

# Rightful

Australia's first online legal Marketplace

**Are there remote work options within the legal profession? This Barrister's idea could shake up the working environment of the legal profession and provide the key to the door that many diverse groups of people have been waiting for!**



Chris Dobbs

Barrister specialising in Corporations and Commercial law

Co-Founder of Rightful

<https://www.rightful.com.au/>

Chris co-founded the online legal community 'Rightful,' which utilises online technology with the goal of bringing about a new era of legal practice.

Rightful aims to drive legal practice into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by reinventing the legal landscape to operate 100% online as one of Australia's first online virtual working platforms designed for the legal profession.

Rightful boasts a fully integrated platform where legal professionals can collaborate and provide their services from legal advice, to online dispute resolution, throughout the entire case management process.

Chris describes the 'earn out till you burn out' philosophy of the legal profession as incompatible with home life and by utilising available technology, we can work smarter not harder! Remote work environments promote higher productivity, less burn out and fosters an environment that is better for our overall mental health.

An online presence promotes a more client-centric practice that will positively impact the legal realm by providing greater access to justice, particularly in remote locations. Increased productivity speeds up the litigation process and decreases overhead costs for the legal professional, which means a lower cost to the end consumer- the client.

Recent amendments to the Fair Work Act support the right to reasonable flexible working arrangements for the purpose of improving gender equality within the workforce by providing more opportunities for women and job stability for each individual's circumstances. An online based legal marketplace has the ability to pull some diverse groups of people who are currently sitting on the sidelines due to their circumstances, back into the legal workforce. This includes mothers with children in their care, people with a disability who may find work from home options more accessible to their situation, people with carer responsibilities and people in remote locations.

With the ability to work remotely, a sense of equity is achieved by providing the same working opportunities to those who cannot work from an office based location. In turn, we pull more women and diversity in to the legal profession. Increased diversity is then called to the bar, then promoted to the bench. A more diverse bench results in effective promotion of social justice via judicial decision making, driving social change from the top down and setting an inclusive example for other areas of employment to follow.



**Can you tell me a bit about yourself, what inspired you to become a Barrister and what area you practice in? Any hobbies you would like to share?**

Sure...I grew up in Wollongong, oldest of 6 kids, my parents were both missionaries and creatives. I was homeschooled and spent a lot of time competing in acting competitions. My dad is also a lawyer. Shout out to my parents here.

One of my first legal jobs was clerking at a local barrister's chambers. Although my job wasn't that interesting, I was inspired by the master story tellers that inhabited those four walls. Each word on the page, each argument presented in court, was carefully arranged like a brush stroke on a painting. Nearly all the barristers had an artistic bent and one was even a celebrated painter, his works adorning the chambers like the halls of a French monarch. I was inspired by their grit, their love of literature and music and their ability to summon Shakespeare or the battles of ancient kings into any conversation. Legal advocacy seemed a perfect continuity to a life surrounded by finer things. An art form. Now I am a barrister I practice in corporate and commercial. For me, it provides the right balance of drama and interesting complexity.

My hobbies are guitar, hiking, Starcraft and chess, pretty much any strategy game, halo lately, and my wife is teaching me piano. I also do a little coding.

**Your website promotes legal tech at the forefront of the work from anywhere revolution. Can you tell me a bit about what inspired you to create it?**

I see the work from anywhere revolution as part of a broader movement to find happiness in our careers. This movement is happening in many industries but particularly in law with the Newlaw movement. My Newlaw influences are Michael Bradley from Marque Lawyers, Alex Solo from Sprintlaw, Professor Susskind, and many others.

My first foray into legal tech was building software for the ASX. I learned the capacity for technology to influence the way we do things and to make our lives better. Tech, like any tool, depends on the user and our drive to iterate and continually improve it. In researching my move to the bar, I realised there was a need to use tech to improve the legal marketplace in general.

**Your website states that the purpose isn't just to find a lawyer swimming in an outdated sea, nor is it tech to plug into an ancient system, but a submarine: same body of water, new way of navigating it. (Love the use of metaphors by the way!) As an online legal community underpinned by technology, can you tell me how it all works? As in does your company supply and run the cloud-based software and all the tech needed for this online virtual professional world to function?**

Yes we do. But in answering your question I will need to challenge an assumption implicit in it. Think of us like a train station in which every customer is running to a different train at a different time (i.e., every need is different). Our platform provides the tools necessary to get the right people working on online legal projects and singing from the same songsheet. Detailed marketplace profiles, calendars, resource management, booking management, jobs post, legal project management, chat, notifications, doc generation, e-signatures, case charts, talent lists and a digital wallet to accept payments. However, we don't 'cover the field' where there is already a great product in the market that everyone is working on. For example, a great free time recording tool is toggl which I use whenever I need to record my time. We don't rebuild the train so to speak.



**My first thought upon visiting the site is that this tech could bring more women, single parents, and carers into the workforce by providing the opportunity to work from home, and in turn, pull more diversity into the legal profession. Have you had many people in this position sign up?**

I am glad you mentioned that! Yes, they are such an untapped resource. I do have lots of discussions with mothers who want to keep engaged with legal work. Unfortunately, the legal profession's earnout till you burnout philosophy is just incompatible with a happy home life. I am of the view that there is no need for this philosophy with technology that can help us work smarter not harder. That said, we are still proving the model so I wouldn't want anyone to quit their day jobs just yet.

**Particularly for law students, do you think it is possible for a student with no work experience in the legal profession to gain the same level of training as, say a paralegal from their mentor/employer remotely as they would in person?**

Yes I do. I have had great paralegals over the years that I have trained that I have never met in person. They have gone on to do great things. What I typically do is create google docs so we can both work in the same document at the same time. This allows me to manage my busy day and still keep an eye on what they are doing from my phone. In this way I can give much more detailed drafting feedback in real time, and they feel comfortable raising questions in the document as we go. This builds their confidence up much quicker than the law firm process, where you often have no safety net and all you get are redline markups which usually shatter your confidence and make you hoard work before showing it to your supervisor. I like to give paralegals complex interesting pieces of work to do, and then help them work through it so their confidence explodes, and they become legal superstars. Particularly with video chat apps working so well, there is no reason we need facetime anymore.

Meeting in person can be extremely valuable too as we are social creatures. Many Rightful users are also members of Clarence Chambers, a national legal co-working space provider. We envision people on our platform working on legal projects online and visiting their local clarence office for meetups and gatherings.

**Considering the recent data breach issues with Optus, can you tell us a little about how online client data is stored or secured to protect confidential information from being accessed?**

We do have the capability to store files on the platform and we take information security very seriously. Particularly considering we are a legal marketplace. We have very high standards of information security and intend to seek ISO 27001 certification which is the gold standard.

That said, our marketplace is flexible in that it doesn't force anyone to house their document databases on the platform. Every legal project is different. Most people are familiar with DropBox, Google Drive, OneDrive etc. These repositories are well understood and used by the market. We aren't trying to reinvent the wheel here. I myself use Ebrieff for my legal projects as a repository for storing thousands of PDFs in a case. I often share a link to the database rather than the underlying documents themselves. This way I can restrict who can access the link.



**Is there anything else you would like to add about your tech and collaboration platform?**

Probably but it will come to me later after this interview and I will go, doh!  
Why didn't I say that?

**Just for fun, and on the subject of legal technology, what is your opinion on the use of AI in the courtroom? Especially considering the legal system in China who has been utilizing such technology since 2017, do you think an AI courtroom could work here in comparison to the amount of human discretion our judges use on each individual case? DO you think an algorithm can run a courtroom?**

I hold the utmost respect for our judicial officers. I don't think an AI can do what they do.

But to answer your question I will borrow from Professor Susskind. When people ask this question about AI they are asking and answering the wrong question. The question is not whether AI can do what judges can do (it can't) but rather whether AI can achieve the same outcomes judges bring.

These outcomes have two components, a practical result (a job done) and emotional effects (an appropriate feeling, perhaps of reassurance or confidence). When these outcomes can be delivered in new ways that are demonstrably cheaper, better, quicker, or more convenient than the current offering, we can expect the market to switch to the alternatives. To fixate on today's processes is to assume there is something inherently valuable in the way we deliver services compared to what we deliver.

An AI can't deliver a soaring closing argument in a Courtroom but it may never need to. Increasingly, legal reasoning is occurring purely in written form. Oral advocacy is going the way of Rumpole of the Bailey.

If you think about some of the new technologies out there, smart contracts, DAOs (Decentralised Autonomous Organisations) and even in Australia the new legal coding language TurnipBox developed by Data61 and the CSIRO, an AI making legal decisions doesn't sound that far-fetched to me.

**Do you have any advice for our law students who are yet to enter the profession?**

What I look for is a genuine interest in a person's chosen subject matter. I love corporate law and it's very easy to see if someone has any interest in it. They have usually been reading the latest judgments, are getting stuck into the legislation and want to have discussions about new developments. In any discipline, the ones that understand the need to never stop learning will always rise to the top. Law is technical and if you can 'nerd out' with your supervisor you will do well. You don't need to worry about whether you get into that grad program - I learned the most from working in a government department - just keep reading. Take as many side courses as you can, find people who can teach you what you want to learn and build your curiosity. Most of all have fun with it.

**Given that anxiety and stress is a common complaint in the legal profession, do you think working remotely has the ability to impact the mental health of lawyers? How so?**

I do. Working remotely gives people the ability to balance their work and homelife. But at the same time it depends on who is supervising you. If you have a bad supervisor, it may be worse in a remote setting. It also doesn't replace the social aspects of work and sometimes it can be lonely - so there needs to be a good support network around you.

