

Why MyLawPlace and Microsoft Teams?

Since the onset of the first COVID-19 Lockdown, the way we do business has changed. All of the tools were all there already, but the absolute necessity was not. COVID-19 changed all of this.

When hard lockdown was announced by the President of the Republic of South Africa on the 26th March 2020, we were given 3 days to organize our affairs before the lockdown began. In those 3 days I set about loading my numerous legal files systematically into boxes, collecting my law books and statues and ensuring that my staff were able to work from home. While I was able – with a great deal of effort – to get my necessities home, I failed miserably in equipping my staff and managing them during hard lockdown. For this reason, I took the opportunity to research what was on offer for remote legal practice management. It became immediately clear that Zoom meetings were all the rage. This solved the communication problems, but not the practice management problems. I kept searching.

I had been a Dropbox fan, utilizing this resource prior to lockdown to manage my files. But while the file storage was taken care of, my communications and diary management were not. I had long email threads in Outlook for communication, which were not easily accessible and quite cumbersome. I had the free Microsoft 365 Family Office Suite, but this did not allow me to synchronise my calendar with my staff and clients. My IT advisor suggested that I try Microsoft 365 Office for business to solve that problem. This involved an upgrade and payment of a monthly fee per user. I could see the advantage of synchronizing calendars, particularly for a legal practice. Now (with a monthly per-user fee) my staff could access my diary to arrange court dates and client consultations without my involvement.

But still – between Dropbox, Zoom and Office Suite – everything was all over the place.

I kept looking for answers to solve this problem. I had seen MS Teams being advertised more regularly, and while Team work and collaboration were emphasised, no mention was made of how the problem of multiple platforms could be solved, and there was certainly no mention of specific benefit to lawyers. In any event, MS Teams was receiving negative press in comparison to Zoom so I investigated no further.

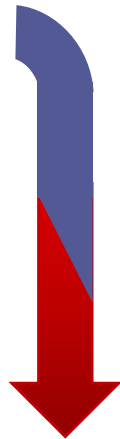
In a telephone conversation with the person who manages my website domain, I mentioned that I was looking for a system that could manage my documents effectively and get rid of the cumbersome email threads, thus manage my communications too. I remember her clearly stating: “You’ve got to try MS Teams. It’s the channels – that’s where the magic happens”.

That fortuitous conversation changed everything for me. I decided to further explore MS Teams as the solution to the problem that I was trying to solve, bringing software together in one place and providing a single platform in which lawyers could communicate, collaborate and litigate. All under one umbrella, **One Community – One Place**.

I immediately realized that MS Teams was not getting their message out properly. What seems to be a Zoom-type product – a communication platform – is so much more than that; the video conferencing feature is only a small part of their offering.

I spent the next 5 months working with MS Teams to see how I could use it for my legal practice. This is what I discovered in a nutshell: MS Teams is a chat-based messaging and video-call application. But what differentiates MS Teams from all the others is that it is much more than a place simply to talk to your colleagues. MS Teams is deeply integrated with the Office365 suite, bringing into a single app all of the Office365 features. It is a unified platform for online work - combining the functionality of the entire Office365 suite into one location. All on **one Dashboard!** This is key!

So what’s it all about?



How MyLawPlace Works

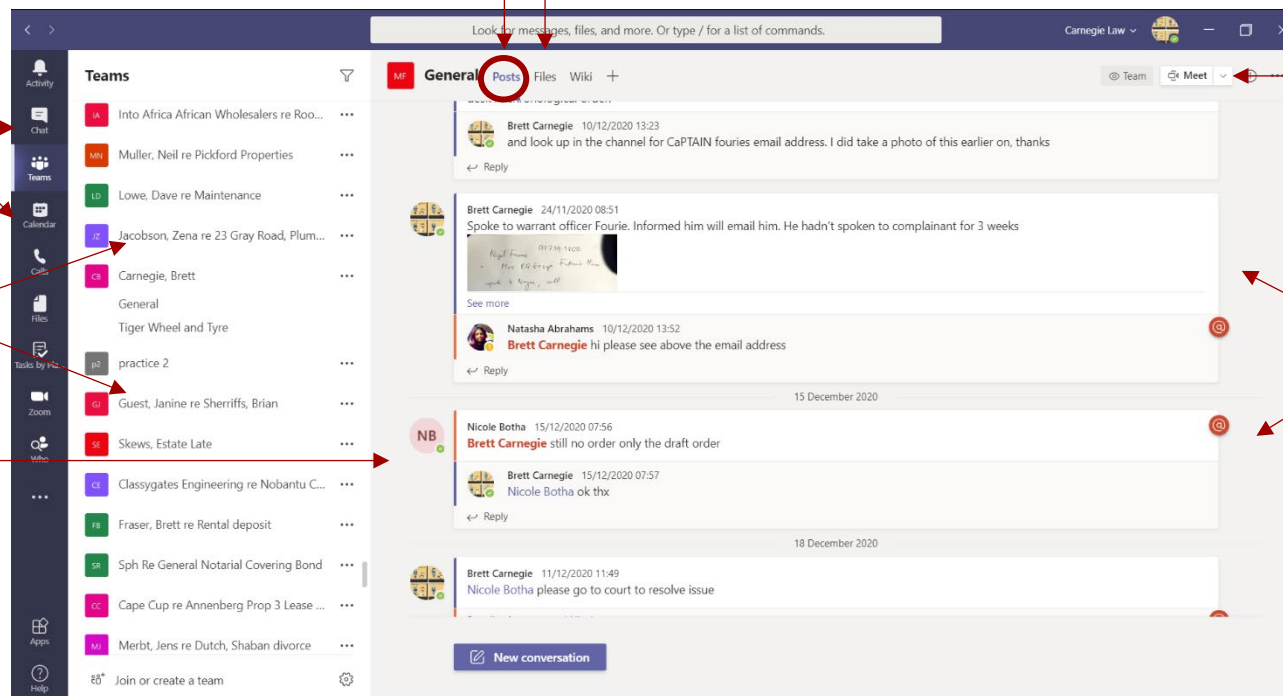
Firstly I created my first Organization, to which I could add team members. I included my bookkeeper, secretary/receptionist and my candidate attorney. I also invited guests to the team as required. This gave me my dashboard:

Control what is displayed using the links at the top of the main window. Click the **Files** link to access all files associated with the selected Legal Matter

Useful links in the **Navigation Panel**

List of legal matters in the **Teams** list: when an item is selected, all related communications will open in the **Posts** window alongside

Microsoft Teams Dashboard (showing Posts)



Click here to navigate directly to a video meeting

All communications appear in the **Posts** window, including emails, @mentions and uploaded file notes

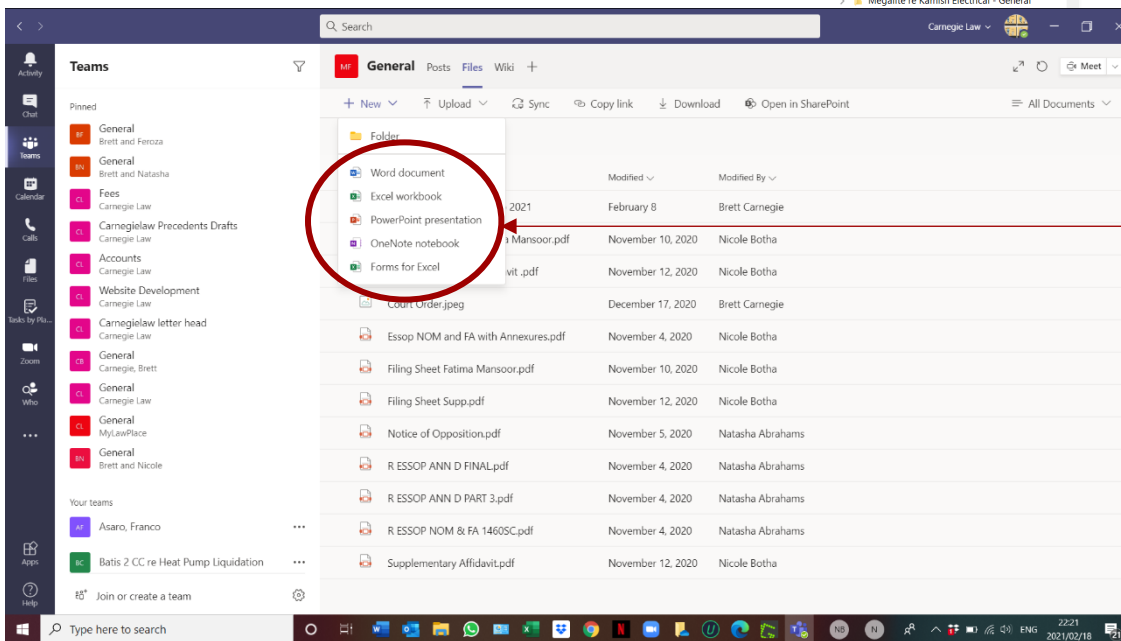
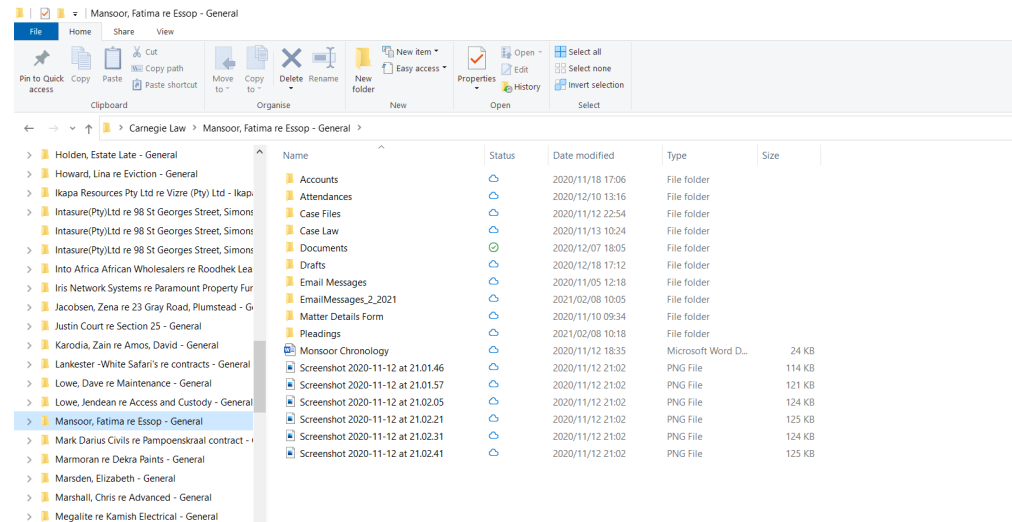
Accessing Files Associated with a Legal Matter

1 Once a Legal Matter is selected in the **Teams** list, click the **Files** link to view a list of all files and folders related to that Matter

2 Navigate to the relevant folder to locate the file and open the file from within Teams

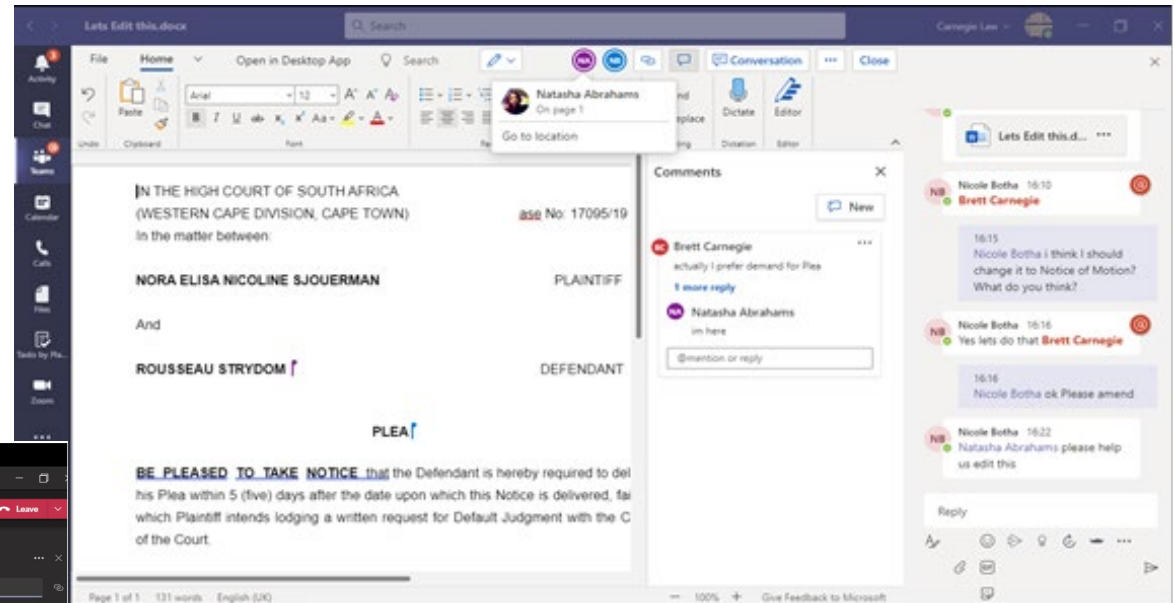
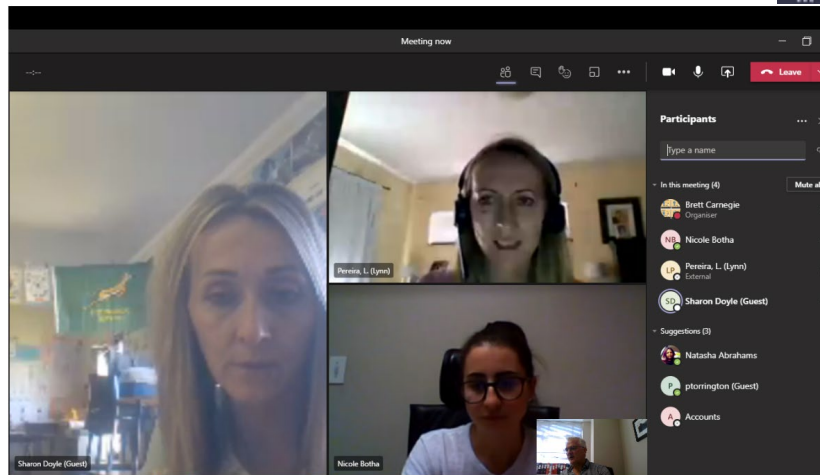
The screenshots illustrate the process of accessing files within a legal matter in Microsoft Teams. The first screenshot shows the 'Teams' list on the left sidebar with a team selected, and the 'Files' tab highlighted in the top navigation bar. The second screenshot shows the 'Files' view for the selected team, with the 'Pleadings' folder highlighted in the left sidebar. The third screenshot shows the 'Notice of Opposition.pdf' file open, displaying the document content.

You can synchronise the files and folders in Teams with those in File Explorer



You have the whole MS Office Suite at your disposal, allowing you to create Office documents, workbooks and presentations from within Teams.

Collaborate in real time and online with multiple participants...



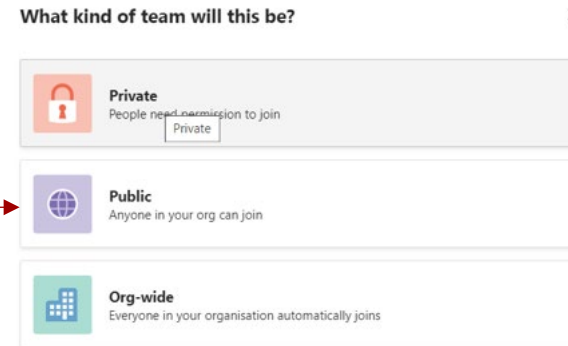
...and communicate on video chats in the matter...

...across multiple devices.



All this is underpinned by the strictest of privacy levels at Microsoft level standards.

Choose Public to create a publicly available Team for the purpose of precedents, legal resources, contact sharing etc.



Choose Private when creating your Legal Matter Team, allowing only invited members to see its contents

Features of Microsoft Teams

- Chat and instant messaging
- Manage calendars and meetings
- Create, share, edit and find content
- Call and meet team members
- Integrate with to-do lists
- Make, save and share notes
- Post messages in larger social channels
- Search across all of your O365 documents and folders
- Integrate with 3rd party Apps through Tabs, Connectors and Bots

In summary, Teams makes it easier to collaborate using Microsoft 365 by bringing everything into one place for the first time.

So why choose MyLawPlace?

Without MyLawPlace, in order to communicate and collaborate with multiple law firms, each law firm would have to create its own Organization. Then from your own Teams Organization you would have to explicitly link to each of those external law firm Organizations. Very quickly your Desktop Task Bar would be displaying icons for hundreds of law firms, resulting in fragmented communication where you are prevented from seamlessly locating all relevant data from within a single location.

In this environment, having to locate the correct law firm to find a specific document or post or initiate a chat is very much like having to navigate between Netflix, HBO, Apple Tv, Showmax or DSTV to find your favourite show. Highly inefficient!

With MyLawPlace everything you need is located within a single platform (One Place), allowing you to seamlessly interact, communicate and collaborate with others (One Community). Using MyLawPlace you can contact someone or include them in a chat or post simply by retrieving their @mention name from the MyLawPlace Website directory and using it in your Post. It's that simple!

In this way, you can manage your own practice online, seamlessly interacting with your colleagues – all on the MyLawPlace Platform.



One Community 

One Place 

MyLawPlace 