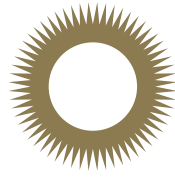


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UAE MANAGING PARTNER REPORT

LAW FIRMS TURN TO TECHNOLOGY TO
FACE THE POST COVID-19 LANDSCAPE

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CHRIS WILLIAMS, MANAGING PARTNER, BRACEWELL LLP

Chris Williams serves as the Managing Partner of Bracewell's Dubai office and has practised in Dubai for the past 12 years. His practice focuses on corporate and commercial work throughout the Middle East and he has particular experience advising on mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, complex commercial contracts and corporate advisory work. Chris has further experience advising on labour and employment matters (contentious and non-contentious), and managing litigation disputes in the UAE.

WHAT MEASURES HAS YOUR FIRM TAKEN TO ADAPT TO COVID-19?

Protecting the health and safety of employees while continuing to provide a seamless service to our clients have been our priorities throughout the pandemic. We were fortunate to be in a position to make a quick transition to a remote work environment. We run off a cloud-based document management and remote working platform that has withstood the test of COVID-19 and proven itself to be a reliable work from home tool. We experienced no interruptions in our ability to provide excellent client service and delivery.

of notes offerings, bond issuances and the like in the States. Once there's greater certainty in the market, funds (whether it's private equity or otherwise), will looking for ways to deploy capital.

HOW DO YOU ENVISAGE THE 'NEW NORMAL' FOR THE UAE LEGAL SECTOR?

We've recently seen encouraging signs, particularly in Dubai, in terms of the fact that the very stringent lockdown is at an end. People are returning to work, albeit in limited numbers, and businesses are operating on a limited scale. Getting businesses that were previously mothballed up and running again will be an important next step to getting the economy back to work.

“COMMODITISED, PRECEDENT DRIVEN TRANSACTION WORK IS IN TURN BOUND TO SHIFT TOWARDS AUTOMATION AND LOW MARGIN AND HIGH VOLUME BUSINESS.”

WHAT REGULATORY INITIATIVE WOULD YOU MOST WELCOME TO SUPPORT THE RECOVERY AND GROWTH OF UAE BUSINESSES AND/OR THE LEGAL SECTOR GENERALLY?

There have been some useful ministerial resolutions (and the like) that have been passed in the UAE, which have allowed businesses to better manage their workforces. Economic stimulants whether direct or indirect will be important particularly within the SME sector which plays an increasingly important role in the UAE's economy. Getting money flowing will be crucial.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR YOUR CLIENTS OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS?

The biggest challenge at the moment is planning. Nobody can predict when the pandemic will end. Obviously, the longer it goes on, there's a greater risk of economic harm. The good news is that while market conditions have been challenging, money is still available. We have seen this in terms

WHAT IS NEW WITH YOUR FIRM?

A renewed drive to succeed in increasingly unpredictable times. Our determination to bring world-class legal services to our clients is by no means new. Our continued commitment to hiring only the best lawyers to focus on sophisticated and complex client transactions – coupled with



the drive to entrench client relationships through legal service excellence – is the ultimate path out of our current situation and into new frontiers.

WHAT GIVES YOUR FIRM THE EDGE IN A COMPETITIVE MARKET?

Great client relationships and deep bench strength in focused legal sectors. We're fortunate to be at the forefront of regional developments in the energy sector – including energy storage projects in emerging markets and groundbreaking renewables projects – as well as general corporate commercial matters for companies in the automotive, defence, manufacturing, retail, hospitality and professional services sectors. We are able to advise clients on the most sophisticated transactions – off the beaten track – requiring blue sky thinking and innovative legal solutions.

WHAT ARE YOUR FIRM'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS?

Strengthening existing client relationships and focusing on profitability. With the introduction of automation and AI technology within a myriad of traditional junior lawyer roles, law firms will need to

focus on pursuing legally complex mandates that require human intervention and lawyer analysis. Commoditised, precedent driven transaction work is in turn bound to shift towards automation and low margin and high volume business.

WHAT DOES INNOVATION MEAN TO YOU, AND WHAT ARE THE KEY FACTORS CHANGING THE WAY LEGAL SERVICES ARE PROVIDED?

While law firms have been talking about mobility and remote working for years, never has the required infrastructure and approach to mobility and remote working been tested to such an extent. The business of law has always been a people and relationship driven business. As much as that fact will not change for the foreseeable future, it is a given that the manner in which such relationships are developed and maintained will change dramatically. Physical meetings will no doubt become less important as lawyers and clients alike have grown accustomed to video meetings and negotiations, using remote work stations and infrastructure. Law firms will have to innovate to keep pace with the fast changing client preferences in this regard. ■



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