



**Manchester Law Society**

Instituted 1838 Incorporated 1871

**A best practice guide for the members of the Manchester Law Society to assist in navigating COVID-19.**



**Practical advice, insights, and guidance from the partners of  
MLS Advantage**



**MANCHESTER  
LAW SOCIETY**

## AN INTRODUCTION FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Once upon a time we were all living happily ever after, except...

... at that time, we did not always appreciate it!



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So, here we are! Our world's in turmoil, the health of our loved ones and many around is a real worry, and as to our businesses ....?

COVID-19 is having a major effect on all of our lives. Your Officers, Council, and I are thinking of you all and as friends and colleagues our thoughts are with you, your families, your teams and your staff.

We know that you have all been focusing on minimising the disruption to your firms and clients, whilst at the same time ensuring that you are looking after your people and keeping them safe.

One of the silver linings has been to see how firms are willing to stand together, join forces and support each other. We know that we can all work and pull together, showing resourcefulness and care for everyone in this time of crisis.

COVID-19 has disrupted the lives, businesses and economy of Greater Manchester and we can't be sure of what is to come.

What we are sure of, however, is how important it is, at a time like this, that we help and support each other.

To this end, our MLS Advantage partners would like to offer their help and support to you all.

We have an excellent range of suppliers, the majority of whom are long term partners, and all have a deep and thorough understanding, and experience, of supporting the legal sector.

We hope that the advice in this document will help and support you through this challenging time.

I hope that when we are all **"out the other side"** we are able to emerge as safely as we can, and in the best possible shape. It's not going to be **"business as normal"** but can MLS Advantage help you make it **"business better than normal?"**

We will remember, once again, when the Manchester legal community became stronger by working together. We have all come through troubled times before, and united, we will come through again.

***Stay safe, and keep in touch,***

***Fran Eccles-Bech, Chief Executive***

**FranEccles-Bech@manchesterlawsociety.org.uk**



**WHAT IS MLS ADVANTGE? A group of carefully selected partners who have all had due diligence undertaken to ensure we are only working with the most professional, innovative and knowledgeable of companies.**



Working with our partners will ensure that our members have improved efficiency and value, and most importantly reduce cost, helping your practice develop and succeed.

MLS Advantage partners are able to identify and advise on core issues that may be facing your business, and using their experience, expertise and market knowledge they will help you with the right solutions.

We know that our members recognise and appreciate the value that technology, outsourcing and business services can deliver to the client experience, as well as business processes and operating efficiency.

**Our MLS Advantage partners are able to offer you support in:**

- Regulatory and compliance advice and assistance
- Outsourced typing and transcription
- Outsourced switchboard facility
- Top level cyber security consultancy
- Dedicated cloud computing for law firms
- Telecoms, connectivity and mobiles
- On-line search portal
- Marketing and websites
- Office equipment
- ATE insurance
- Legal costs funding
- Employee engagement
- Third party managed accounts

Here is a quick snapshot of their top tips, and then we shall dig a little deeper into how they can help you, and how they have already helped many of our members, especially during these troubling times:

MLS ADVANTAGE MEMBERS CONTACT DETAILS		
ADVANTAGE MEMBER	Expert area	Their top tip
	Regulatory and compliance advice	Check that your manuals reflect homeworking and document your key decisions.
	Marketing, brand and websites	Over-communicate - improve your SEO - keep clients close and informed.
	Digital dictation, typing and transcription	Download our dictation app to your smartphone - 24/7 typing.
	Office equipment, scanning	Use home based scanners, maintain professionalism
	Cloud IT services and IT service management	Make working from home like being in the office, check security of VC, furlough your software licences
	Cloud and hosted telecommunications; superfast broadband; mobiles devices and video conferencing.	Integrate your mobile phones into existing desk phones and measure employee productivity with management information dashboards.
	Specialist cyber risk management for law firms	Secure your home access; increase cyber vigilance and controls.
	Telephone answering, Live Chat and switchboard services.	Have all your calls answered FREE for 3 months with their Digital Switchboard.
	Insurance ATE and PII.	Review your policies and pandemic cover.
	Property searches	Update your current transactions so you're ready after lockdown.
	Third party managed accounts	Re-assure your clients of the safety of their funds.
	Costs and disbursement funding	Look at funding your paid disbursements and legal costs. Plan ahead on your cash flow.
	Employee engagement and feedback	Keep feedback channels open and senior management visible.

# Our top priority

**The health and wellbeing of those around us is of paramount importance.**

I'm sure you know the Government guidelines off by heart, and I don't need to nag at you to wash your hands, keep your distance and stay safe.

The practical difficulties caused, and in some cases, great distress given, have affected us all, but those guidelines are what we have to respect and endure to attempt to mitigate the impact of this dreadful virus.

There is a hidden danger that lurks and that is of course in maintaining our mental wellbeing.

One of the vital elements behind the successful management of this issue is our mindset.

We have had great change thrust upon us, and most of you will have adapted superbly, but each day we hear about lockdown, isolation and uncertainty. That can affect how we view our new temporary reality and can give rise to great frustration.

Many of our daily routines and habits have been changed, and much of our normal social interaction has been affected.

**A number of useful techniques can help us here:**

- Try some daily meditation – plenty available on-line.
- Keep a sense of humour, even in trying times. Many of us share snippets of video, so take time to do this and lighten the moment.
- Take specific moments out for a coffee break.
- Call a contact or friend who you've not spoken to for a while.
- Establish new home habits.
- Make sure your good sleeping patterns are maintained.
- Use your daily exercise ration.
- Stand up and move every 30 minutes.
- Keep your daily rising times consistent.
- Give yourself a small treat during the day.
- Chocolate and drink are up to you – just be aware.

**If you would like to speak to an expert in this area, we have partnered with Team Mental Health:**

**<https://teamentalhealth.co.uk/>**



# And so, to our tips and tricks:

A number of key themes have emerged from the advice of our MLS Advantage members, and these can be summed up with the 3c's:

## **COMPLIANCE, CARE & COMMUNICATION.**

The current crisis did not creep slowly upon us – it sprang out of the dense, and so we have all needed to react quickly.

This has of course been important in maintaining business continuity, and a sense of embracing the imperfections has been hugely useful.

That can bring its own risks, and the need for a greater awareness of cyber security and compliance may need renewed attention.

In this context we have the wisdom of our Past President, Michelle Garlick of Compli, and the experiences of Mitigo, Nasstar, Matrix 247 and Document Direct.

Compliance may not be the first thing on your mind, but don't make it the last – that's a problem for another day that's not needed.

The SRA have recognised that the strict adherence to their rules and regulations will be giving challenges now, and so Michelle believes there will be some degree of tolerance, but that will be no excuse for any lowering of standards, especially regarding protecting the public.

### **Michelle's key points are:**

1. Make sure your contingency/business continuity plan has been implemented and is adapted where necessary to fit these exceptional circumstances.
2. Have a crisis team who can review and continue to monitor how effective the contingency plans are, what new risks are arising and how these can be mitigated.
3. Document the decisions made and your ongoing monitoring.
4. Regularly check the SRA's and Law Society's updates of common queries/FAQs.  
<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/support-services/advice/articles/coronavirus-advice-and-updates/>
5. Look after your clients and staff. Communications with them will be key.
6. Ensure you have explored all options with regard to financial/banking support to ensure your financial stability but do not forget your regulatory/directors' and officers' obligations should your financial stability be at serious risk.
7. Seek specialist advice where necessary.

The logo for Compli, featuring the word "Compli" in a bold, orange, sans-serif font.

The SRA Professional Ethics Helpline is currently closed. Compli are offering their own Helpline free for all MLS Members during the lockdown.

**Contact them – [compli@weightmans.com](mailto:compli@weightmans.com) or call 0345 070 1047.**

**Mitigo** have highlighted the importance of keeping personal and business activity as separate as possible on the PC's and laptops you will be using. Personal applications tend not to have the same level of security attached to them, and cybercriminals have identified this as a vulnerability.



Be very aware of phishing attacks – these are essentially emails that are not what they appear and be extra-vigilant on responding to a stranger and opening attachments that you are unsure of.

One useful tip is for staff to refresh their cyber-training, and a simulated attack in their personal environment will highlight the risk.

Ensure that applications, operating system, and anti-virus are up to date on home devices. Don't forget about back-ups – they not be as automatic as you are used to, and there is little like the frustration of losing hours of work.

Also review encryption software, passwords, and the allowing of remote access to other systems.

 **nasstar**™ Nasstar, a GCI Group company, as the masters of cloud-based working, are ideally placed to advise on accessing your existing systems from anywhere in a secure manner. If you have already embraced a cloud-based environment, the transition should be smoother. If you are still very much “on-premise”, technologies such as Nasstar’s “VDI in a box” will be a very helpful resource which deploys a Citrix virtual desktop giving you the same user experience you would normally get in the office from anywhere.

Nasstar highlight the immense benefit that video conference is now giving us but recommends that you consider the security of the various platforms, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. It's very important that you don't have uninvited guests joining or listening in to confidential meetings. They point out that Microsoft are currently offering free licences for Teams and Office 365, and Nasstar can help you with deployment, set up and management needs.

They also have brought an innovative take on furloughing for their clients through their IT Services Furlough Scheme. With IT Service Furlough Nasstar protects your businesses data, ensures email is managed, provides compliance evidence and greatly reduces your software license costs for furloughed staff. For some of their clients they have been able to reduce the monthly cost of software licences for furloughed staff from £30 to just £1.

**In that regard, Document Direct** have highlighted that their leading typing and transcription service remains a pure pay-as-you-use service. This is even more important as some of your fixed costs may remain but the volumes of activity falls.



Their business has probably been the one that has had least operational disruption. They were established as a secure home-based provision, and as such they can help anyone with aspects of this from a perspective of 15 years' experience.

One important element they would highlight is to keep engaged with all staff even more than you would normally do – even if it's a 10-minute zoom coffee.



They are also able to help in overcoming the hurdles of integrating or accessing on-premises dictation systems, by offering their dedicated and secure smartphone dictation app to our members. You can be set up to send your dictation to their UK based team of experienced legal secretaries within minutes.

They also have a specialist document production team who are able to receive your hand-written notes, PDF's and other documents, and amends, and convert them to your exact typed requirements.

They can even transcribe your Zoom or video conferences, easily and quickly.

**Our other renowned outsourcer of vital office functions is of course Moneypenny.**



They are trusted by some of the country's most respected firms to answer their calls and website live chats, as well as offering an impressive switchboard facility.

As the current crisis unfolded, MoneyPenny moved quickly to ensure that all their 700+ receptionists were set up and able to work from home.

They are now offering their impressive Digital Switchboard product completely free to Manchester Law Society members. The switchboard service has been developed with Google and Amazon and uses the latest speech recognition to answer every call a firm receives and channel it immediately to the right person – a great way to cut costs and maintain service to clients.

And of course, MoneyPenny's award-winning receptionists are still available to answer your calls and live chats in person whenever you need them – up to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In these uncertain times live chat in particular has come into its own with MoneyPenny reporting a big increase in clients choosing to enquire via legal firms' websites. A website without live chat is like a shop without an assistant, so if you are still working without it your firm is almost certainly missing enquiries.

**When it comes to the physical and software focus for your phone systems Matrix247** have been able to help law firms implement extremely quick integration of their home-office to their smartphones.



They are offering free support of their "Intelligent Call Routing" service which enables inbound calls to be re-routed from your office number directly to your support team or specific fee-earners. This will help ensure a smooth client experience and can be made even smarter by having your office number being displayed when your staff make an outgoing call.

Matrix247 also highlight the need for extra vigilance with smartphones during this period when they are likely to be used much more. Their Mobile Device Management (MDM) software will help manage apps on the smartphone and will help ringfence business sensitive information ( in the case of damage or loss), and very effectively manage remotely all elements of the smartphone which previously may have been managed on-premise by your IT team.

This can be a key element in keeping personal and business information separate too.

**We can leave it to our marketing expert David Gilroy of Conscious Solutions** to have only one key word for us – communicate. In fact, he has three – **communicate, communicate, communicate.**

**conscious**  
brand, design & marketing for law firms

He recognises that marketing spend is such an easy cost to cull, but would highlight that is a very short-term attitude, and if you need to tailor budgets, there are many lower-cost activities which can be conducted to ensure your firm profile and presence is maintained.

He particularly highlights the great value that SEO can give – especially as the more panicked firms will be cutting spend, and therefore the cost of key SEO terms will be very attractive for the next few months for those who hold their nerve. As others pull their budgets, that effectively gives greater value to those who keep theirs.

His “communicate” mantra could not be shouted more loudly. As he highlights, “If you’re not communicating with your clients, then think about who might be?”

This environment presents everyone with an even starker opportunity to reach out, to help, to offer advice, and to support. He asks you to think – “Are you demonstrating congruence with your brand values?” This applies to all stakeholders in your firm – staff and clients – and everyone will remember how you treated them when the market comes back.

One has to live by their own mantra, of course, and Conscious have created Club Tropiconscious, as a regular Tuesday 5:30 Zoom meeting for all of their contacts to catch up, chat, share, and have that cold beer or cocktail amongst friends.

It’s free admission for MLS members.

<https://lnkd.in/euQhXFC>



**On the theme of communications, quickly comes engagement, and Andrew Roberts of Weekly 10**, our newest MLS ADVANTAGE member, wants you to think about the four phases of remote working.

**Weekly10™**

You will all have had differing degrees of success with the mobilisation phase, and we hope many of these tips will enhance that further, but we now have two important phases of “Bed-In” and “Monitor”.

More than ever he reminds us of the need to establish good working habits and ensuring that your leaders are even more visible. The delegation of responsibility is even more important here, and one needs to resist the urge to micro-manage.

Empathy will become a very important quality as the length of our “isolation” increases. Do not let lack of support and communication occur as this will quickly lead to disengagement, lowered wellbeing, and of course poorer financial performance.

Wellbeing, critical as we highlighted at the start, can be enhanced by the appointment of mental health first aiders and highlighting online resources. Procedures and process may need setting up to

encourage feedback, and Weekly10's smart apps can really help support this. They have a 3-month free offer to MLS members.

The 4<sup>th</sup> phase is of course the "Return" phase, and this is looking more and more like a transitional phase rather than a "big bang" return. You should be capturing all lessons learned during our lockdown and establish which are worth retaining as you aim to improve your firm post COVID-19.

It is clear that remote working will help us much more in the future and will add to staff well-being and greater firm resilience.

Weekly 10's free guide to the 4-phases of remote working is here:

<https://www.weekly10.com/webinar-the-phases-of-remote-working/>



One of the hardest hit sectors has been that of property, especially conveyancing. To help firms in this area **Searchflow** has created their data-backed Continuity Property Solution. Their solution combines historic data with core ancillary

reports (environmental, mining and chancel repair) and will help you be ready for those completions after lockdown ends.

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## FUNDING AND SUPPORT

We will all have heard about the financial support available to many business and individuals, and you should thoroughly research and understand how this phenomenal government support can help you.

**There are many elements to this support, and two are worth highlighting:**

Furloughing – another new word for our lexicon, and one that can aid your payroll costs by up to £2,500 per employee per month. This has just been extended to the end of June.



Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans Scheme – up to £250,00 without the need for any Personal Guarantees, fee-free and interest-free and repayment-free for 12 months.

You should be applying for one if suitable, just for the sheer comfort and cushion it may give you. Don't wait until you need it, as your bank will be overwhelmed.

More detailed information here: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/business-support>

You will all have your favourite accountant, and many have been very proactive with newsletters and information. One excellent central resource can be found here: <https://www.icaew.com/>



Two of our specialist finance related members have some useful tips. Geoff Dunnett of Shieldpay has highlighted the need to be extra diligent in transferring funds when your more established internal controls may not be as visible.

Shieldpay have also waived all subscription fees to the end of June for firms wanting to try using a TPMA solution to onboard clients and take online payments while working from home. They have also made available some useful resources and articles about working from home on their blog [\[https://blog.shieldpay.com/\]](https://blog.shieldpay.com/)



Their Third Party Managed Accounts (TPMA) can offer a safe mechanism for holding client funds.



One great source of internal funding for you could be to use your existing paid disbursement accounts as security and here VFS Legal can help. They are able to

fund your cost and disbursements and help on cases when there has been an admission of liability; and this can release a good element of your working capital at a time when it will be very stretched.



**Palladium** have suggested that a careful review of your 'force majeure' may be needed, and **Docutech** should be able to help you with low-cost scanners for your home use.



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**SOME FINAL TIPS**

*Recall the wisdom of Winnie the Pooh:*

*We are all of us, braver than we believe; stronger than we seem, and smarter than we think.*

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**Final helpful resources:**

What do you do with the unused contents of your drink's cupboard?

Click on these links to find out what your cocktail could be!

<https://makemeacocktail.com/mybar/>



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**We may also need for this for our coffee.**



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