How AI Will Actually Transform the Legal Industry

A look at AI use cases finds that despite all the hype, attorneys' jobs are secure for now.

Peter Wallqvist, iManage, Law Technology News

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As we enter the age of artificial intelligence (AI), there are some concerns in the legal profession that AI could soon replicate their work or threaten their jobs. As we examine the real-world use cases for AI for legal professionals, we quickly see that, despite all the hype, attorneys' jobs are secure for now: AI will not be writing briefs, interviewing witnesses or arguing cases anytime in the near future.

Content and Knowledge Management Transformed

AI is changing the legal industry—just not in the ways that many expect. One area where AI is most transformative is in content and knowledge management. With AI, auto-classifying documents so they may be used based on their content and extracting key information from content has forever changed.

Previously, this was a long, boring and often error-prone task that lawyers disliked. Too much time was spent and many opportunities were lost due to not having relevant content at hand. Modern law professionals always need the right content at the right time in the right place.

The era of simply searching for and finding documents has passed, replaced with the need to extract and distil the information held from within documents—just like humans do, but much faster and more accurately. AI now automates this process, reducing time and effort while also improving accuracy by limiting the chances of human error.

Rather than having lawyers secluded in a room for weeks or more, reviewing and extracting privileged information from thousands of documents and contracts, law firms and in-house counsel can now complete this task in a very small faction of time (often hours) while securing better results.

For example, the Serious Fraud Office, a UK-governmental agency in charge of prosecuting complex cases of fraud and corruption, recently used AI to help a team of investigators sift through 30 million documents. With AI, the team processed 600,000 documents per day—a target that would be nearly impossible for a human work staff—allowing investigators to save many months of work. Without the use AI search capabilities, the investigation quite likely would never have completed.

The Evolving Role of Tomorrow's Law Professional

AI innovations are currently being used mainly for e-discovery, research, business processes, basic analytics or analysis, where they speed up many of the mundane elements of legal work. With the deployment of AI in the legal ecosystem where lawyers, firms, general counsel and clients are beginning to embrace such technologies, we're seeing that lawyers are increasingly becoming more productive, efficient and accurate. Their roles have become less labor and time intensive and there is a gradual shift and change to focus on interpreting the output.

For modern lawyers and law firms, AI provides the opportunity to rethink legal service offerings through automation—services that would have been impossible previously due to the disproportionate spend in time and cost.

Legal professionals are rapidly discovering AI's ability to organize, discover and summarize information. Automation can dramatically increase efficiency, reduce risk, and deliver valuable insights, benefits that enable legal professionals to deliver better business outcomes for their clients that demand and expect fast, accurate legal advice.

The legal sector has started embracing technology. According to the ALM 2015 Law Tech Survey, 95 percent of firm leaders and technologist respondents agreed with recent decisions by management regarding the firm's technology. This is a welcome time of promise, opportunity and growth for modern law professionals of today and tomorrow.

Now is the time to act as AI promises to be a real advantage for innovative law firms around the globe having to deal with the exponential rate of legislative evolution and technological change. Busy lawyers can now focus on interpreting the output and analyze legal documents like contracts and leases, identify information which is privileged or subject to compliance and automate document classification for easier search and governance.

Peter Wallqvist is VP of Strategy at iManage. He started his career in the information retrieval industry as a research engineer at BT Research at the turn of the millennium. From there he went on to being part of delivering some of the largest and high profile search and unstructured data processing systems in the world. In 2010, he co-founded AI pioneer RAVN Systems, which was acquired by iManage in 2017.