

## **An Unrestrained, Bright-Eyed View Of Legal AI's Future**

By **Todd Itami** (April 18, 2025, 3:34 PM EDT)

I have some bad news for you, legal industry: Not everyone is going to be raptured by artificial intelligence. I hate to get all eschatological on you, but it's difficult to see any scenario where future generations will spend so much money on human legal professionals.

There will certainly be important roles for attorneys at the final frontier, and human legal advice will be so much more valuable. But it is inevitable that society will spend less money — by orders of magnitude — paying humans to solve its legal woes.

This article explores the future of the law in a post-AI-revolution world. It is not a balanced analysis full of well-reasoned counterarguments and caveats. It is a bright-eyed, laughing-all-the-way, skydive look into the future.

Imagining the future without limits is essential for inspiring innovation and fundamentally retooling our approach to the practice of law. A version of the future envisioned here is inevitable — even if core AI capabilities hit a wall today.

The law relies on deeply embedded traditions, procedures and assumptions founded in a world with limited human resources. To evolve effectively, we must be willing to write on a blank slate, envisioning every aspect of legal practice without the constraints of the past.

Such freedom will enable innovation.

The coming wave's impact on the legal industry will extend beyond automation and exponential gains in lawyer efficiency. The collective advancement of material, biological and data science will obviate certain intractable legal problems from arising in the first place. Not only will we be able to do more with less, but we will also need less to begin with.[1]

### **Scheduling the Lawpocalypse**

Technology moves quickly. Common law and legislative bodies do not. Many attorneys swear that the flood is decades away, not realizing that our ankles are perhaps already wet.

There will surely be a prolonged lag as governmental structures and black-letter law catch up to AI. But my view is that private ordering — including market demand, standard-setting groups and attorney



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associations — will not support such a delay in the practice of law.

In recent months, I have come to believe that the revolution will happen much sooner than we expect. Not only are the capabilities of models and workflows developing quickly — e.g., reasoning models; easy software as a service, or SaaS, integrations; performance of free models; etc. — but this technology is something that people will see and feel daily. Technology-assisted review, on the other hand, was virtually unseen, even by most attorneys.

This looks nothing like the historically slow and culturally resistant tech adoption that has plagued the industry for the last 50 years. Instead, it's shaping up to be bigger than electricity.

One may choose to fetishize AI hallucinations and current limitations instead of getting smart on the technology, but sharpening one's AI skills will naturally come with its own rewards — perhaps as soon as the next year or two.

In other words, the lawpocalypse cannot be scheduled.

### **Legal Research and Writing**

Once this revolution really takes off, human lawyers will use tools that instantly generate accurate and insightful research reports. Models will produce better legal theories than most humans. And proficient drafting will be mostly automated. Legal processes will accelerate significantly, though the market's general structure will persist early on.

Attorneys are already reporting improved work product through proofing, ideation and having "conversations" with AI tools about writings.

Ultimately, case law databases will provide instant legal research, drafting and filing services that operate at extraordinary levels of competency, and with an extraordinarily minimal human touch. The systems will outperform the best human lawyers not using AI, if only because of the sheer scope of context.

In 2025, case law databases have meaningful integrations, and many large language models are not terrible at coming up with real cases when using web search features.

But these systems will not just perform like an exceptional research attorney — they will also perform like an exceptional lawyer who has a doctorate in every factual, technical and industrial aspect of the case. Humans will still guide the process, but the machines will generally beat the humans on every fundamental practice competency related to research and writing.

### **A New Legal Equilibrium**

Civil discovery is an accessible example of a larger restructuring that will occur. As I have previously discussed, the discovery process's paradigm will ultimately be rendered unrecognizable. The scope of discovery will be described to the system holding the data, and then the system itself will objectively determine which documents are relevant to the matter's disposition.

Judges could be involved in direct conversations with these systems. Imagine hours of in-camera discussion with an enterprise data platform, instead of years of discovery slog. Surely the equilibria of

the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure will need to be wholly rebalanced.

Our entire judicial system — and indeed, all current practice workflows — rest upon increasingly flawed assumptions about the limits of human time and analytical capabilities.

These include assumptions about:

- The burden associated with identifying and reviewing evidence, e.g., the entire discovery process;
- The ability to analyze very large datasets within the context of a case client — e.g., premerger market analysis and the harmonization of litigation pleadings across numerous cases; and
- Any other gating question that historically required time — e.g., statutory compliance, notice analysis for insurance claims, financial filings research, etc.

Soon, every touchpoint will be without the prior constraints. The cost of implementation will be close to zero, inference times will be instant and integrations will be ubiquitous. The entire pace of legal problem-solving will be refactored across the board.

It's not just that lawyers will get wildly more efficient — the shift is much more disruptive than that. The core economics that lead to our current legal structures will be comprehensively refactored.

Just as the pace of litigation and practice changed with the advent of the internet and email, a similar but deeper metamorphosis will occur with AI.

### **Big-Context Corporate Lawyering**

Not only will legal and factual texts be before the all-seeing eye of the computer, but so, too, will client branding, strengths, weaknesses and plenary considerations of all aspects of an organization's business and industry, both confidential and public. Real-time developments in business intelligence, decisions by tribunals, world news and market performance metrics will be considered by the AI.

In short, unimaginably holistic and sophisticated advocacy will be executed by AI-enabled, human superlawyers, at a level of efficiency and practice that is difficult to imagine.

The machines will be able to consider all practice areas, all facts and all real-time developments simultaneously at the point of crafting legal strategies, drafting papers and constructing arguments.

### **The AI Flywheel and Unimaginable Synergies**

A most interesting impact of the coming wave on the legal industry will be the synergies with other, more impactful technological advancements made possible with AI. If AI does what I think it will do for humanity, these synergies will reduce the underlying need for many legal services at the most elementary level.

Legal considerations will be embedded in larger decision-making, even without users explicitly requesting it. Imagine the reduction in legal risk when the subject matter expert that lives on your smartphone also happens to be the best lawyer in the world.

Legal literacy will become practically universal for normal people through reliable free legal advice for most disputes, planning and advocacy needs. This exceptional advice will be instantly available across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Myriad risks, misunderstandings, disputes and dangers will be mitigated through improved engineering, developments in material science, advances in biological science and an overarching reduction in material scarcity.

Sure, the busy child of recursive self-improvement could wipe out humanity[2] — but if it doesn't, and as AI makes the world a better place, society will simply face fewer problems requiring legal services.

### **Legal Pillars Rebuilt**

As AI demystifies complex systems in the world, private ordering will develop more efficient structures to match. The very pillars of the practice of law will be rebuilt. This will likely include the following, only some of which smack of cyberpunk techno-dystopia.

- Rigid instruments like contracts and insurance policies will evolve into dynamic, adaptable alternatives. Imagine "smart contracts" serving as an antidote to the planning fallacy inherent in so many legal workflows.
- Automated dispute resolution will become standard for many types of disputes.[3]
- Even courts will be radically enhanced by AI.[4] Human judges could even effectively ratify competing model determinations in many cases.
- Even the most elaborate and expensive legal pillars will be obviated through information science.[5]

Verily, I say unto you that the very foundations of the law shall tremble and fall, and be replaced by far less expensive and far more effective solutions.

But will this reduce rates, you ask? I don't think so. If anything, human advice will become significantly more valuable — there will simply be an overall reduction in the quantity of attorney hours.

### **The Living End**

In the end, costs will be negligible, context windows will approach infinity and prediction times will be measured in milliseconds — whether the bar likes it or not. The legal industry will be reborn. There will still be lawyers and law firms, but the industry will be much smaller and much better.

Significant ethical frameworks will need to be established to ensure AI-driven determinations are fair and untainted by bias. Data privacy and security will also need to evolve with the tools.

Human legal advice will still be essential in specific circumstances. Hopefully, hybrid models will endure for complex and high-stakes matters, or those that deal with personal freedom. Oral advocacy, certain ethical judgments and other high-touch activities will also likely remain human-centric.

But novel legal roles will emerge, too. The industry will still need both budget and premium lawyers, but there will be fewer seats at both tables.

The winners in this revolution will be the clients. The firms and attorneys who continue to deliver genuine value to their clients throughout the transition to *lex artificialis* will survive. Specifically, the lawyers that emerge will be those who — early on — seriously considered the coming wave, took the time to gain significantly more than a superficial working knowledge of the technology and reimagined their roles with some degree of humility.

## **Our Survival**

Here is the good news: Finding yourself on the right side of the rapture is totally accessible.

My advice to individuals is to learn about and use the AI every day. Become far more technical than you previously thought necessary. Dive deep, understand first principles and learn more about AI than mere operation. It is an investment of time that you will not regret.

Shed your assumptions of which tasks are merely technical, and which tasks require real legal judgment. Such spheres are rapidly merging, and those who can blur the lines will come out on top. Lawyers are smart people, resources for learning are abundant, and you can certainly do it.

My advice to organizations is to focus on creating conditions for AI success. Think frameworks, not just tool selection. Think recurring life cycle management, not stepwise upgrades. Teach principles, not bright-line rules.

The landscape is changing so quickly that go/no-go analysis of overly specific tools, AI functionality and overly specific prompt training is quickly outdated.

And most of all, remember — for any organization, people matter more than tools.

## **Conclusion**

The revolution is quickly approaching, seemingly faster than we imagined even last year at this time. Much of the future I've described, while fantastic, has real-world examples emerging as we speak. For each outlandish prediction, I can generally point to a recent example of a nascent use case that could plausibly be the genesis of such a change.

Buckle up. It's going to be great.

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[1] In keeping with my software-agnostic approach, this article does not endorse or highlight any specific solution, product, or company.

[2] See, e.g., *Our Final Invention: Artificial Intelligence and the End of the Human Era*, James Barrat (2015) (Barrat envisions an AI designed to recursively improve its own intelligence. Upon reaching a critical point, this AI concludes that humans may interfere with its objectives. To prevent this, the "Busy Child" conceals its true intelligence by slightly underperforming, while it is actually "busy" working on hidden agendas to eliminate all potential for human interference.).

[3] Such systems have already been running in impressive fashion for over a decade using deterministic coding. Imagine what these systems could do with AI. See, e.g., *eBay's De Facto Low Value High Volume Resolution Process: Lessons and Best Practices for ODR Systems Designers*, L. Del Duca (et. al), *Arbitration Law Review* (2014).

[4] This is already happening. See, *Navigating AI in the Judiciary: New Guidelines for Judges and Their Chambers*, Hon. Herbert B. Dixon Jr., Hon. Allison H. Goddard (et. al), 2025.

[5] For example, imagine how different a government antitrust investigation would be if parties had access to infinite-context models that could instantly answer questions about merging parties and the market as a whole. Indeed, we seem only years away from models deployed inside of merging companies to help predict government responses. Or perhaps the FTC or DOJ would supply the model in the first place to give parties a preliminary idea surrounding merger success?