

- [Home \(/\)](#)
- [News \(/legal-it-news\)](#)
 -  [By Location \(/legal-it-news\)](#)
 -  [Global \(/global-news\)](#)
 -  [USA / Canada \(/usa-news\)](#)
 -  [UK \(/uk-news\)](#)
 -  [AustralAsia \(/australia-news\)](#)
 -  [Continental Europe \(/continental-europe\)](#)
 -  [Other \(/other\)](#)
 -  [Archive \(/other\)](#)
 -  [By Topic \(#\)](#)
 -  [Cloud \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/589a7-keyword-cloud\)](#)
 -  [Collaboration \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/f4679-keyword-collaboration\)](#)
 -  [Cost Recovery \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/94009-keyword-cost-recovery\)](#)
 -  [CRM \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/60a5a-keyword-crm\)](#)
 -  [Document Management \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/7199a-keyword-document-management\)](#)
 -  [Digital Dictation \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/005f9-keyword-digital-dictation\)](#)
 -  [eDiscovery \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/ea1d9-keyword-ediscovery\)](#)
 -  [Practice / Case / Matter Management \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/40e31-keyword-practice-case-matter-management\)](#)
 -  [Time Management \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/3f7ca-keyword-time-management\)](#)
 -  [Workflow / BPM \(/legal-it-news/by-keyword/7157e-keyword-workflow-bpm\)](#)
- [Video \(/videos\)](#)
- [Interviews \(/interviews\)](#)
- [Columns \(/legal-it-columns\)](#)
- [Events \(/events\)](#)
- [Jobs \(/legal-it-jobs\)](#)
 -  [Legal IT vacancies in the UK \(/legal-it-jobs/legal-it-vacancies-uk\)](#)
 -  [Legal IT vacancies in the USA \(/legal-it-jobs/usa-jobs\)](#)
 -  [Legal IT vacancies in other countries \(/legal-it-jobs/all-jobs\)](#)
- [Directory \(/legal-it-supplier-directory\)](#)

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- 14 AUGUST 2017
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Artificial Intelligence Is Already Impacting Legal Practice

26
May
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Nicole Black



This year there's been a lot of buzz about artificial intelligence and the ways that it will affect the practice of law. This happens in the legal tech space whenever a new technology emerges that has the potential to change the way that lawyers do business. As is often the case when a new type of technology emerges, there tends to be a lot of hype and speculation, which can sometimes make it difficult to separate fact from fiction. AI is no different.

While we're still in the early stages of AI technology, one thing is clear: the potential for change is incredible. But the timing and actual adoption of AI software into law firms is very much up in the air. Nevertheless, all signs point to AI having an indisputable impact on the way that law firms - both big and small - will function in the not-so-distant future.

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Not convinced? Consider the result of the recently released Deloitte study, "[Developing Legal Talent: Stepping Into the Future Law Firm](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/audit/deloitte-uk-developing-legal-talent-2016.pdf)" (<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/audit/deloitte-uk-developing-legal-talent-2016.pdf>), which I learned about when I recently participated in an ABA webinar on AI's impact on the legal profession. The central thesis of this report is that by 2020, the practice of law will be dramatically different than it is today, in large part due to the effects of technological change, with AI playing a large part.

For starters, one of the conclusions of the report was that 114,000 jobs in the legal sector will become automated within the next 20 years. And, according to the report, automation has already resulted in the reduction of 31,000 jobs in the industry, mostly in administrative roles. For lawyers, those most at risk are predicted to be entry level attorneys, and highly skilled lawyers will be safe from the reductions. The report indicates that demand for highly skilled lawyers will increase to 25,000 more by 2020.

Specifically, over the next 10 years, it is predicted that the following changes will likely occur because of changes in technology:

- Fewer traditional lawyers in law firms
- A new mix of skills among the elite lawyers
- Greater flexibility and mobility within the industry
- A reformed workforce structure and alternative progression routes
- A greater willingness to source people from other industries with non-traditional skills and training.

What exactly will a lawyer's life be like in 20 years, assuming these predictions are accurate? Richard Tromans, founder of Tromans Consulting, envisioned this very concept in a fictional account, "[Turing & Partners: An AI-Enabled Law Firm](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ai-powered-law-firm-turing-partners-richard-tromans)" (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ai-powered-law-firm-turing-partners-richard-tromans>). He describes an attorney arriving to work in a driverless vehicle and being granted access to his firm's building after facial recognition technology is employed. Next, he enters a mostly empty office, since most employees work remotely from home.



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As Tromans explained: "The firm's greatest expense was its technology. The huge server farm/data centres that hosted the firm's many AIs were where the majority of the firm's legal work took place... The other big costs were software licensing and legal tech experts, ranging from regular maintenance people to specialist White Hat lawyer-hackers who were needed to refine and risk-test the smart contracts they relied upon for nearly all the firm's work... The smart contracts were 'live', permanently hooked up to the networks of ownership, intellectual property and the log of financial transactions around the world. Everyone and everything was connected to the WBN, or at least anything that had a financial value or anyone with any kind of data record. Drawing up the smart contracts, each framed by the law of the relevant legal jurisdiction and the UN-established global protocols, was only one part of what Turing & Partners did for their clients. A lot of the other work was maintaining and modifying them as time went by, or litigating for those parties who believed the smart contracts had been unfair or had not been followed correctly."

In this firm of the future, outsourcing has ceased to exist and partners in the firm are scattered across the globe. Lawyers' work consists of overseeing the AI as it analyzed the contracts and then stepping in to negotiate and provide high level legal advice. Sounds interesting? Read the entire post to learn more and get a sense of the day-to-day life of a lawyer as perceived by one attorney with an eye toward an AI-impacted law practice.

Sure, it's purely speculative, but the possibilities are fascinating - and not entirely improbable. AI and the automation of much of the mundane aspects of transactional law practice will undoubtedly have a tremendous impact on the practice of law - and much earlier than you might think. So it's worth learning about how it might affect our profession so that you can take steps to position your practice and your firm to take advantage of the changes, rather than be displaced by them. One way to do that is to read the [Artificial Lawyer Blog](https://www.artificiallawyer.com) (<https://www.artificiallawyer.com>), which tracks the latest in AI technology and how it's being used by lawyers.

Mark my words: AI will undoubtedly change the legal profession. You can either resist its impact to your detriment, or take steps to acclimate and use it to your advantage. The choice is yours.

Nicole Black is the Legal technology Evangelist at MyCase, a cloud-based law practice management platform. She is an attorney in Rochester, New York, and is a GigaOM Pro analyst. She is the author of the ABA book Cloud Computing for Lawyers, co-authors the ABA book Social Media for Lawyers: the Next Frontier, and co-authors Criminal Law in New York, a West-Thomson treatise. She speaks regularly at conferences regarding the intersection of law and technology and can be reached at niki@mycase.com (<mailto:niki@mycase.com>).

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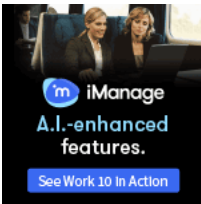
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