

# Using technology to get legal help

4 October 2022

Many of us use technology to access everyday services – from online banking to grocery shopping, buying insurance to ordering a taxi. Solicitor firms are no different with more and more of them offering their services through apps, chatbots or other online tools.

## Why use technology?

Using technology to access certain legal services might not suit everyone, but it could give you:

- more **choice** about how you access legal help — for instance, you might prefer getting advice through an app rather than speaking to someone in person
- more **affordable** options — for example, by allowing you to do certain tasks or elements of a service for yourself online
- more **control** — with more opportunity to access services when and how it is convenient for you, in potentially quicker and more efficient ways.

## Common examples

There are plenty of examples of technologies and tools in use within the legal sector. Some are relatively simple, while others use more sophisticated technology. Common examples include:

### Apps

There are many apps, available to anyone with a smart phone or tablet, which can provide a wide range of support, guidance and interactive services on a range of legal issues. Apps can:

- offer easy access to a range of services
- be free to use, while some charge for premium services
- help show you your options and offer simple guidance, while some have more advanced interactive tools
- come directly from legal service providers, while some are from third parties.

### Online interactive websites

Whether provided by a third party or directly by a law firm, there is an increasing range of services available online. For example, sites offering



templated legal documents/applications. Although the level of human/professional input behind the scenes can vary, these are:

- available for individuals and businesses
- appropriate for more simple/formulaic processes
- often cheaper than using traditional methods, but cost can vary
- available for different areas of law, from family disputes to contracts.

## **Chatbots**

Chatbots provide online advice and support – either through speech or text – without having to speak to a human. Chatbots are:

- available 24/7, often without any wait times
- easily accessible through apps or websites
- usually free to use
- often suited to simple problems
- usually able to direct you to a real person if more help is needed.

## **Comparison websites**

Comparison websites provide the public with the opportunity to research and compare different providers of legal services in one place, without the need to contact suppliers directly. They can:

- allow you to search by factors such as location, price, areas of law and if the provider is regulated
- provide easy access to third-party customer reviews
- help you make an informed choice on which firms to approach directly.

## **Virtual meetings and instructions**

Many solicitors are increasingly giving clients the option of completing certain activities, traditionally offered only face-to-face, remotely. For example, virtual meetings or signing and witnessing documents electronically. In fact some firms now only offer services on a fully remote basis. This can:

- offer greater convenience
- reduce costs
- allow matters to progress more quickly and efficiently.

## **Unbundling**

Involves you carrying out certain less complicated aspects of a legal transaction yourself – for instance, filling in forms – while only paying for a solicitor to do more specialist work. Unbundling:



- can reduce costs
- varies from firm to firm – check with your provider
- should only happen if you feel comfortable and capable to carry out the 'unbundled' tasks

## Key questions to consider

### Do I need professional help?

While it may not be necessary for every legal matter, there are some situations when you may need a legal professional such as a solicitor. Examples include buying or selling a property or representing you in court. The [Legal Choices](https://www.legalchoices.org.uk/legal-choices/got-a-legal-issue/) website has more tips on dealing with a range of legal issues.

If you use a [regulated solicitor](https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/register/), you can be sure that they are qualified. They are also expected to provide a good quality service, have certain insurance, and you can complain if they don't.

### How much will it cost?

Legal costs vary depending on the type of service you are using. Generally, using an app or interactive website will be cheaper than getting traditional face-to-face legal advice. Make sure you understand the costs for the required service from the outset, and check for hidden charges.

All regulated law firms who offer services in some common areas of law are required to publish [information on prices](https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/instructing/costs-legal-aid/) and services on their website.

### Is my data protected?

All businesses must meet strict rules around how they handle your data. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has provided useful [information about your rights](https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/individual-rights/individual-rights/). For instance, you have a right to be told if your personal data is to be used for other purposes.

If you are concerned about the way an organisation is handling your information, you should raise this with them. The ICO provides [advice on how you can raise concerns](https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/).

## Useful resources



- More information on [choosing a solicitor](https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/) [https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/]
- More information on [instructing a solicitor](https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/instructing/) [https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/instructing/]
- Find out whether a solicitor or firm is regulated by us by using our [Solicitors Register](https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/register/) [https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/register/] and look out for our [logo](https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/look-out-for-our-logo/) [https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/choosing/look-out-for-our-logo/]
- More information about different legal issues and your [Legal Choices](https://www.legalchoices.org.uk/) [https://www.legalchoices.org.uk/]