From cost centre to strategic partner

Empowering small legal teams with CoCounsel Legal UK

Thomson Reuters™

All in-house legal departments face wide-ranging challenges, cost constraints, and increasing business expectations, but for small teams within UK SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) which often face outsize workloads with limited resources, these issues are magnified. As they help their companies navigate today's volatile trading environment and complex regulatory landscape, they must be positive, proactive partners that can see the big commercial picture as well as the important legal details.

That requires time. Time to get to grips with unfamiliar areas of law, to think strategically, to weigh up the pros and cons (and the how-to's) of a course of action, to evaluate opportunities and risks, and much more, so they can give senior leaders and business colleagues the best possible advice.

Yet time is scarce for a small team, particularly when there are large volumes of contracts to be managed, fast-changing regulatory requirements to comply with, and multiple policies to keep up to date and fit-for-purpose. There's plenty to keep in-house legal departments at SMEs busy simply to maintain business-as-usual. But for those with growth ambitions, that are managing pan-European operations, or are expanding globally, the pressure is even more intense.

What's more, time is often of the essence in business-critical decision-making. Therefore general counsel (GCs) need to get up to speed quickly, and provide well-informed advice without delay, across a wide variety of business issues. Budgets for external legal advice may be more limited in small legal teams, so external legal spend must be deployed carefully. Meanwhile, increasing in-house headcount in line with demand may not be an option.

Against this backdrop, smaller legal teams must find ways to maintain (or improve) their effectiveness while boosting their efficiency so they can add real value, and Fiduciary-Grade AI™-powered tech tools are fast gaining traction as a solution. They can help by accelerating routine work and facilitating complex tasks including performing data analytics, surfacing hidden insights and enhancing visibility over legal matters and business issues.

In this white paper, we explore how AI tools designed specifically for the legal market can empower small in-house legal teams to do more with less, freeing up time so they can elevate their role from cost centre to business enabler, strategic partner, and even value creator.

Capacity in crisis: Growing workloads vs. static headcounts

Productivity — always a key preoccupation — is now fully front of mind, particularly for smaller legal teams. Tight budgets are getting tighter, so traditional options for getting the work done (i.e. outsourcing to external law firms or hiring more in-house professionals) may not be possible.

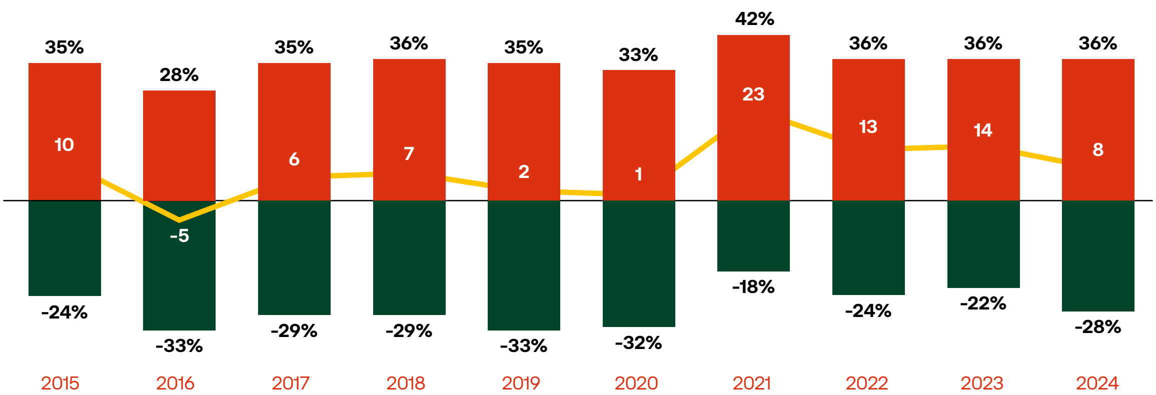
According to the Thomson Reuters® State of the UK Legal Market report, there has been a net decline in in-house legal departments' anticipated legal spend outlook (ASO) in recent years. Meanwhile, more than half (54%) expect to bring more work in-house over the next five years.

FIGURE 1:

UK Anticipated Spend Outlook (ASO)

Total legal spend anticipation: Global companies with £39m+ in annual revenue
(percentage of buyers planning to increase versus planning to decrease)

Plan to increase Plan to decrease Anticipated spend outlook



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

FIGURE 2:

GCs seeking to bring more work in-house

Proportion of work in-house in 5 years' time

Higher proportion will be in-house
Will have remained about the same
Lower proportion will be in-house
Unsure

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

81%

of legal respondents said their company has legal needs across multiple countries.

88%

of professionals favour using an AI assistant designed specifically for their industry.

At the same time, legal work is becoming increasingly complex and international in scope. Even organisations whose operations are predominantly based in the UK may need to navigate cross-border contracts with suppliers, stay ahead of tariff changes for exports and imports, or comply with other jurisdictions' regulations on, for instance, data protection and privacy.

Those with a broader footprint across Europe or beyond will need to navigate an even more intricate web of rules and requirements that apply in all their locations, while positioning themselves to enable the company to seize the opportunities this global reach creates. These are common concerns: the report found that 81% of legal respondents said their company has legal needs across multiple countries.

Capacity constraints could prove costly in financial and reputational terms if they cause legal teams to operate sub-optimally, from failure to comply with critical regulations or missing out on opportunities to leverage or renegotiate contract terms, to hampering organisational agility.

If adding more human resources (internally or externally) isn't on the table, then the answer lies in harnessing tech tools to make existing in-house legal professionals more productive. Those tools must be grounded in reliable legal intelligence and know-how and designed specifically to help legal teams thrive despite the challenges. Plus, they should be scalable to enable them to keep up with changing business needs and deliver the latest cutting-edge capabilities.

The AI divide: Not all AI assistants are created equal

Artificial intelligence is rapidly gaining traction, and more and more legal teams are starting to see the benefits of harnessing AI to streamline workflows, accelerate outputs, deliver vital intel, empower faster decision-making, navigate complexity, and ultimately control costs.

But not all AI is created equal. While general purpose, freely available tools like ChatGPT and Gemini may be useful for some non-legal tasks and may have acted as a testbed for people to explore and experiment with this new technology, it's clear that these are not suitable for legal work. Concerns around the security of confidential data, how models are trained, and where they draw their information from loom large. Moreover, these tools were never designed with the unique needs of legal users in mind. No wonder almost nine in ten (88%) professionals surveyed in Thomson Reuters Future of Professionals Report said they favour using an AI assistant designed specifically for their industry.

However, not all AI tools aimed at the legal market are created equal either. At one end of the scale are the legal AI start-ups that have entered the market in recent years. These typically simply wrap legal functionality around a generalist LLM, but their underlying AI models were not designed for legal use.

At the other end of the spectrum are tools such as CoCounsel Legal UK from Thomson Reuters that come from well-established legal market leaders who have decades of experience in the legal market and have spearheaded the development of AI for that sector over a long period. The differences are significant.

What matters here is not just what AI tools can do, but the value of the experience, content, knowledge, security, and support that underpin those models.

CoCounsel Legal UK: Embedded expertise and extensive legal content

Importantly, extensive legal capabilities and expert content are embedded into CoCounsel Legal UK's model from its very foundations. That matters because AI outputs are only as good as their inputs. CoCounsel is trained on, and has access to, unrivalled depth and breadth of proprietary legal content from Thomson Reuters Practical Law, Westlaw UK, and many other verified secondary sources in its repository. Lawyers already rely on Practical Law and Westlaw UK for vital legal research and know-how; knowing that AI tools rely on these same trusted resources creates enormous confidence in the results.

What's more, Thomson Reuters has hundreds of experts, both lawyers (working in their areas of expertise) and software engineers, building and testing its LLMs, vetting outputs, and iterating. This is not a recent development: it's the work of many years that new entrants to the legal space simply cannot replicate.

Enterprise-level data security is important, too. Thomson Reuters has long-standing experience implementing cloud-based solutions for legal customers and maintaining robust compliance with data protection rules. In addition, the level of support for onboarding and day-to-day operations is second to none. Users have direct access to our UK-based customer success team and solution consultants who understand customers' businesses and the market because they have been talking to them regularly for years, and who know the tools inside-out.

What matters here is not just what AI tools can do, such as sophisticated features and functionality, but the value of the experience, content, knowledge, security, and support that underpin those models. Whether you're a small in-house legal team or part of a much larger corporate legal department, all these aspects matter.

Use-cases in the spotlight: What can AI enable legal teams to do?

CoCounsel Legal UK delivers powerful capabilities that both automate routine processes and streamline complex work. The possibilities of what it can do are extensive and expanding all the time, but the most common and valuable use-cases for in-house teams include:

Contract drafting

CoCounsel can produce high quality first drafts of standard and complex documents, finding the best place to start, comparing changes to established playbooks, populating with appropriate information from internal databases, and incorporating know-how from resources like Practical Law, with all documents finalised within Microsoft® Word.

Contract review

CoCounsel can facilitate large scale document review. It analyses single or volumes of agreements to identify relevant material and extract key information, and directly links back to the source material for verification. Surface important insights ahead of contract renewals and renegotiations, accelerate review cycles for due diligence, disclosure, compliance, and privilege, and improve contract management.

Data privacy and security compliance

Even smaller companies with no cross-border footprint can still find themselves subject to the rules and regulations of other countries. Extraterritorial data protection and privacy rules such as the EU's GDPR, governing the use of citizens' data anywhere in the world, are a prime example. CoCounsel Legal UK provides the trusted resources necessary to help GCs advise their organisation on how to protect itself and its data, with access to expert intel on various data privacy laws and regulations.

Cross-border compliance

CoCounsel makes deep research and compliance monitoring quick and simple and delivers accurate, trustworthy results that are relevant to both UK operations and across borders as required. So, areas of regulatory risk across different jurisdictions are easy to spot and an organisation's obligations under a range of different rules are straightforward to understand. In addition to ensuring compliance, this insight supports well-informed strategic decision-making across the business.

CoCounsel can also automatically check for compliant (or non-compliant) language in contracts en masse, and create playbooks based on organisations' own gold standard precedents or specific regulatory requirements.

M&A transactions

Lawyers can harness CoCounsel to accelerate the due diligence process, identifying key contractual obligations, highlighting risks within commercial agreements, and ensuring that all corporate transactions comply with the applicable regulations.

Dispute resolution and litigation

CoCounsel can assist with contentious matters by quickly analysing documents such as witness statements for key information or to flag inconsistencies, summarising evidence and issues, building chronologies, sourcing case law, drafting arguments, and getting to grips with procedural rules.

In-house legal teams using AI could free up as much as 13 hours per week within the next five years.

From capacity crisis to strategic advantage

All of this transforms in-house legal's capacity crisis into competitive advantage and enables small teams to do more with less. Instead of reacting to events and being seen as a cost centre, even small departments are now empowered to be proactive to mitigate risk and enable the business to seize strategic opportunities, adding value as trusted business partners in the process.

These impacts are not theoretical, they are measurable. For example, CoCounsel Legal UK can:

2.6x

More than double your speed on document review and contract drafting, letting you focus on higher-value work.*

85%

Nearly all users find more key information with advanced review and analysis tools, enabling better, faster decisions.*

2x

Organisations with an AI adoption strategy are twice as likely to achieve revenue growth, expanding their competitive advantage.**

88%

of users report greater confidence in the advice.**

60%

Draft contracts up to 60% faster.**

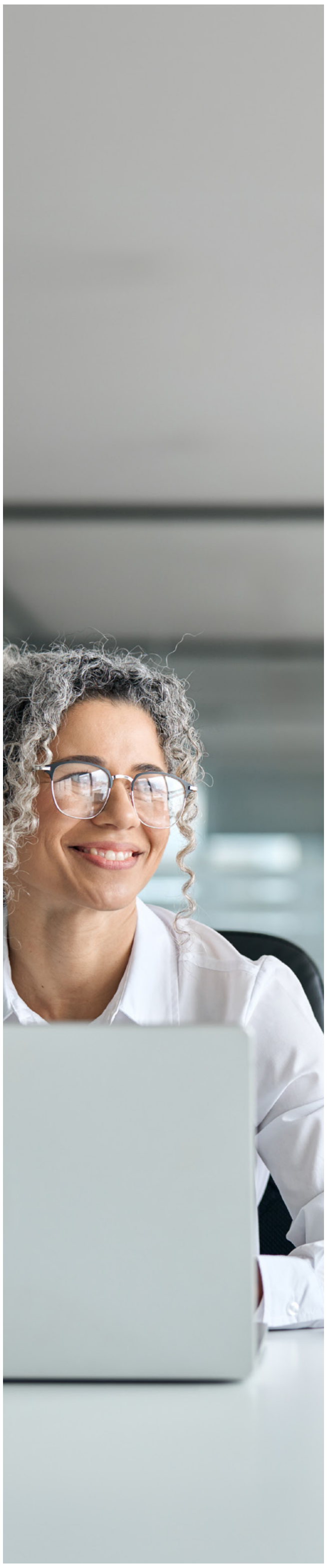
The result? More time to focus on higher value work. More headspace to deliver strategic advice. More capacity for lawyers to act as business partners, over and above their role as legal advisers. The Thomson Reuters State of the Corporate Law Department report revealed just how hard in-house lawyers work (putting in near 50-hour weeks on average), yet most still feel constrained by time limitations. But many also believe that professional-grade AI solutions could free up significant amounts of time, as much as 13 hours per week within the next five years.

These efficiency gains should ultimately translate into commercial success, by turning legal into a business enabler rather than a roadblock to progress. With AI putting in-house teams at the cutting edge of technology, they can play their part in building organisations that are at the forefront of their field today, and in the future.

* Time savings data from Thomson Reuters customer surveys and U.S. usage data, 2024.
** Thomson Reuters Future of Professionals Report 2025.

Why CoCounsel Legal UK is the right choice

CoCounsel Legal UK is the right choice for small in-house legal teams because it is:



Built for professionals

This is Fiduciary-Grade AI designed by lawyers for lawyers, underpinned by decades of experience in developing software solutions for the legal profession, and many years spent honing best-in-class proprietary AI models.

Designed for the UK market

Users can be confident that the outputs delivered by CoCounsel Legal UK are appropriate for the needs of UK-based lawyers, because they are grounded in the relevant information of Practical Law and Westlaw UK resources. Similarly, answers about EU, US, or other jurisdictions are grounded in equally authoritative content for those whose businesses have a multi-jurisdictional reach and cross-border legal needs.

Provides enterprise-grade trust

Both large corporates and smaller businesses can trust outputs delivered using Practical Law and Westlaw UK resources. Moreover, they can rely on CoCounsel Legal UK's enterprise-grade security and be confident that proprietary data will never be used to train its large language model.

Delivers rapid time to value

CoCounsel Legal UK provides an intuitive interface, guided workflows, extensive library of prompts and skills, and on-hand AI assistant — all of which means users can get to grips with their matters quickly and easily, encouraging engagement and accelerating ROI. Early users report 2.6x faster document review and contract drafting, with 85% saying they find more of the key information they need using CoCounsel tools, to inform faster, more confident decisions.

Scaling capacity, elevating impact

Legal teams can transform their role from reactive support to proactive business partners.

The reality is that the pressures UK legal departments are under are unlikely to dissipate any time soon as companies demand more and more from their legal advisers, and the impetus for GCs to add value by acting as a sounding board to the C-suite on business strategy grows. For small teams particularly, the answer to doing more with limited resources is to work smarter, not harder. In today's digital world, that means harnessing the power of AI to accelerate work outputs, bring clarity to complexity, and augment what humans can do.

As a comprehensive solution to manage regulatory compliance, reduce costs and enhance their strategic impact, CoCounsel Legal UK is empowering in-house lawyers in both large corporates and smaller businesses to achieve just that. By leveraging AI-driven features tailored to the UK market, legal teams can transform their role from reactive support to proactive business partners and play an important role in company success.

Experience CoCounsel Legal UK

Learn more about how **CoCounsel Legal UK** can elevate your legal team.

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