

KNOWLEDGE WAS NEVER MEANT TO HIDE

David Mpanga

I began my professional career in 1993. Mobile phones were rare and the preserve of the *Wnouveau riche*. Fax machines were still in in thing; with letters printed on shiny flimsy paper in ink that faded over time. Legal research involved rooting through the indices of law reports, heavy textbooks, and patient conversations with colleagues who knew where important precedents could be found.

Around the same time, something momentous was happening. The Internet revolution had begun but most of us did not notice. This was the end of the analogue age and the beginning of the digital age. We were privileged to be around at this time in much the same way, I suppose, as were those people who were alive when Johannes Guttenberg invented and popularized the printing press in 1440.

Few people understood then how profoundly it would transform the world. The Internet was initially viewed as a curiosity, then as a useful communications tool, and eventually as an essential piece of infrastructure. Entire industries were rebuilt around it. The Internet changed the way we communicate, work, learn and connect with the world. Information became abundant. Over the last three decades the Internet has democratised access to information and knowledge in ways previous generations could never have imagined.

My legal career has spanned this transformation. Law firms and the businesses that we advise have been continuously engaged in digital migration. Lately, even the Courts have begun move from paper records to digital systems. Letters have given way to email, then to instant messaging and video conferencing. I have watched global transactions become commonplace and regulatory frameworks grow increasingly sophisticated as governments attempted to keep pace with innovation.

The legal profession changed along with everything else. When I was a young lawyer, access to legal information was itself a competitive advantage. The lawyer often knew things that clients did not. Legal practice was essentially about the gatekeeping of legal knowledge and when the knowledge was released, it was couched in jargon and travelled slowly. Interpretation was costly and often incomplete.

Today, thanks to the Internet, legal knowledge is accessible to anyone, anywhere. A client in New York once told me that she wasn't paying me to tell her what she could find out for herself using Google. The challenge is no longer access to information. The challenge is knowing what information matters, what it means, and how it applies to a particular decision.

That distinction is becoming increasingly important. Business leaders today operate in a super connected world that moves at an extraordinary speed. Regulations change, markets shift and new technologies emerge to disrupt old ones. Decisions that once unfolded over months now unfold over days, sometimes hours. In such an environment, waiting until a problem arises before seeking legal advice is often too late.

In this environment, the best lawyer is not a fire fighter but fire prevention officer. The most valuable legal insight frequently comes before the dispute, before the transaction, before the regulatory inquiry, and before the crisis. It lies in understanding risks and being able to anticipate industry and regulatory change early enough to respond intelligently.

This is one of the reasons why I believe the role of the modern law firm is evolving. For much of our history, law firms have functioned primarily as repositories of expertise. Clients came to us when they needed advice, representation, or specialist guidance. We served them privately and confidentially, one matter at a time. That remains an essential part of what we do. But in the digital age it is no longer enough.

Knowledge today creates value long before a formal legal instruction is given. Businesses, boards, investors, regulators, entrepreneurs, and development partners increasingly need access to trusted interpretation and practical guidance that helps them navigate complexity before difficult decisions are made. That is why AF Mpanga is taking an important step forward.

We are launching our refurbished website but we are doing much more than unveiling a new digital presence. We are transforming our website into a legal knowledge hub.

In many respects, the websites of the early Internet age were digital brochures. They told visitors who you were, what you did, and how to contact you. As technology evolved, websites became communication platforms and information portals. They allowed organisations to publish news, share updates, and engage with audiences more effectively. Today, another transformation is underway.

We are entering the age of artificial intelligence. Just as the Internet changed how information is distributed, artificial intelligence is changing how information is discovered, analysed, and used. The implications are profound. People increasingly expect answers rather than archives. They want insights rather than data. They want tools that help them understand complexity quickly and confidently.

We believe the legal profession must adapt to that reality. The AF Mpanga Knowledge Hub is our response.

Our ambition is to create something that sits somewhere between a reference library and an automated legal assistant. A place where clients, business leaders, policymakers, researchers, journalists, and young lawyers can access practical legal knowledge, understand emerging developments, and find thoughtful analysis of issues affecting Uganda's business environment. The objective is not to replace lawyers. Nor is it to provide definitive answers to every legal question. Its purpose is simpler and, perhaps, more important. We want to make trusted legal knowledge easier to access.

The Knowledge Hub will contain articles, explainers, commentary, regulatory updates, sector insights, partner perspectives, videos, and practical guidance drawn from decades of experience advising organisations across Uganda and beyond. Over time, it will become more searchable, structured, and increasingly intelligent in the way it helps users find relevant information.

In short, we hope it will become the first place people visit when they need to understand the legal landscape before they need legal representation.

As I reflect on the journey from 1993 to today, I am struck by how quickly the world continues to change. The Internet transformed how humanity connects. Artificial intelligence is beginning to transform how humanity thinks, learns, and solves problems. Nobody can predict precisely where this new era will lead. But one thing seems clear: access to reliable knowledge will become more valuable, not less.

At AF Mpanga, we intend to be part of that future. We invite you to explore our new Knowledge Hub, engage with its content, and return often as it grows. This is not merely the launch of a website. It is the beginning of a new chapter in how we share knowledge, contribute to public understanding, and serve our clients.