

How data strategy and sophisticated training are integral to the future of GenAI in the legal industry

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The legal industry stands at a pivotal moment, driven by advancements in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) technologies that are challenging established norms in the legal profession. Successfully meeting the moment requires more than financial investment and enthusiasm — it calls for thoughtful adoption, robust training and careful measurement of these tools' impact on legal work. Law firms that embrace these changes while managing risks like data security and ethics will thrive in a tech-driven future.

Embracing better training methods is particularly crucial because, in addition to the technical complexity of the topic, the use of Gen AI tools brings a host of new ethical obligations.

The most successful firms will adopt a structured approach to research and development, focusing on use cases where GenAI outperforms human effort. Knowledge management and innovation teams can play a key role by guiding legal teams in leveraging technology and delivering measurable returns on investment.

Securing data and moving from 'data hygiene' to 'data strategy'

Every GenAI tool has its own set of rules (<https://bit.ly/4188BoO>) around security and how or whether it retains and incorporates user inputs. This means the first challenge for law firms is to establish standard operating procedures to prevent lawyers from exposing client data to public GenAI tools. Given how quickly a tool like ChatGPT can be prompted to do time-saving, non-client matter-related tasks, such as building a helpful report on current events about a company before a client pitch, firms that issue a blanket ban on the use of these tools risk limiting themselves. In addition, they run the risk of their employees covertly using GenAI technology anyway.

Beyond the privacy concerns around exposing confidential client data, public-facing AI tools like ChatGPT or Gemini are built for

generic usage and lack the sophistication required for complex legal work where decisions can often hinge on very specific nuances of language usage and applicability.

Secure, private GenAI models trained on mature legal databases or anonymized, firm-specific data can provide tailored outputs aligned with a firm's unique needs. For example, a data model trained on internal language, practice areas and workflows can generate recommendations or documents that adhere to established standards, such as a practice group's gold standard language for a conflicts of law clause. Such specific solutions unlock GenAI's potential while safeguarding confidential or proprietary information.

The potential value of this data increases the urgency of data hygiene — the process of identifying and rectifying corrupted, inaccurate or irrelevant data. However, successful law firms will move beyond merely curating their data and focus on leveraging it for strategic decisions. Information architecture must be at the core of broader data strategies, as the success of generative tools depends on access to high-quality, structured data outside the public domain. Whether they are built internally or purchased as a part of a subscription product, many firms are now leveraging privatized large language models (<https://bit.ly/4373wQx>) where this sensitive, but curated data can be processed safely.

Firms must also manage risks such as inadvertent data exposure, false information and biased outputs. Implementing robust audit trails and review mechanisms ensures that AI-generated results align with legal and ethical standards. Proactive risk management strategies protect the firm's reputation and build trust with clients concerned about the technology's implications.

Innovative training for a tech-driven future

The sprawl of GenAI directly impacts the methods and modes of training for legal professionals. The building blocks of lawyering with GenAI will stretch beyond lunchtime roundtable sessions, embracing more web-based resources that distill key concepts and provide practical guidance and visual aids. These on-demand resources can complement focused training — whether virtual or in person — that offers digestible, hands-on opportunities for lawyers to explore AI tools in real-world scenarios, building confidence and competence over time.

Embracing better training methods is particularly crucial because, in addition to the technical complexity of the topic, the use of GenAI tools brings a host of new ethical obligations. The American Bar Association's Formal Ethics Opinion 512 (<https://bit.ly/3BbliVP>) makes it clear that a lawyer prepared to leverage GenAI tools must know when to disclose the use of GenAI, when to obtain client consent before applying the tools to casework, how to supervise and work with other legal professionals and technologists, what level of understanding is necessary to use the tools with the required competence and how to protect client and firm data properly. Firms will be most successful when training programs integrate tools that support lawyers in meeting these obligations.

The legal industry will see GenAI moving rapidly beyond experimentation to systemic and operational integration.

Measuring the impact of training and GenAI adoption is equally important. Firms should use analytics to assess skill acquisition, productivity gains, client outcomes and satisfaction among legal professionals. Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as hours saved, error reduction and deliverable quality improvements offer valuable insights. These metrics help refine strategies and ensure alignment with organizational goals.

Clear communication with lawyers about the capabilities and limitations of GenAI tools will foster trust and engagement. Lawyers must meaningfully understand not only what GenAI tools can

produce but also where the use of these tools is aspirational or fundamentally limited. Internal newsletters, webinars and success stories educate lawyers about the technology and highlight effective GenAI usage, emphasizing its role in enhancing — not replacing — the skills central to legal practice.

The road ahead: a vision for 2025

The market is confident that GenAI will be transformative. Technology consulting and research firm Gartner predicts (<https://gtnr.it/4jllvT9>) that by 2027, AI global spending will soar to \$297.9 billion, growing at an annual rate of 19.1%. The legal industry will see GenAI moving rapidly beyond experimentation to systemic and operational integration. Predictions include exponential growth in agentic AI, where AI agents facilitate information exchanges directly across platforms to simplify the knowledge lawyers need to use GenAI.

By the end of the year, law firms that have integrated GenAI into their workplace culture will be well-positioned for the future. These firms will pair cutting-edge technology with strong commitments to data security, ethical standards and ongoing education while also leveraging robust analytics strategies to measure the efficacy of their GenAI programs and drive continuous improvement.

Achieving this vision requires careful planning and execution. By exhaustively experimenting with GenAI capabilities, demonstrating GenAI's practical benefits, implementing thoughtful data architectures, and designing comprehensive training and analytics programs, law firms can position themselves as leaders in the era of GenAI.

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