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GUIDE

Embracing change and driving efficiency through AI

A guide to AI in the legal industry

The legal industry is actively transforming, driven by the rise of artificial intelligence (AI). With growing workloads, rising client expectations, and increasing pressure to deliver efficient and cost-effective solutions, law firms are searching for ways to create more value while maintaining their high standards of professionalism. AI has quickly become a key player in meeting these demands, as a tool to streamline operations, support decision-making, and enable lawyers to focus on the work that matters most.

The Lexis Nexis AI Report signalled that AI adoption among UK legal professionals has more than doubled in a year, with many firms allocating budgets specifically for generative AI tools. Reflecting a growing recognition of AI's potential. However, Thomson Reuters reports imply uptake remains cautious, particularly among small and mid-sized firms, where limited resources and a preference for traditional methods often delay innovation.

While some may view AI as uncharted territory, the truth is that its foundations have been discussed in legal practice for decades. From helping with legal research to automating time-intensive administrative tasks, AI has consistently performed as an assistant, not an adversary.

Now, as AI and specialised tools become more sophisticated, law firms stand to benefit from powerful, customisable technology that amplifies their ability to work efficiently and deliver better outcomes for their clients.

Understanding not just the "how" but the "why" of AI adoption is critical. Approaching AI strategically will be crucial for law firms looking to maintain a competitive edge. The LPM Frontiers Report recently found that 33% of law firms have an official plan for AI use, with an additional 35% indicating they will implement one within the next 12 months, reflecting a growing commitment to strategic adoption.

AI is here, not as a disruption, but as a tool for improvement. By taking the time to understand its benefits, limitations, and potential, law firms can approach this technological shift with confidence and clarity.

Supporting law firms today

AI-based tools tackle the operational challenges that can weigh down lawyers and their teams. By automating repetitive processes, enhancing accuracy, and offering actionable insights, AI allows professionals to focus their time where it counts most —on their strategic, value-driven work.

Managing your documents

A staple of legal work, managing documents can feel like an overwhelming task, from exhaustive reviews to detailed contract analysis. AI takes this burden and transforms the process. Tools designed for document management use natural language processing to identify key clauses, risks, inconsistencies, or even compliance issues within lengthy texts. AI-powered document review tools can reduce review time by up to 80%, making them invaluable support and dramatically reducing admin workload.

By tagging, organising, and archiving documents based on context and relevance, these systems ensure that nothing gets overlooked, and retrieval becomes quick and painless. Such systems not only save time but also reduce the risk of human error.

For legal professionals, these capabilities mean less time buried in paperwork and more bandwidth for high-value work like strategic planning and client consultations.

3

Capturing missed time

Time tracking is an essential aspect of legal work, but it's a task often mired with inefficiency. AI provides a smarter system that can automatically track work activity across various platforms, minimising the need for manual entries. Through machine learning, these systems identify and log billable hours, even filling gaps where time may have otherwise gone unrecorded.

The greatest advantage lies in the ability to detect errors, such as incorrect entries or missed periods of time, and correct them. This ensures that all time is accurately captured and ready for invoicing. The result? Lawyers reclaim the confidence that they are accounting for their efforts fairly, while administrative teams benefit from quicker and smoother billing processes.

Automating workflow

Whether it's onboarding a new client, generating routine documents, or managing case deadlines, AI is streamlining the process. They track critical details, send timely reminders, and generate necessary paperwork automatically, ensuring that timelines are met and the administrative load remains as light as possible.

An overwhelming 74% of small firm lawyer's reported spending too much time on administrative tasks in the Thomson Reuters Small Firms Report, highlighting the impact of AI in reclaiming their time for client-focused efforts.

Law firms, including trailblazers like Simmons & Simmons, are already exploring agentic AI for tasks such as NDA drafting and compliance workflows. With routine processes reliably handled, legal teams can direct their focus toward resolving complex, strategic cases with confidence.

What's next for legal AI

The legal industry stands at the edge of a new era, where artificial intelligence moves beyond automation and into the realm of agency. AI Agents and Agentic AI represents an exciting evolution, pushing the boundaries of how technology can assist legal professionals.

With capability to perform specialised tasks and intelligently collaborate with human users, agentic AI and other emerging tools promise to transform the way legal work is conducted.

ARTIFICIAL AGENTS

AI agents refers to systems that can act with a degree of independence within defined parameters, executing tasks that are more nuanced and specialised. Unlike traditional AI, which requires explicit instructions for each action, agentic AI can interpret goals, make decisions based on unique contexts, and adapt to real-time information.

These agents could assist with tasks that were once thought to require significant human intervention. For instance, they could look at file and matter quality. Helping firms meet SRA regulations more easily while reducing administrative workload and lowering spend.

Agents are designed not to replace legal professionals but to augment their capabilities, serving as highly skilled assistants. By taking over procedural tasks or offering data-driven insights, agentic AI allows lawyers to concentrate on exercising their judgement, creativity, and expertise.

While these developments are groundbreaking, it's important to view them as complementary to human strategy, not substitutes for it. Their power lies in reinforcing what legal professionals can achieve, providing new levels of speed, accuracy, and insight.

Considerations, concerns, and how to address them

With powerful new tools comes increased responsibility. Navigating agentic AI's integration into law firms involves addressing critical ethical and practical concerns to ensure trust and transparency remain cornerstones of legal services.

1. Ethical use and bias

One of the primary concerns with agentic AI is the potential for bias in decision-making. AI systems learn from data sets which, if not representative or diversified, can carry forward existing biases. The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) has made it clear that lawyers remain responsible for any work delivered using AI assistance, underlining the importance of maintaining ethical practice at every stage.

2. Confidentiality and data security

Given the sensitive nature of legal work, ensuring data privacy is paramount. AI systems should be deployed with secure infrastructure, accompanied by rigorous confidentiality protocols. The UK's first AI-driven law firm, Garfield Law, was approved only under specific conditions, such as prohibiting autonomous operation and requiring human oversight for activities like generating case law. illustrating the level of caution necessary when managing client data.

3. Oversight and accountability

Human supervision is essential for overseeing AI outputs, particularly for complex cases or those involving high stakes. This principle is reinforced by guidance from the UK High Court, which highlights several professional obligations when using AI tools. Including verifying the accuracy of AI-driven research against authoritative sources before employing it in legal work, as well as ensuring that firms and chambers implement measures to help their teams comply with professional and ethical obligations. However, more progress is needed to ensure consistency.
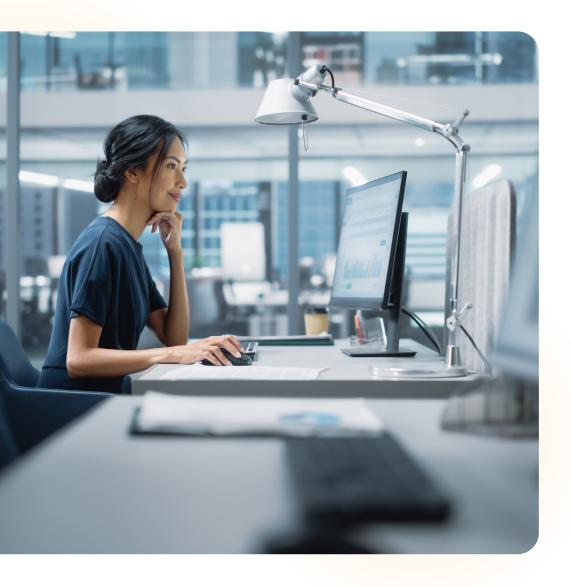
4. Adoption and literacy

Understanding and trust are critical for effective AI integration. Resistance often stems from a lack of awareness about how these tools function. Providing ongoing training and creating open dialogues within teams can ease worries, emphasise the supportive nature of AI, and promote wider acceptance.

Building confidence

Taking cautious but proactive steps is key. For firms looking to incorporate agentic AI, starting with smaller projects or pilot programmes allows systems to be evaluated without overwhelming existing workflows. Transparency with clients about how AI is being used also helps establish trust while showcasing the firm's commitment to modern, efficient practices.

Agentic AI and its emerging capabilities present an extraordinary opportunity for the legal industry to innovate and improve. While challenges around ethics, security, and accountability require ongoing attention, these tools are within reach as allies, not threats.

The future of AI in the industry

A positive outlook

With advancements in technology accelerating, AI's potential within the legal sector is far from fully realised. Future developments could see AI systems integrated seamlessly into every facet of legal operations. This vision aligns with the goals of many law firms, with 39% planning to increase their investment in technology to drive AI-driven innovation according to The Bellwether Report.

Imagine fully adaptive platforms capable of managing entire workflows autonomously, from client intake to case resolution, all underpinned by rigorous human oversight.

AI could enable predictive capabilities far beyond today's standards, offering high-level scenario modelling based on an array of real-time data inputs. Such insights would empower law firms to advise clients with unparalleled precision, mitigating risks before they even surface. Furthermore, virtual legal assistants could evolve into expert aides, not just summarising case law but proactively proposing strategies tailored to specific legal contexts.

By addressing systemic inefficiencies, AI has the potential to positively reshape the legal landscape for professionals and clients alike.
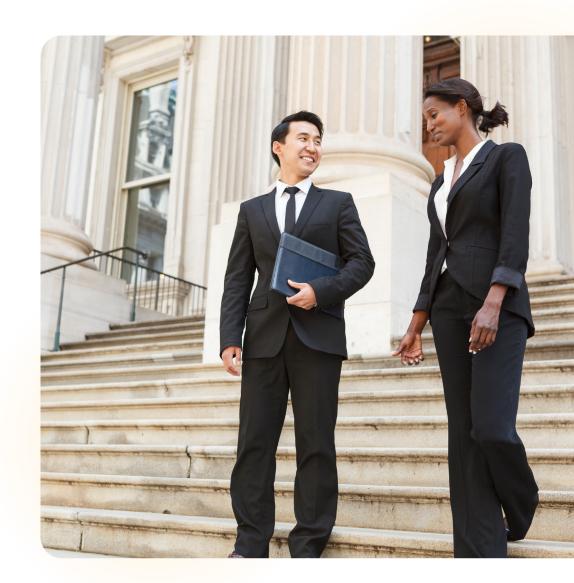
The role of human lawyers

While the future of AI is promising, it is essential to recognise the irreplaceable role of human lawyers. AI may excel at pattern recognition, data processing, and predictions, but it cannot replicate human empathy, nuanced thinking, or ethical judgment. These qualities remain the backbone of effective legal representation.

While AI amplifies capabilities and streamlines processes, it serves to enhance human judgment rather than supplant it. This belief is shared by legal professionals, with 41% expressing excitement about AI keeping humans in the loop while allowing them the time to tackle more complex or strategic responsibilities. However, staying competitive in this shifting landscape will require lawyers to develop AI literacy and strategic thinking, enabling them to work alongside these tools effectively and unlock their full potential.

Whether crafting persuasive arguments, navigating complex client relations, or addressing broader societal issues through law, human oversight and leadership will always be essential.

Adapting to change

The integration of AI into the legal profession is not a matter of "if" but "how." Adapting to this change effectively will require a combination of strategic planning, education, and action:

1. Start small and build confidence

Firms should initially adopt AI in manageable areas where it can provide immediate benefits.

2. Invest in training

Firms must prioritise upskilling their workforce. Training programmes that foster AI literacy and demonstrate practical applications should be in place.

3. Foster a culture of innovation

Leadership must encourage openness to technological change. Foster a positive narrative around AI to drive meaningful adoption.

4. Maintain ethical standards

Regular reviews, clear policies, and human oversight are critical to ensuring that AI tools are implemented ethically and responsibly. As regulation adapts compliance and security must be the key priority.

5. Collaborate and prepare for future needs

Ensure readiness to adapt as tools evolve, securing a competitive edge in the increasingly AI-driven legal landscape.

The future of AI in the legal sector is an exciting prospect, filled with opportunities to enhance efficiency, expand capabilities, and provide better outcomes for clients. However, the partnership between humans and technology will underpin its success.

Overcoming fears

The introduction of artificial intelligence into the legal industry has sparked curiosity and excitement, but it has also raised understandable concerns.

Addressing concerns

The hesitation around AI often centres on three main areas: job displacement, data security, and control over decision-making. While each of these concerns are valid, they can be mitigated through awareness and preparation.

1. Job displacement

AI frees up professionals to focus on complex, value-driven activities. Importantly, legal success still relies on human empathy, strategy, and decision-making, qualities AI cannot emulate.

2. Data security

When implementing AI, law firms need to prioritise robust data governance policies and choose systems designed with security as a foundational feature. when looking for AI systems, ensure they provide a black box so your data remains yours and not used to train the LLM.

3. Control over decisions

AI tools are designed to function as assistive systems. They support decision-making with data and insights while ensuring human professionals maintain full oversight and accountability.
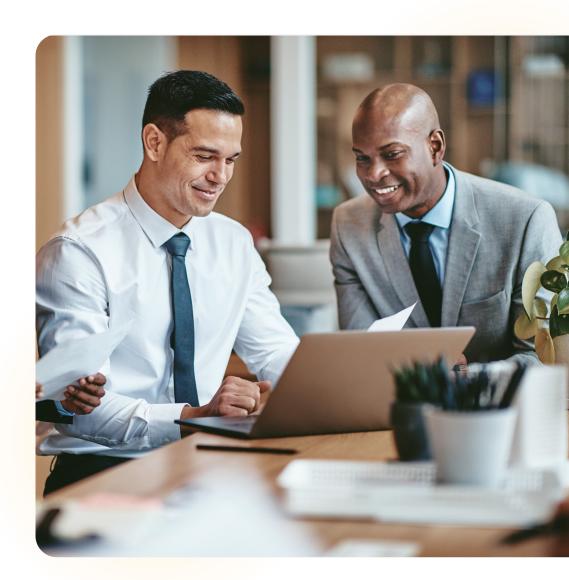
Reframing AI

AI can be likened to breakthroughs from the past, such as the introduction of computers or dedicated legal software. Initially new and somewhat intimidating, those technologies quickly became indispensable tools, streamlining workflows and enhancing productivity. AI now follows a similar trajectory, offering capabilities that amplify the work lawyers do best.

Additionally, AI allows firms to develop more innovative service offerings. By enhancing processes like legal research, time tracking, and compliance monitoring, teams can refocus their attention on creating meaningful strategies for clients. Recasting AI as a supportive partner rather than a competitor can transform it into a core ally of legal professionals aiming to excel in a changing environment.

The integration of AI into the legal industry is no longer a question of *if* but *how*. By proactively adopting AI solutions in-house, your firm can retain control, safeguard sensitive data, and prevent information from entering the public domain. AI offers unparalleled opportunities to streamline processes, reduce administrative burdens, and refocus efforts on delivering exceptional client service.

Empower your team to use AI ethically and effectively, ensuring it aligns with your professional standards and strategic goals. The future is here, and with the right approach, AI can become your firm's most empowering ally.

Secure your firm's future with OneAdvanced AI. Trusted, safe, and built to evolve with your needs. Explore today

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Powering the world of work

OneAdvanced powers over 30,000 legal professionals with software automation that delivers increased productivity and agility, using modern security protocols and built-in regulatory compliance to help protect law firms from financial penalties and business disruption.

As well as our AI offering our legal software portfolio includes Practice and Case Management, Time Capture, Document Management, Legal Forms, The National Will Register, and Performance & Talent Management.

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