

**Business of Law**

# The Coach: The COVID-19 law firm goes virtual | Gary Mitchell

By **Gary Mitchell**

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(March 14, 2022, 8:49 AM EDT) -- As I wrote in the preface of my latest book, *Growing a Law Practice during Covid-19*: "Just a short while ago the concept of allowing lawyers and support staff to work from home seemed like a pipe dream. It could never work. The sky would fall. Nothing would get done. And then along came Covid-19 and kicked the world and the legal industry in the ass! And the sky didn't fall. And the work got done!"

Basically, COVID-19 forced the legal industry out of the dark ages, into the 21st century, and pretty much, overnight. There was resistance, of course. But as time went on, people adapted, the glitches and challenges were worked out. And, what many people discovered is that their productivity went up, and they were able to create more balance in their lives.

In case you are considering taking your practice or firm virtual, here are some things to consider.

**Expanded client pool**

How large a market do you want to serve? You don't have to be restricted by geographical limitations anymore. You can be licensed in one province or state and work from anywhere. Clients are also used to working with their lawyers virtually. So, it no longer means limiting your business development and marketing to your neighbourhood.

**Expanded talent pool**

While many are still fixated on the challenges of staffing these days, there are amazing opportunities for you to expand your talent pool. You don't have to be limited to your own backyard. You can attract talent from far and wide. And, that talent, by the way, is already used to working virtually. There is no training required on your part. No further investment is to be made.

It opens up more opportunities to hire contract lawyers and staff, meet your clients' needs while being able to hire and retain top-notch talent.

**Lower overhead**

Another obvious benefit to the virtual law firm, is the fact that you no longer need to pay out exorbitant leasing fees for bricks and mortar. While some will retain a physical presence, the size and scope of your needs for space have been drastically reduced.

**Technology and communication**

There really aren't any excuses. With ever-evolving technology, what wasn't possible a few short years ago, is totally possible now. Many of my clients have made this move over the past couple of years, and as recently as the past few months.

**FaceTime?**

While these conditions favour the smaller firms and solo-practice lawyers, even the large firms can learn from this experience. Must you have your lawyers and staff in the office at all times? Is "FaceTime" really that important? Most larger firms I am aware of have adopted a hybrid model, allowing lawyers and staff to work from home part of the time and get to the office as required for meetings.

### **A virtual reality**

I reached out to one of my clients, Steven Benmor, the owner and founder of Benmor Family Law Group in Toronto. I asked him to share his experience in taking his long-standing and highly respected law firm virtual. This is a brief summary of our conversation.

**Q:** What motivated you to take your firm virtual?

**A:** There were two main factors. The first was the lifestyle. COVID-19 created an environment where you couldn't and didn't want to go into the office. Within a few short weeks of the initial lockdown in 2020, our staff, myself included, realized we really enjoyed working from home. And our clients were happy not having to commute as well. The second was economics. It just made sense.

**Q:** What was your greatest challenge in going virtual?

**A:** The biggest challenge, which, wasn't discovered until about a year in, was the social element. Lawyers, like most human beings, require — no, more like thrive — with social interaction. The lack of this element needed to be managed.

**Q:** What has been your greatest win?

**A:** By far it has been a personal impact. Being able to run a full-service, very busy law firm, while continuing to coach, mentor and guide my team from the comfort of my own home. This gave me complete control and freedom.

**Q:** What advice do you have for other lawyers considering the virtual path?

**A:** Take the same approach as you do with maintaining friendships. Reach out, connect whenever possible with colleagues and clients, schedule social time. Just like a long-standing friendship, it requires effort on your part.

**Q:** Final word?

**A:** Looking back on my career and where I thought I wanted to be, there is no question that this route has brought me more fulfilment, more joy, and frankly, a more profitable business. And my staff and clients are more content and happier too. It's been a total win.

### **Living the dream**

Going virtual offers so many options for how, and where you run your law firm. The possibilities are endless. What have you always dreamed about creating for your law firm, or practice, but never thought it was possible?

In 2022, I challenge you to create your very own virtual firm — the COVID-19 law firm, and start living your dream.

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