. He adopted a legal research platform last year for the “one-stop shop” research experience that he needed.

When Michael test-drove his new software (new Westlaw), he couldn’t believe how much time it saved him, and now that he’s adopted it, the time it saves his lawyers so they can provide the best service for clients.



“One of the things that really impressed me about it was when you were typing in the question, it would anticipate what you were about to ask. It’s intuitive and you can easily access the information you need, with all resources in one place.”

Knowing your research is comprehensive and up-to-date is a gamechanger for our firm.”



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Know when your legal research is complete

Conducting thorough legal research is a challenge to manage through free desktop research alone. Particularly for lawyers who rely on traditional search engines or physical libraries to collect their research, it's difficult to determine when the search is complete.

For Michael, the benefit of a comprehensive and accurate research tool is simple. "I'm confident that when I've assigned a research task to any lawyer, I know that they've reached all the relevant information available to them at their fingertips (with new Westlaw).



“ When they present the results of their research to me, I’m confident that I have a complete analysis of the issues they were asked to research for us. ”



Did you know?

Practical Law and new Westlaw are maintained by approximately 40 legal experts in Australia and New Zealand. Together they create and curate high-quality legal guidance, research and know-how for thousands of end-users employed at law firms and legal departments in the region.

Cultivate your own client service style

In its recent annual survey, the Thomson Reuters Market Insights team examined the qualities that drove more than 6,000 senior legal counsel to rate their law firm advisers more highly, with a third of these based in the Asia-Pacific. The data revealed subtle shifts in what clients are focused on when they're evaluating which law firms to choose.

Innovation was one of seven drawcards that influenced their purchasing behaviour, with innovative law firms experiencing a spike in their GC preferential rating of 32%.



Lalitha Vyamajala
Senior Content Manager,
New Westlaw

Among other qualities it identified are for your firm to possess brand affinity, offer clients stand-out lawyers and enable continuous client feedback and collaboration with them.

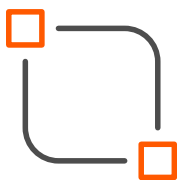
"While still prioritising expertise, there's a greater emphasis on style and service," reveals James. "In fact, the three qualities are heavily related and intertwined.

"What we've learned is that clients want to be confident that the firm can deliver the work, from wherever they're working. In terms of style, outside counsel are considering whether their law firm clients have adapted to the new COVID-19 environment and possess the tools and resources to do the work."

James observes that with the move to online meetings, and every lawyer in their office now an image on their client's screen, their focus is much more on the style of the firm.

Casting your style shadow through technology, says James, is all about ensuring lawyers have the right tools. With technology solutions such as Practical Law and new Westlaw, you're retrieving data faster and, therefore, improving client responsiveness.

As Tim adds, expertise is still the top priority for law firms, but not at the expense of responsiveness.



“If you don't adopt solutions that will help you to do both of those things – demonstrate deep subject matter expertise and demonstrate responsiveness to client needs – then, inevitably, there'll be a time war between the two. You will have to give ground on the expertise side or the service and style side, and you won't be able to compete effectively with firms that use technology to enable them to do both. ”



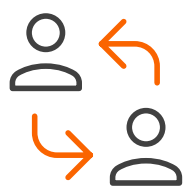
Alex Chernishev
Head of Banking &
Finance, Practical
Law Australia

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Collaborate to improve your client service

How well must lawyers in law firms collaborate, both internally and with their clients? For Michael's firm, it's a major consideration.

"We have nine lawyers, all with different levels of expertise, so it's important they can collaborate internally with each other, to work through issues and to build their levels of expertise, so that they can provide the best advice to our clients.



“ It’s also a priority for them to collaborate with clients, so that they can understand how to service their needs. ”

Solari & Stock recently introduced a client survey to capture expectations at the commencement of a matter.

“ This gives us an insight as to how we would manage and collaborate with the client from the start and during the course of the transaction. ”

Differentiate your offering

Number two on the Thomson Reuters Market Insight's list of law firm favourability drivers after an innovative approach is the notion of brand affinity. Although this attribute is a little tricky to measure, says Michael, a corporate client's sense of connection to the brand of a law firm will impact how highly they rate you as their legal adviser.

Identifying how his firm stands out from the competition, Michael goes straight to the fundamentals of taking a personable client approach, which means being reliable, meeting deadlines and building respect from long-term clients.



“They feel comfortable dealing with us, they know that they’re going to get a good job done. And they’ll keep coming back,” says Michael.

Solari & Stock have also distinguished their firm from competitors through the launch of a client portal.

“Our clients can log in and see everything in their electronic files. They’ll be able to access all the documents that we can see on our screen, making them feel more a part of their matters.”

Tim sums up Michael's approach to brand.

“How you deal with your clients really creates a brand that says, ‘We’re your partners in your business and your growth. We’re here for you, this isn’t just a transactional relationship.’”



Tim Pollard
Senior Manager,
Primary Law

Ask for genuine client feedback and be responsive in return

As clients become more involved in their matters, they want their voices to be heard. For the relationship with their law firm to grow, they require a candid right of reply.

The reward for meeting this need is aptly demonstrated by the Thomson Reuters Market Insights survey results. Those in-house lawyers whose firms engaged them in formal feedback in the last 12 months had higher satisfaction rates than those who didn't. The moral of the story is to ask clients what they want and how the relationship is going. They want to help you do better.

Reflecting on how things have changed in the 20 years since he practised as a lawyer, James says that it used to be that lawyers would provide you with formal mechanisms to collaborate with you, such as a letter outlining what they're going to do for you in a particular situation.

"Well, people don't think like that now. They're looking for a lot more." Referring to his own experience in iterating new Westlaw, he said "if we hear about a problem from a customer, they need us to reply quickly, otherwise the pain point may build."

Lawyers who approach legal service delivery with trust-building in mind will experience growing client relationships that may lead to more matters, he explains.



“You need to offer mechanisms for seeking continuous, but informal feedback. A question that I try to ask is, ‘Are we aligned?’ It takes five seconds to ask the question, and only 30 seconds to ensure that we’re on the same page.”

"Being more empathetic is also important to ensure optimal service delivery. For example, in our Practical Law and new Westlaw tools we can share annotations and folders. That's a level of personalisation, or rather a piece of feedback that shows you care about your client.

"The little things add up and they also create that sense of confidence in your client, so they think that 'this lawyer is using modern tools that save me time, I value that'. Those things matter."

Carl Olson
Vice President,
Proposition &
Client Relationship
Management

Be a stand-out lawyer

Corporate clients are demanding more from their legal advisers. Not only that they have exceptional technical expertise, but they can also add commercial and strategic value to their businesses. That X Factor that makes you stand out and above your competitors.

"It's about more than just being their lawyer. It's also about being the trusted adviser," explains Tim. To reach that status, you've got to invest the time to get to know your client, their business and the industry in which they operate. There's a large piece of non-legal expertise that you need to develop.

To do it properly you need to equip yourself with several sources of information and ensure you're accessing legal information in an efficient and effective way. Lawyers require information that helps them stay across industry trends and know what's happening in the market.



“Carve out time to get together with your clients and learn from them. Keep them front of mind, stay engaged, all the while building trust to cement a long-term relationship.”



Cassandra Siciliano
Senior Content Manager,
New Westlaw



Ready to boost your legal expertise for optimal client service delivery? Speak with a **Thomson Reuters specialist** to explore your legal research technology options today.

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