

The News of Attorneys' Demise Has Been Greatly Exaggerated (With Apologies to Mark Twain)

Some warn that the world's first artificially intelligent attorney is imminent, but replacing lawyers is not on the horizon

Stacey Kacek, Microsystems, Legaltech News



Credit: Devrim/iStockphoto.com

There has been a great deal of coverage about the possibility of Artificial Intelligence (AI) replacing the legal profession, stimulated in part by a recent conference at Vanderbilt Law School titled “*Watson, Esq.: Will Your Next Lawyer Be a Machine?*”

Some warn that the world's first artificially intelligent attorney is imminent and that it is only a matter of time before technology gives rise to new ways of delivering professional services and ultimately replacing the traditional lawyer. Yet others think that the human element is critical to the practice of law and cannot be so easily replaced.

While AI has come a long way, replacing lawyers is not on the horizon.

Larry Bridgesmith, an adjunct professor at Vanderbilt Law who helped coordinate the school's Law and Innovation program, [argues that](#) "(computer solutions) can assist attorneys at rapid rates to address any of the research issues and natural language sources, but it still takes the discipline and professionalism of a lawyer (to use)."

Our clients in the legal profession tend to share Bridgesmith's view. Those firms that have looked at solutions like ROSS tell us they don't see a broad application to their organizations in the near future. Even those practices with the most leading edge approach to technology explain that these systems, while theoretically interesting, lack necessary content and don't provide practical solutions to the challenges their law firms confront.

The general consensus is that the place for computers in the practice of law is as a tool to maximize human efficiency — to make lawyers more productive, effective and accurate — with the ultimate goal of improving client service and relationships. As business owners, the partners we speak with are focused on how to better serve the needs of their clients through practical applications of technology.

It seems that technology-driven organizations that want to remove actual lawyers from the practice of law are forgetting what buyers want. Sure, buyers want less pricey legal services, but not at the expense of losing the human component. They still want counsel and strategy customized to their unique situation.

To suggest that artificial intelligence can replace a lawyer is to misunderstand the value of a lawyer and the needs of their clientele. Computers can only perform what their algorithms permit. Algorithms cannot fully model or replicate a lawyer's understanding, analysis or experience. AI only succeeds in constrained environments and activities.

Talk to my... Surface Pro!

Lawyers do not compute, they interact. Lawyers must be able to influence others, whether they are government officials or your next door neighbor. Lawyers are masters of the sometimes subtle and deep meaning of words. They know how to document and protect their client's interests. They know when to push, negotiate, cooperate, and concede. Lawyers are culturally, socially, and ethically aware. A good lawyer knows the difference between whether you can legally adopt your girlfriend, and whether you should.

But more than anything, lawyers provide confidence and peace of mind. In your darkest hour, your lawyer has your back and will fight for you. You can't throw your Surface Pro at someone and say, 'Talk to my lawyer.' Lawyers will never be replaced, but they have begun and will increasingly team with technology to represent their clients fully, effectively and at competitive cost.

The Ascendancy of Legal Technologies, Such as ADI

The more likely future for the legal profession will be based on an evolution of converging technologies that improve legal services delivery, making lawyers more efficient, accessible and impactful to their clients. These

include companies like Axiom Law, a firm that uses technology to streamline costs and accumulated expertise to help clients manage legal work more effectively; Legal Zoom, which automates replicable legal services (backed by limited time with an actual lawyer); and technology solutions like artificial document intelligence (ADI).

ADI has been growing in popularity for its ability to empower, strengthen and speed lawyers through repetitive, mechanical tasks, improving content quality, mitigating risk, identifying errors and inconsistencies, and increasing productivity and efficiency. Technology can do this tirelessly. Lawyers in turn are free to spend more time focused on critical issues, communication and meeting with clients, an outcome that is more valuable, and most importantly, easily billed.

Coming from a technology background, I understand the tendency to get excited about what technology can do and I applaud the innovation. But in business it's important to separate the theoretical from the practical. The problem with some ambitious technology companies is that they lose sight of their buyer. Too often, entrepreneurs and CTOs fall in love with their technology and forget the needs of the market. For AI to supplant the legal profession and to replace the human element in the practice of law, there will have to be a buyer who does not value human advice or counsel, and it is our belief that that consumer does not exist.

Stacey Kacek is the CEO of Microsystems.