How AI is Evolving the Practice of (Small) Law

For lawyers comfortable with the processes and methods on which they've relied for years, the AI phenomenon may still seem a bit too obscure. But the application of artificially intelligent-based tech tools is having a real impact on the way law firms practice and run their businesses. And while it may surprise some, such tools are even within reach for small law.

From legal research and eDiscovery to contract review and litigation management, legal tech companies are building scalable software and solutions that benefit firms of all sizes and can serve as a cost-effective alternative to the traditional means of practicing law. But to understand AI's place in the practice of law, it's important to realize what it means in a larger context. AI's current applications in law include:

- Helping lawyers perform due diligence and research
- Providing additional insights through analytics
- Automating processes (including writing) in legal work

AI is steadily changing the work of paralegals, litigators and legal researchers. Legal futurist Richard Susskind, who has spoken and written prolifically about the intersection of artificial intelligence and the law, says this transformation is already underway—and that law firms of all sizes must prepare for and adapt to the change—or get left behind.

Susskind, author of *The Future of Law* and *Tomorrow's Lawyers*, predicts: "Looking 30 years ahead, I think it unimaginable that our legal systems will not undergo vast change. I say this because I believe there to be three drivers of change that will combine to transform the legal landscape, radically and internationally."

The first driver, he says, is growing cost pressures on lawyers as corporate legal departments demand more value from their outside counsel. The second, Susskind explains, is "pressure flowing from the liberalization of legal services" and, in particular, from allowing so-called non-lawyers to compete in the legal marketplace. The third and, perhaps most ubiquitous driver, is information technology—especially the internet.

"They will not support, sustain and enhance the way that lawyers and law firms have worked in the past. Instead, these technologies—such as online dispute resolution and intelligent search—will fundamentally challenge and change legal work," Susskind says.

Real applications of machine learning are doing legal work faster than any human could—and at increasingly more reliable rates than humans. According to one recent study commissioned by AI contract review platform LawGeex, lawyers exhibited 85 percent average accuracy, compared to the 94 percent average accuracy rate achieved by AI software, based on research by professors at Duke University School of Law, the University of Southern California and Stanford Law School.

The study compared the results of a team of 20 top corporate lawyers with experience in reviewing non-disclosure agreements to those of LawGeex. It took LawGeex AI just 26 seconds to complete the task, while the lawyers took an average of 92 minutes.

This is just one example of the way AI is transforming legal work—but it's a strong proof point that demonstrates the real value the technology can bring to the notoriously inefficient practice of law. So, rather than view AI as a threat or invasion of the profession, small law (and all of law, really) would be well served to view AI as an ally—reducing the tedium associated with countless hours of legal research, discovery or contract review—and perhaps with decidedly greater accuracy.

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