

MICHAEL BULA

OCEANS LEGAL

Michael Bula Solicitors and International Lawyers (MBS) is not your average legal practice. In fact, it is far from it, with the vast majority of its clients based in far-flung and exotic locations throughout West Africa, Europe and the Pacific. Such is the breadth and diversity of the practice, the firm's principal Michael Bula was forced to think about ways in which he could better manage and coordinate the requests for legal services coming his way. From this, Oceans Legal was born.

"[Oceans Legal] is not a law firm. It is more a portal for international and cross-jurisdictional assignments," says Bula.

"Law firms can be part of Oceans Legal and exchange files and set up cross-jurisdictional projects. Clients with international issues can go through this portal, and I may broker the job, give it to someone in our network, or to other lawyers in Australia."

Essentially, Oceans Legal allows Bula to draw on MBS's exceptional global network of consultants and overseas-based lawyers and notaries – built up over many years of international legal work and assignments – to deliver a seamless service for clients with cross-jurisdictional issues.

"Some firms would contact me with issues in seven jurisdictions all across Africa. They need a resolution to those issues and they ask me to project manage it," says Bula.

"This is where it started. I saw there was a market for it. Certain clients may be hesitant to go directly to a law firm, and they don't know which law firm to go to." Bula sees portals and networks such as Oceans Legal as increasingly important facets of the legal industry, and believes that the increasingly global nature of the legal market needs correspondingly globally connected legal practitioners.

"It is very much the way of the future. Clients these days tend to have long-standing associations with large law firms, but they are finding – and even large law firms are finding – that they can't cover everything," says Bula.

"They can't cover [all] jurisdictions. They can't have agents absolutely everywhere, nor do they have a practitioner that has all the required cross-jurisdictional knowledge. Legal practice is changing."

Claire Chaffey



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