

Young Attorneys Using AI: The Benefits And Best Practices

By **Robert Klamser, James Le and Randall Reese** (December 17, 2024)

The increasing adoption of artificial intelligence in the legal profession has sparked debate about its effect on the professional development of a new generation of attorneys.

While some worry about limiting opportunities to learn foundational skills, the reality is far more promising: AI presents an unprecedented opportunity for young legal professionals to embrace the future of law practice while developing deeper and broader expertise more rapidly than ever possible before.

AI Adoption on the Rise

Law firms and legal departments are integrating AI into their workflows at increasingly rapid rates. In fact, AI adoption in the legal industry has more than doubled during this year, according to a 2024 LexisNexis survey.[1]

This transformation isn't just about keeping up with technology — it's about reimagining how legal services can be delivered more effectively and efficiently. The adoption of AI by legal practitioners is not new; machine learning and robotic process automation have been widely deployed for document review and e-discovery for years.

What is new is the advent of generative AI and the current zeitgeist to anthropomorphize these tools for efficiency gains.

While generative AI captures headlines, the legal technology landscape encompasses far more sophisticated and specialized tools. Modern AI-powered platforms can analyze vast databases of cases, statutes and legal documents to surface relevant precedents and insights that might otherwise take days to discover.

Machine learning algorithms excel at reviewing contracts and legal documents at scale, identifying potential issues and inconsistencies that human reviewers might miss.

Robotic process automation now performs dual key-entry tasks instead of human operators. Advanced AI tools can analyze historical case data to predict litigation outcomes and develop more effective legal strategies, while sophisticated systems continuously monitor regulatory changes and corporate documents to ensure ongoing compliance.

Young attorneys who master these tools position themselves as invaluable assets to their firms, capable of delivering deeper insights more quickly than their predecessors.

Increasing Earlier Exposure to High-Value Deliverables

Rather than stunting legal understanding, AI serves as a powerful learning accelerator for junior attorneys. AI can function as an intelligent "second chair," providing real-time validation of research and analysis.



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Like modern driver assistance systems, AI offers guardrails that help new attorneys develop confidence while maintaining safety. The ability to process more cases and documents quickly exposes young attorneys to a broader range of legal scenarios, accelerating their practical experience.

By automating routine tasks, AI tools free up time for junior attorneys to engage in more strategic work earlier in their careers. Young lawyers can dedicate more time to developing crucial skills like client-relationship management, strategic planning and complex problem-solving.

The technology allows for more direct involvement in high-stakes matters that would traditionally be reserved for senior attorneys, accelerating professional growth and expertise development. Law firms that embrace AI tools not only benefit from more capable junior attorneys, but also demonstrate a commitment to providing their employees with more fulfilling careers.

A July survey by Thomson Reuters[2] found that 42% of respondents said that the change that they'd most like to see in their profession was more time spent on engaging, judgment-based or expertise-driven work.[3] That was also the area where respondents said that they expected to see the most progress made over the next five years, only after increasing innovation.

By comparison, the same study shows that employees' fears over AI causing widespread job loss are falling quickly, with only 10% of respondents expressing that concern, down from 19% just a year earlier.

The experience of early adopting law firms confirms the level of junior attorney interest in these opportunities.

For instance, in October, Latham & Watkins announced[4] the launch of its AI Academy, which it describes as a "first-of-its-kind program in the legal industry designed to equip lawyers to navigate the significant changes that artificial intelligence will bring to businesses." Latham held its inaugural training event for a group of 125 first- through fourth-year associates, and The American Lawyer[5] reported that the firm had more demand than they had seats available.

Testing the Waters

For attorneys and legal professionals who don't know where to begin in exploring and adopting AI into their practices and law firms, it can seem overwhelming. To make this exploration less daunting, they can start by thinking about a specific problem or challenge they have encountered and then search for a tool that specifically can address that.

Generative AI platforms may not be the place to start if you're in need of a contract review tool. Hate entering your time by the end of the month? Utilize an automated timekeeping agent that recognizes your work habits. The important thing is to try something and not be intimidated by it. AI can be one tool in the tool kit rather than changing your entire practice.

Focus on specialized legal AI tools, rather than general-purpose platforms, and prioritize solutions that integrate with existing workflows and offer strong training and support resources.

Ethical Considerations and Best Practices

As AI becomes more integrated into legal practice, incorporating an AI policy that complements existing ethical standards is critical. Attorneys must understand their obligation to supervise and validate AI outputs, ensuring accuracy and compliance with legal and ethical standards.

As the saying goes, trust but verify. This includes maintaining client confidentiality when using AI tools, understanding the limitations of AI technology, and being transparent with clients about AI usage in their matters.

Most AI tools claim some level of data security; their marketing brochures are often embossed with Amazon Web Services, Azure or Google Cloud logos and fancy acronyms. However, AI systems are a web of interdependent applications, all of which must maintain high-level information security standards to avoid compromise. Understanding how the underlying information is processed, hosted and used by your provider is crucial to protecting your clients.

Best practices for ethical AI use in legal practice include maintaining detailed records of AI assistance, implementing robust verification processes for AI-generated content, and regularly updating knowledge about AI capabilities and limitations. Firms should establish clear policies about acceptable AI use cases and require human oversight. Young attorneys can take the lead in developing and implementing these ethical frameworks, positioning themselves as thought leaders in responsible AI adoption.

In addition, there continues to be rapid change and continuing uncertainty regarding the use of AI tools, especially generative AI tools, in the representation of clients. Rules governing their use vary by court, or even by judge.

As of Dec. 16, a review of Ropes & Gray's Artificial Intelligence Court Order Tracker[6] shows that there are at least 60 separate standing orders and local rules nationwide regarding the use of AI tools. Some judges have already issued, and then rescinded, orders governing AI usage in their courts. Therefore, diligence is required in maintaining compliance with applicable rules, particularly for attorneys who may frequently practice in multiple jurisdictions.

Young attorneys who embrace this technology position themselves at the forefront of legal innovation. They become not just practitioners, but pioneers, helping to shape how legal services will be delivered in the decades to come.

For law firms and legal departments, supporting young attorneys in AI adoption creates improved efficiency, better work-life balance, enhanced client service and accelerated professional development. This combination makes AI adoption a "win-win-win" for professionals, firms and clients alike.

The future of legal practice belongs to those who can combine traditional legal expertise with technological fluency. Young attorneys have a unique opportunity to lead this transformation, using AI not as a replacement for legal thinking but as a powerful tool to augment and enhance their professional capabilities.

As AI technology continues to evolve, those who embrace it early and thoughtfully will be best positioned to shape the future of legal practice and deliver superior value to their clients.

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[1] <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/blog/future-of-law/explore-the-growing-appetite-for-legal-ai>.

[2] <https://www.thomsonreuters.com/content/dam/ewp-m/documents/thomsonreuters/en/pdf/reports/future-of-professionals-report-2024.pdf>.

[3] Approximately 57% of respondents to the Thomson Reuters survey reported working in the legal profession.

[4] <https://www.lw.com/en/news/latham-watkins-hosts-first-of-its-kind-ai-academy>.

[5] <https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2024/10/31/welcome-to-lathams-ai-academy-now-accepting-internal-applications/?sreturn=2024111414045>.

[6] <https://www.ropesgray.com/en/sites/Artificial-Intelligence-Court-Order-Tracker>.