

VENDOR VOICE

Practice Point

Thomson Reuters' new reference product blends two information services staples—Westlaw and Practical Law—as well as industry members' input.

When Thomson Reuters acquired the Practical Law company in 2013, the legal research provider almost immediately looked for a way to combine content from its Westlaw product with Practical Law's proprietary legal resources.

"We had requests from customers who said, 'Practical Law and Westlaw [are] the two core products attorneys use; is there a way you can bring them together?'" says Chris Lafferty, Practical Law's head of product management.

Thomson Reuters' response—Practice Point, a new platform that offers access to Practical Law's guidance, analysis, and other management resources, including Westlaw's forms and primary law—was released in January 2016.

Since its debut, the product has added enhanced functionality. A smart search feature suggests topics based on what users enter. This past fall, Practice Point also integrated with the company's West km legal knowledge management software.

Lafferty, who says Practice Point also plans to add a bankruptcy practice area and other functionality later this year, recently shared his thoughts with us on the product's workflow-based mindset, the process used to create it, and the pressures law firm attorneys, in-house counsel, and legal information management professionals collectively face.

How did Practice Point come about?

We launched Practical Law in the UK as a business around 1990; we started off as a magazine, pre-web. The founders felt there had to be a way to get specific knowledge and guidance into attorneys' hands the

Practice Point integrated with West km software in August 2016.

moment they were trying to do a particular thing.

Legal know-how took off incredibly fast in the UK, so a lot of U.S. firms, around the early to mid-2000s, said, “What a great concept; you should bring that to the U.S.” In 2007, Practical Law began as a start-up in the United States; I joined in early 2008.

After the Thomson Reuters acquisition, Practice Point was that next step in our evolution. We brainstormed at the time of the acquisition about what customers loved about Practical Law and Westlaw, and how we could enhance the experience and bring everything together.

How did you develop the new product?

We worked on the prototype in 2014. In summer 2015, we launched a program where we had about 67 actual Westlaw and Practical Law customers get access to our beta version of Practice Point so they could really play around with it. We had three librarians participate in the pilot—our

Librarian Advisory Board saw Practice Point before it launched and provided feedback to product developers and marketers. Before and after the beta program, we talked to dozens of customers—at least 100 during the entire development phase, through focus groups or conversations. We received valuable input by having customers be involved throughout the process.

We also have the Practical Law editorial team, a group of about 245 attorney editors with substantial practice experience that represents a cross section of our customers. It’s a great way to internally do testing and vetting as they have a phenomenal wealth of subject matter expertise.

Did any suggestions that came out of the beta phase surprise you?

We received a lot of suggestions in terms of user experience—“If I click on this button, I expect to see this happen,” or “If I’m looking for this content, I’d expect it to be delivered in this way.” Our subject matter experts were great in that regard, and also

helpful in defining the task structure itself. We had some examples of what we thought would be useful; it was helpful to have customers say, “What if you used this terminology or way of thinking” to make sure we were doing it in the most helpful way for attorneys to practice law.

Did user feedback help shape any specific features?

The product’s Rulebooks feature—it’s a unique aspect that came out of conversations with customers and understanding the way they practice. Historically, some of the core rules and regulations, things like securities offerings and SEC disclosures, were listed on Westlaw according to the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). Talking to customers, they suggested, for instance, that we say Regulation D, as opposed to organizing within a certain CFR section. We created a way to access content that is more in line with the way practitioners think and use it in their practice. They found the new classification system to be a much

easier way of accessing rules and regulations content. It allows them to track changes that are happening within regulations; they can see the old version versus the new. It's been an exciting part of the product; we've gotten a lot of positive feedback about this feature.

Are attorneys Practice Point's biggest user group?

Attorneys are our primary customer. I really think Practice Point is a product that's helpful for any attorney, whether that person is a solo practitioner or someone who works in a massive multinational law firm or as in-house counsel. One area where Practice Point is seeing the best traction is actually with in-house attorneys who work for large or small corporations.

Law librarians absolutely will use the product. If they are tasked with getting current awareness information for a group or helping with a particular project, they can find value in using Practice Point to help them get precedent documents or SEC filings faster.

What makes Practice Point different from other legal information products?

The idea behind Practice Point is twofold. The first integrates Practical Law and Westlaw. The other fundamental idea was to offer a construct that allowed us to organize the wealth of content we have into different tasks and a more workflow-based way of thinking. When we developed the product, we spent a lot of time organizing content into particular tasks an attorney would do, and selecting content that corresponds with those tasks.

The breadth and depth of Westlaw's content and search technology is the market leader, so we've got that great product, and Practical Law doesn't really have any direct competitors. If you look at Practice Point, building off the legacies of Westlaw and Practical Law, it stands alone. There aren't a lot of folks who can do what we do, given how long we've been in the market and how much information we have.

How is content updated?

Practice Point leverages and builds on the infrastructure of the underlying products—that includes Westlaw, where there is a huge infrastructure of making sure you have primary law that's updated. The content in Practical Law is kept updated and maintained regularly. Many groups in Thomson Reuters' legal solutions division ultimately support Practice Point, including the Practical Law team and our Westlaw and current awareness teams.

Are there challenges legal information professionals face today that the product might help alleviate?

Anyone who has worked in the legal industry since 2008 knows there's been an increasing awareness of efficiency—working to do more with less, being cost conscious—whether you're in-house or in a law firm. Firms are in a more sensitive environment regarding billing, and they need to be more aware of cost pressures.

Anybody in the legal client service world must be aware of how they're delivering legal services to their clients; we hear that a lot. There is a demand to be more efficient; practitioners need to be aware of things sooner. Attorneys want to be more productive members of their law firm or in-house legal department. Practical Law and our other products can help get them up to speed quicker.

The second challenge is the volume of information that seems to have exploded exponentially recently. Sifting through the noise to find the right piece of information you need is critical to meeting the needs of your client.

Westlaw historically has been at the forefront of that with its WestSearch technology, which provided the ability to run efficient searches. It has developed even further now with a task-based organizational hierarchy that allows you to say, "OK, today I am working on drafting an asset purchase agreement. Let me go into that practice area and find out what information you have for that particular task." We've heard Practice Point helps

people find the information or answer they are looking for faster, but it also allows them to access other helpful related content when and where they need it.

Do you anticipate we'll see any other new or different legal information-related challenges in the next 5 to 10 years?

Technology is changing, as is the generational makeup of attorneys. When you look at millennials coming into the legal industry, their expectation of technology is that it's much more integrated into how they interact with the world. There's an assumption that there will be intuitive interface capabilities and ways to get information faster. They grew up on YouTube and Instant Messenger and with other on-demand information. You need to make sure you're on the forefront of technology and usability, providing that group of new attorneys with the right tools.

You also need to remember that a lot of attorneys have been in practice for a long time, and they also need to feel comfortable with the product. As with any new technology or product, you definitely have early adopters; other folks are a little bit more used to the historical way of doing things.

But, as with anything, if you truly deliver on the promise of making legal practice better and more efficient, you'll see customer adoption. I'm happy to say Practice Point has been successfully adopted so far by a good portion of our customer base. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. ■