

How Artificial Intelligence is Already Transforming Legal Services

In this edition of AI roundup, we take a look at the ways artificial intelligence is being implemented in today's legal departments.

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September 7, 2016 | [0 Comments](#)



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The biggest names in legal technology came together last week for the International Legal Technology Association's (ILTA) annual conference, bringing with them insights on the latest trends and technologies transforming the marketplace. Paramount among discussions, demonstrations and predictions was artificial intelligence (AI), but the topic was not confined to the (near) future tense. Rather, as indicated by titles of sessions like "Choosing the Right Artificial Intelligence for the Job," AI's place in law is very much in the present.

[As observed](#) by ILTACON-attendee [Adi Elliott](#), vice president of market planning at Epiq Systems, "Machine learning and artificial intelligence were mentioned in virtually every session about the future of legal technology. While predictive coding has been around for years, these were by the far the most talked-about

industry trends at ILTACON 2016. Both were discussed primarily in the context of benefits, such as time gained, cost transparency and efficiency."

As readers of this magazine can attest, machine learning's benefits are becoming increasingly known and adopted in document review, and riding this hype is Microsystems, which used ILTACON to both announce a PDF cleanup feature (which converts PDFs to Word docs then uses "artificial document intelligence" to identify and remove errors and unnecessary coding) and the use of its Contract Companion tool at Drexel University Thomas R. Kline School of Law for a course in contract drafting.

What Microsystems and the interest generated in the programs signaled, however, was not so much innovation as the new norm in law. As Microsystems CEO Stacey Kacek [admitted](#), AI's use is "still pretty limited," but nevertheless it's [increasingly deployed in many law firms](#) around the world.

In scaling back premonitions of a future where robots rule courtrooms, Microsystems vice president of product development David Cook noted at ILTACON that while some view AI as replacing people, the idea is better broken down to a simple idea: let the computers do what they do well and let people do what they do well. As an example, he noted that while people are bad at repetitive tasks, computers are bad at advocacy.

While the industry begins finding comfortable footing with AI's presence in the workflow, those that have been anticipating inevitable change used ILTACON as a grounds to balance predictions made by renowned legal technology scholar Richard Susskind over 20 years ago with the state of law today.

In the session "Grading Susskind: The State of Legal 20 Years After the 'Future of Law,'" the panel discussed how the [legal industry's collective resistance](#) to technology has at times held it back from technological progress already making strides in other industries, such as medical and financial. According to panelist Susan Hackett, CEO of Legal Executive Leadership, "what holds [legal] back is behavioral," and while change is already underway, legal professionals "can't accept it."

Problematic to law is the notion of perfection, she added, as in the lawyer's mind, for something to be valid, "everything has to be 100 percent" accurate. This, however, contradicts expectations of most businesses, and law firms are increasingly being called upon to operate as such.

"Lawyers have become part of a much larger team of service providers and people that are not playing a formal legal role," Hackett said, listing those with technology, financial and data expertise as part of this new workforce.

Yet when weighing law's adoption of technology against the actual capabilities of technologies across other verticals, Gilbert + Tobin chief operating officer Sam Nickless noted that while "you give Susskind an A for predictions," the legal industry has fallen far behind. However, he added that while law is struggling to keep up with change in other industries, greater change will likely be underway in the next five years, shifting legal technology from sustaining to transformative.

Outside of the Bubble, the World Takes Note

Legal technology is often criticized as being [insular](#), followed regularly by a devoted set of hobbyists that don't represent the state of the legal industry. While there's much room to bring new firms and practitioners into the fold, the world beyond law itself is taking note of AI's impacts on the industry.

In a [Forbes](#) article discussing how AI is set to transform legal services, author Mark Cohen notes that at present, "technology has already produced a new class of support professionals that work with lawyers," allowing lawyers the time to "interpret data, render professional judgement, and perform functions that require professional training."

As for machine learning's role in the mix, Cohen writes that given changes fueled by tech advances, globalization and the financial crisis, "it's no surprise that AI is rapidly becoming a staple in the delivery of legal services." At present, he notes that AI, not labor arbitrage, is being viewed as "the engine for a 'better, faster, cheaper' delivery of certain legal services":

"AI's impact on the corporate end of the legal market is in its incipient stage, but its impact on efficiency, risk mitigation, and dramatically shortening the time and reducing the cost of human review is significant."

Forbes isn't novel in realizing AI's implications. For example, the [Huffington Post](#) noted this week that "new lawyer are having a hard time finding jobs upon graduation from law school" while "established lawyers are facing threats to their way of doing business by technology-enabled companies." Similarly, [ZDNet](#) recently spoke with Morgan Lewis CIO Michael Shea about how his law firm is using AI to respond to client demand. Additionally, international law firm Reed Smith tested RAVN Systems technology in interpreting and extracting key provisions from client leases. As The Law Society Gazette reported, "the firm will definitely be using [the technology] again."