Will AI Replace Lawyers?

Written by Andy Younes

It's safe to say that artificial intelligence (AI) has infiltrated our lives. The technology can be used to write compelling content, answer questions, and fulfill commands in a matter of seconds.

Despite the excitement this innovative technology holds, it's also raised a litany of concerns around whether it may eliminate jobs in the legal industry. These fears have been further exacerbated as advances, like ChatGPT and Harvey AI, open up new possibilities—not to mention the technology's recent acing of the Bar Exam.

But is AI going to replace lawyers? The short answer: No. If anything, AI is poised to help lawyers.

In this blog post, we'll examine the current state of AI in the legal industry, the advantages and drawbacks of the technology, and what AI means for all legal professionals.

The current state of AI in law

AI refers to the ability of machines to mimic functions normally associated with humans, like speech recognition. As of January 2024, more than half of in-house legal professionals (51%) say their company's leadership encourages legal departments to use GenAI tools, and more than a third (35%) require it.

As for *how* they're using it, most are turning to the technology to automate tedious tasks, like legal research, contract analysis, and document review.

Clearly, the majority of legal professionals aren't yet using AI to their advantage. So, what's holding them back? Let's dive into a number of pros and cons of AI in law.

The perks and pitfalls of AI

Like any new technology, AI has both benefits and downsides for the legal industry. Below, we've summarised some of the key ones that you should know about.

Pros

AI can save time. As any lawyer knows, legal work is filled with repetitive, mundane tasks that quickly fill up a day—whether it's researching laws or scouring through piles of documents. AI has the power to automate this work and complete it in a fraction of

the time. The result? Lawyers can focus on what truly matters, which can increase job satisfaction, improve their bottom line, and elevate client relationships.

AI promotes greater productivity. By streamlining processes and automating workflows, lawyers can be more efficient in their work. Take eDiscovery, as one example. Trained algorithms in machine learning can identify patterns in vast amounts of data and identify what information is relevant at an astonishing speed. This allows lawyers to finish tasks at a much faster rate.

AI can elevate lawyers' work. Legal professionals can use more sophisticated AI-powered tools to augment their work. These tools can assist with tasks like drafting legal documents, conducting legal research, and analysing contracts. In particular, document automation, which is offered through a legal software solution like Clio Manage, speeds up routine tasks and allows lawyers to focus on higher-level work that require human judgment, such as negotiation, advocacy, and counselling.

Cons

Mistakes happen. Misused source material and factual errors are common downsides associated with artificial intelligence. Compounding this challenge is the fact that technologies, like ChatGPT, don't provide sources for where information is collected from. As a result, many lawyers struggle to know what's true and what isn't—and must exercise increased caution when using them. While some practitioners experiment and try ChatGPT prompts for lawyers to test its capabilities, real client work requires secure, legal-specific tools like Manage AI.

It carries ethical concerns. Ethical considerations must be taken into consideration when using AI—including data privacy and security, the potential for misuse, and the risk of bias and discrimination.

Strategic work can be a challenge. Attorneys are skilled at arguing cases and challenging outcomes in a way that machines simply can't replicate. For instance, an attorney knows from experience if a client is withholding information, and can probe deeper to test versions of events. While AI can process and analyze data, it does not possess the critical thinking or emotional intelligence skills necessary for reading people. Plus, while humans can work with incomplete information, AI is poor at reasoning from it.

To sum it all up: it's unlikely that AI will replace human lawyers. This is largely because the technology lacks the ability to solve complex challenges, think critically, and even possess the empathy that's so critical to client relationships.

That said, there *are* areas where AI can be beneficial, such as in automating tasks and time tracking to help increase billable hours. That's precisely where its true power lies.

The potential impact of legal education

AI isn't only transforming how law firms work; it's also changing the way legal education is delivered.

In recent years, many law schools have evolved their curricula to include courses and training in AI and other technologies. Doing so is playing a profound role in equipping law students with the skills needed to thrive in this changing landscape, whether it's to use the technology for repetitive tasks, assess its accuracy, or protect client confidentiality.

As a result, many students are graduating with new skills that make them competitive. They can enter the workforce with the knowledge of how to construct legal arguments, and also stand out as an adopter of the latest in innovative technology and legal tools.

The future of legal with AI

Just as AI will augment, not replace, the work that lawyers do, so too will AI reshape the future of legal.

As we look to the future, here are three predictions for how AI will continue to shape the legal industry.

A changing regulatory landscape. As AI becomes increasingly prevalent in the legal profession, there will be an even greater need for new rules and guidelines to ensure that these tools are used in a way that's safe, ethical, and effective. As a result, we will likely see a crop of regulations emerge for AI in the legal industry. This means that lawyers must keep a pulse on the current regulatory landscape and closely follow how it evolves in the near future.

Access to justice will be top of mind. AI-powered legal tools have the potential to increase access to justice by making legal services more affordable and accessible. This is because it reduces the time to complete tasks, which means that law firms can pass those savings on to clients. However, there are concerns that AI could also exacerbate existing inequalities and widen the justice gap, due to biases inherent in the data sets.

Law firm structure will change. AI is likely to change the structure of law firms, with smaller firms having access to the same AI-powered tools as larger firms. This could level the playing field, making legal services more affordable and accessible. It may also lead to the creation of new types of legal service providers that specialise in AI-powered legal services.

So, is AI coming for lawyers? Our final thoughts

While it has the potential to reshape the legal profession, it is unlikely that AI will replace lawyers.

This is because AI simply can't perform tasks that require human judgment, like arguing a case before a jury, offering a creative strategy, or building lasting relationships with clients.

Rather than making lawyers obsolete, AI will instead serve to enhance their work. Used effectively, it can empower lawyers to be more productive, produce work with greater accuracy, and focus on more strategic tasks. In short, it can help them gain a competitive edge.

The legal industry is constantly changing, and it's more important than ever to stay informed on the advancements in AI and be prepared to adapt to the changing landscape. Training and education are a great way to keep a pulse on the industry.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.