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What is Legal Automation? How law firms use AI to increase efficiency and add value for clients

NOVEMBER 1, 2021 2 MIN READ

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The story of technological innovation ushering in widespread changes to an industry is not a new one. Books, studies, and articles have been devoted to the changes in work practices caused by the pandemic alone. But the legal sector has always been hesitant to adopt new techniques and slow to adapt to more rapidly-evolving workspaces it comes into contact with. While many lawyers and firms may distrust the use of artificial intelligence in the legal sector, it is clear that the benefits – added value, increased efficiency, and reduced costs – significantly outweigh the risks of its use. Lexpert asked Gillian Scott, a partner specializing in Innovative Products at Osler to answer the most-asked questions about automated services and processes and how they can be adopted and integrated in Canada's law firms. Here are her insights into the cutting-edge technologies leading the next generation of legal services.

What is legal automation and which services is it most used in? How widespread is it throughout the profession, and how long has it been employed by lawyers and firms in use?

Legal automation is accomplished when we break down legal processes, or tasks typically performed by legal professionals, take some of those segments and embed them in technology. It is the crystallization or preservation of a piece of the "lawyer brain" in technology. The most prevalent legal automations involve complex high-volume work as well as common and repeatable tasks. We see them most frequently at work in high volume data collection, review, repeatable processes and document generation.

Lawyers and law firms have been using automation in various simplified forms in their legal work for decades. Think of a mail merge technology for addressing standard form letters, or automated tickler or reminder systems for deadlines in litigation. However, applications of legal automation have become increasingly more sophisticated, from culling large document review sets during document discovery in litigation, to pulling key terms from agreements in due diligence exercises. More recently, lawyers have been automating the generation of legal contracts and certain steps in a negotiation.

Automation is present in the practices of almost all lawyers and firms at a certain level when we are speaking about the most basic forms addressed above. For example, it would be rare at this point for a document review to be undertaken without e-discovery/document review software. However, the extent of the sophistication and penetration of automation across the industry varies widely between firms and practice areas.

Read more of Gillian's discussion on legal automation on *Lexpert.ca*

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