

AI is a game-changer for the legal industry

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8 Jan 2019

The drive to do business faster, more efficiently and with less risk, enhancing client experience and improving service delivery, is not unique to law.



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The steps that firms are taking to confront these challenges and shift from 'Big Law' to 'New Law' are varied and numerous. One important trend in 2019 and beyond is the rise in digital technology as the next big enabler in the delivery of legal services.

Developments in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, while only one small branch of opportunities in this space, present an exciting chance for all businesses to improve the way they deliver services. The leap in the technology trajectory in shifting to AI in law could be likened to the jump that occurred when e-mails replaced post.



Cathy Truter

Almost one year into using and training an AI tool called Kira to improve productivity in key legal processes, we have used it at Bowmans in over 30 live client projects with over 170 trained users. The technology has dramatically enhanced service delivery and presents many future possibilities.

As a starting point in the legal context, AI is proving its worth in contract reviews, where it automatically identifies and extracts information from structured and unstructured documents using machine-learning models. Currently being used primarily in the mergers and acquisitions and regulatory advice space to make processes faster and more accurate, reducing risks associated with these types of reviews, streamlining project management and doing away with a lot of the initial heavy lifting, AI's progress is being closely followed in the African legal community. More firms are sure to consider taking the leap in 2019.

That said, AI is still new to the legal market generally and understandably evokes a level of apprehension in some lawyers and clients who have not yet had an opportunity to immerse themselves in the technology. Yet the practical reality of AI is very different from the media articles and movies depicting a robot running amok with confidential information. It is the

people behind the technology who are critical to its success and the symbiosis between human and technology that opens a world of possibilities. Like any other technology or business tool, it is only as good as the data fed to it, as good as the training given to it, as good as the person operating it, and as good as the person interpreting the information it delivers.

As we see it, this type of investment of time, cost and energy is critical to the future-proofing of professional service firms and, based on feedback from clients, is a game changer in service delivery standards and expectations.

The results so far have been impressive and we are confident in predicting that the future is bright for the right combination of human and machine intelligence in Africa's legal services markets.



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