

# IN EXACTLY THE RIGHT PLACE: RACHAEL CAROLAN

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**Rachael Carolan heads the in-house legal function for [what3words](#), the locating tool that has ingeniously mapped the entire world into three square metre sections defined by three words used in unique combinations. The technology has proved incredibly valuable for the emergency services in many countries, particularly as the world struggles with the pandemic.**

Most of us can't live without GPS or Apple or Google Maps to get around. But, good as they are, Chris Sheldrick, the founder of what3words, believed he could come up with something even better. Rather than GPS coordinates, he and a mathematician friend devised a system of using three words in unique combinations to map the entire world in three metre square sections. The business, which started in 2013, has taken off. what3words is now used in over 160 countries using more than 40 languages.

In charge of the company's legal function is Herbert Smith Freehills alumna Rachael Carolan, who is as excited by the capabilities of what3words as anyone. As a new company, as well as being fast-growing, that puts a heavy onus on her to deal with the many and varied issues that come across her desk. Rachael is in charge of handling all commercial matters (including software licensing), intellectual property, data protection, disputes, employment and compliance.

That Rachael should find herself in a technology-related sector is really no surprise, given that from an early age she has always been interested in the world of technology. After reading law at the University of Warwick, which also included a year out at the University of Hong Kong, Rachael joined Herbert Smith Freehills as a trainee in September 2012. There, she took a particular interest in the IP/IT group, but also had a seven-month secondment with Merrill Lynch working on corporate deals.

During the secondment, Rachael realised that she was more suited to an in-house role than private practice, largely because she enjoyed the aspect of being immersed in the business. Perhaps unusually, Rachael left on qualification, joining the consultancy Accenture as the youngest member of the in-house legal team. For Rachael, that was an excellent learning experience, but, after two years, her antennae scanned for other opportunities (“I am always keen to try new things,” she says).

The company that she lighted on was Deliveroo, which was hiring a legal counsel to work with the general counsel. “It was a whirlwind,” Rachael remembers. “Deliveroo was then the fastest growing company in Europe and was known as a major disrupter of conventional business models. As the legal team, we were in the thick of it. One of the most interesting projects was kicking off the review of Deliveroo's approach to the “future of work” and other regulatory difficulties associated with such a rapidly growing business. It was totally fascinating and pretty much 24/7.”

However, when she found out that what3words was looking for a general counsel to start a legal department, Rachael realised that this was a great opportunity. She applied and joined the company in March 2018.

As with her role at Deliveroo, Rachael enjoys both the range of issues which she has to deal with but also the thrill of solving problems which usually arise on a daily basis. The key, she says, is being in a position where people trust your judgment. “You have to be conscious that you need to overcome road blocks, you can't just be the ‘department of no’, and that you have to offer solutions, even in the trickiest situations.”

When asked if she ever gets flustered or overwhelmed by the number of requests – which have been given added urgency in the pandemic and continually evolving government guidance – Rachael responds that she is good at staying calm, and she also has a good instinct for what needs doing when. “If there are 20 things to do, I would have a pretty good idea of which one needs to be done urgently, which are risks that can be worked on in time and which can be fixed in one go by changing a business process or introducing one – or, at least, that has worked well for me so far!”

what3words has proved its worth time and time again over the past year, as the whole world has been struck by the coronavirus pandemic. The app is being used by the emergency services in many countries, helping them to reach ill and injured people with complete accuracy no matter where they are. The app has also come to be extensively used by disaster relief agencies. A simple example of the app's huge value is Gateway Health in South Africa, which is able to use what3words to reach expectant mothers in townships where there are no house addresses.

what3words has taken mapping technology to a new level, which is having direct benefits for humanity. It is being used by more and more countries and can easily be adapted for local requirements. And the technology continues to be developed and refined. what3words has created a ‘FindMe’ web page that only displays a user's current what3words address using their phone's GPS signal.

As with everyone, Rachael is uncertain how long the pandemic will last and what long-term impact there might be. The hope is that life will return to normal at some point, when she sees huge opportunities for what3words and in the meantime, what3words has seen its ecommerce usage increase by 1,000% since the pandemic. Hermes is one of the latest companies to allow their customers to input a 3-word address for delivery.

The technology also fits perfectly with the company's objective to be a responsible corporate citizen. By promoting pinpoint location accuracy, and thus enabling people and vehicles to reach those locations more accurately, the company is assisting to minimise unnecessary use of resources. Aramex improved its last-mile delivery efficiency by over 40% when using what3words technology in Dubai.

### **And that's not all**

The pandemic has also involved Rachael in other, non-work-related ways. She was one of a team helping advise on the legal and strategic issues associated with the setting up of Meals for the NHS, a charitable initiative to deliver meals to doctors, nurses and hospital workers, who otherwise find it difficult to take time off to eat. At the last count, the charity had delivered 300,000 meals, supporting almost 150 hospitals.

Rachael moved from London to Bristol last year, to be closer to nature and to offer more scope for outdoor activities. She is happy to work from home for as long as the company requires.

While she was not with Herbert Smith Freehills for very long, she looks back on her time with great fondness. So what are her favourite memories? "Most of my memories are of working with incredibly intelligent people on interesting legal challenges. I loved working alongside Claire Wiseman on the huge network sharing deal between Telefónica UK and Vodafone. And a specific occasion of discussing the exact shape of laundry liquitabs with Jonathan Turnbull for patent litigation proceedings. Not something I had ever expected to do!"

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The what3words app can be downloaded [here](#).