

Free legal help for all South Africans

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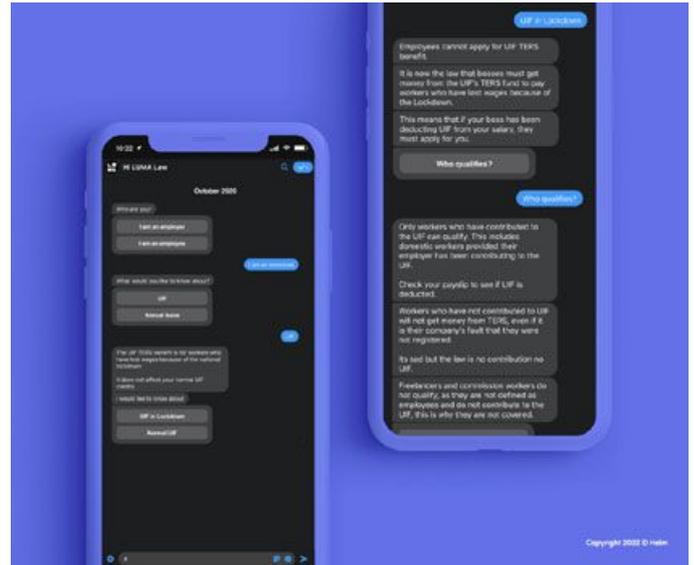
Helm helps local lawyer bring Luma to life with an automated legal assistant

Three years ago, Grace Gichanga was working weekends to provide legal help to 50 people. Thanks to business advice and an automated solution from local customer experience innovators Helm, Luma grew into an organisation that at one point managed to help up to 1,000 South Africans a month – free of charge.

In 2019, Gichanga entered the SAB Foundation Social Innovation and Disability Empowerment Awards, which she won. As part of her prize, she nominated Helm – then known as Praekelt – to transform the offering and help bring her brainchild to life.

“When I first pitched Luma, I knew it was a lofty idea,” says Gichanga. “I wasn’t entirely sure what my options were at the time, but I had a human problem that required a technological solution to help me help others.”

Helm is known for turning complex realities into simple experiences, which made them the ideal candidates to interpret and execute Gichanga’s vision effortlessly – a vision that has now seen Luma expanding to the web, taking the solution to more providers, more platforms, and ultimately more people.



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“Thanks to the solution that we built in 2019, we have now been able to take a second one to a second platform,” says Gichanga. “If it wasn’t for Helm, the idea of law on a chatbot would not have been even slightly possible.”

Luma walks the justice journey with its users, providing them with practical and user-friendly legal information. Through the power of Machine Learning and Natural Language Processing, it breaks down the barriers between South Africans and the laws that protect them. Luma works with a team of experts to provide free legal assistance, with additional consultations starting at just R5.



Renzo Zanetti

Renzo Zanetti, Helm’s head of business development, walked alongside Grace from the very beginning of her journey, and says, “Grace’s target audience was South Africans without the disposable income (or any income) to be able to afford legal assistance. With unemployment sadly being such a major problem in our country, the content placed a special focus on labour law so our users were armed with information that could save their jobs.”

Accessibility and high engagement were crucial keys to success, which is why Facebook Messenger was chosen as the initial platform that the audience already used. The support offered by Facebook advertising meant that Luma could reach and help more people. Luma was built for scale and although it has long since outgrown Facebook bot, it was the foundation for today’s success.

Covid-19 forced Gichanga and Helm to change the offering to cater for people whose

jobs were threatened by the pandemic and subsequent national lockdown. With multiple directives coming from the minister of employment and labour, and legalese being hard to understand, Luma was able to synthesise this information and provide it in a conversational format, addressing people's biggest concerns with respect to the protocols put in place and their employment relationships.

70% of the user base found the Covid-19 workflow to be the most useful part of Luma. It had links to UIF, Covid response info and changed constantly as new info became available. The Covid-19 workflow has become a source of great help for vulnerable people whose jobs hang in the balance as they battle through retrenchments and some of life's toughest blows.

Legal information is made available through multiple formats, while evoking a sense of calm and reassurance, moving away from the traditional legal communication style which is often very cold and complicated in its delivery.

"Working with Helm has taught me to reimagine what is possible at the intersection between technology and human experience," says Gichanga. "And just look at what it has created."

Luma – in the previous Facebook iteration – boasted the following stats:

- From 50 people in a month to over 1,000, that's a 2,000% increase.
- 4,000 interactions, 70-80% on the Covid-19 flow
- 80% engagement on Facebook
- Average of 6,000 engagements via social media
- Average webinar attendance per month 60 people
- Silver MMA Smarties Award for Social Responsibility (in partnership with Helm)

The solution was built for scale to enable future growth for the business, which is exactly what happened with the web platform. It's available for future rollouts on WhatsApp, Telegram, Twitter and other mobile platforms at the push of a button.

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