



**Navigating the  
AI-empowered  
lawyer journey:  
Creating confidence  
through capability**

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80%

of legal professionals believe AI will have a high or transformational impact in the next five years

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Like many professions, the legal industry is undergoing a major transformation as AI becomes a powerful force that cannot be ignored. With the complexity of legal work and client expectations around value continually increasing, lawyers are actively adopting AI to enhance how they research, draft, analyse, and deliver advice.

But while many recognise AI's potential as a critical tool for navigating business challenges and seizing new opportunities, some hesitancy remains. In this white paper, we explore how lawyers — whether in private practice or in-house — can navigate the path to AI empowerment, building the confidence and capability to use AI effectively in their work.

71%

admit they do not have a good understanding of the practical applications of AI

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## The AI confidence challenge

As innovation accelerates, the pressure to harness the power of AI is intensifying. More firms are seeing it as a competitive differentiator and recognising the impetus not to get left behind. Alongside the prospect of efficiency and productivity gains, using AI to enhance the quality, consistency, and speed of service delivery is also a prominent driver for adoption. Yet research reveals just how wide the gap between AI awareness and AI adoption still is, both on organisational and individual levels. According to the recent [Thomson Reuters Future of Professionals Report](#), eight of 10 legal professionals (80%) believe the rise of AI will have a high or transformational impact in the next five years. However, seven of 10 (71%) admit they do not have a good understanding of the practical applications of AI, and just three of 10 (30%) say they are regular AI users. Meanwhile, while almost half (46%) report that their firm or company has invested in new AI-powered technology in the past year, only a fifth (19%) say their organisation has an AI strategy.

30%

say they are regular AI users

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### The business case for adopting an AI strategy

There is a strong business case for adopting AI systematically and strategically to derive the greatest benefit and mitigate risk. Embracing AI in a well-thought-through way enables viable use cases to be identified, which align with the firm's or business's goals. By implementing suitable solutions within an appropriate framework — with the right support, controls, and data governance — concerns around reliability, disruption to existing workflows, and the need for specialist skills should be eased. It will also show how AI can help lawyers work smarter by boosting what they can achieve, freeing up time for higher-value work, and supporting a healthier work-life balance. Ultimately, if all users engage fully with the technology — rather than just a handful of people using it for narrow, isolated tasks — then you are more likely to realise its full value and maximise return on investment (ROI).

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It's about creating an environment that builds genuine confidence and secures widespread buy in. Expecting people to adopt AI tools when they don't feel ready or properly supported increases the risk of the tools not being utilized. Equally, allowing experimentation without appropriate governance and oversight can create real problems. Successful AI adoption in legal teams depends on two things: robust, legal-grade tools fit for purpose, and a culture that enables understanding, adoption, and safe value creation, all backed by training, supervision, and clear policies and guidance. This mirrors the direction of U.K. professional bodies, which increasingly emphasise responsible use, accuracy, confidentiality, and governance when adopting generative AI.

The most effective approach is not forcing entirely new tools on people, but embedding AI seamlessly into the systems, workflows, and platforms they already use.

## Building momentum: Four stages to AI empowerment

If adopting innovative technology and evolving culture feels daunting, it needn't be. That's exactly why having a clear strategy is important: it helps you map the journey ahead, maintain momentum, and avoid getting sidetracked.

One practical approach is to break the path to AI empowerment into four key stages:

### Stage 1: Familiarity builds confidence — Delivering “AI where you live”

People are more likely to be wary of what they don't understand. They may dismiss tools that feel unfamiliar or question their usefulness and value. Even those who are curious about AI can worry about getting it wrong, compromising quality, or losing time as they get to grips with new software. People new to AI need to see quickly that it will help them do their job better and more efficiently.

Unlike some other software tools, superficial features aren't key to AI. What's important is whether it can carry out meaningful legal work. Point solutions that tackle isolated problems will only get professionals so far, often forcing lawyers to hop between disconnected systems, interrupting day-to-day workflows, and undermining efficiency. The most effective approach is not forcing entirely new tools on people, but embedding AI seamlessly into the systems, workflows, and platforms they already use. We call this delivering “AI where you live.”

With everything in one place — AI-assisted document review, analysis, drafting, and research — lawyers have a broad set of capabilities at their fingertips with minimal effort. The experience feels natural, not disruptive. Keeping people in familiar interfaces reduces friction and makes adoption far more likely.

That's the rationale behind [CoCounsel Legal UK](#). It brings advanced AI together with Practical Law guidance and the authoritative content of Westlaw UK — resources many U.K. lawyers rely on — uniting research, drafting, and analysis in one place. It also integrates with today's tools, such as Microsoft® 365, third-party document management systems, and the legal collaboration and workflow platform Thomson Reuters® HighQ.

We know that the introduction to AI must feel natural, not disruptive. Keeping people in familiar interfaces reduces friction and makes adoption far more likely. It also helps build the foundations for deeper engagement by enabling lawyers to see early wins quickly. Research can be faster, insights easier to surface, know-how more accessible, and drafting more straightforward without requiring people to change the way they work overnight. Law firms can provide quicker, more confident advice to clients, and in-house teams can make faster, better-informed decisions for the organisation.

**88%**

of legal professionals prefer using a profession-specific AI assistant over generic tools.

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## Stage 2: Confidence grows with capability — Using “AI with authority”

As lawyers become comfortable with AI in their daily workflows, their confidence grows — but only if the technology can deliver on its promise. A critical factor in building that confidence is the reliability of AI outputs. We’ve all heard about “hallucinations,” and there have been well-publicised cases of lawyers being caught out by false citations and other misinformation generated by generic, freely available tools.

For legal work, content scraped from the internet — potentially inaccurate, taken out of context, or out-of-date — is not good enough. Legal professionals need trusted, verified legal sources they can rely on when shaping advice, submissions, and documentation. No wonder almost all (88%) of those we surveyed said they favour using a profession-specific AI assistant.

CoCounsel Legal UK searches trusted, up-to-date legal content from Westlaw and Practical Law, reviewed and maintained by teams of expert U.K. and international lawyer editors so you can have confidence in the results. For additional assurance, outputs are fully verifiable. Findings are grounded in authoritative sources with clear citations, making it quick to check, validate, and share. CoCounsel Legal UK also integrates with your organisation’s own know-how, connecting seamlessly to your documents to surface insights that combine your expertise with ours. Crucially, this will not compromise any sensitive or confidential information, which is a key risk using publicly available tools.

In these ways, lawyers benefit from a unified platform that supports complex matters, streamlines processes, and delivers accurate intelligence, expertise, and skills — designed by lawyers, for lawyers.

## Stage 3: From user to designer — The “AI-empowered lawyer”

With AI embedded seamlessly into legal workflows, and with confidence that outputs are reliable and grounded in authoritative sources, lawyers will naturally become more comfortable using AI day-to-day. The stage is then set for a shift from simply consuming AI outputs to actively shaping how AI is applied: orchestrating, configuring, and designing AI-enabled workflows to get more from the models. That may sound sophisticated, but in practice it’s far more straightforward than it appears. It’s a logical next step: once the technology is trusted and integrated, lawyers can define the right questions, set sensible parameters, and refine the process to deliver more consistent, higher-quality outcomes from their workflows.

In the CoCounsel Library, you can access pre-curated prompts built by Practical Law experts for legal work in the U.K. They help you get started faster, work with greater confidence, and accelerate AI adoption across your organisation while capturing best practices in a consistent, reusable way. It’s often said the quality of the instruction you give an AI tool (the prompt) shapes the quality of the output. But if AI is meant to reduce workload, writing “perfect” prompts shouldn’t become another task. With CoCounsel Legal UK you don’t need to be a prompt engineer. Just leverage the pre-built prompts or ask questions in plain English. If you want to customise prompts or create your own, you can do that as well — which is particularly useful for teams looking to standardise how AI is used across the firm or in-house legal function.

The context-rich templates and pre-built prompts help to jumpstart complex tasks and navigate challenging processes. This empowers you to more easily move from research to strategy and analysis to execution and your desired outcomes.

As AI evolves and innovation grows, law firms can build repeatable, scalable processes across practice areas that help sharpen their competitive edge. In-house teams can automate routine tasks, focus on strategic initiatives, and add more value to the business.

AI isn't just an efficiency tool — it's a meaningful business development asset for U.K. law firms.

## Stage 4: Extending value beyond the legal team

Now that lawyers feel empowered to use AI with confidence, they can focus on maximising its value in ways that strengthen relationships with clients for private practice or internal stakeholders for in-house professionals. Used well, AI can help firms and legal teams differentiate in a competitive U.K. market by improving responsiveness, efficiency, service quality, and ultimately creating a better overall experience for the people they support.

In practice, this often means freeing up time for higher-value, strategic work that depends on human judgement and lawyer expertise, like advising on risk, negotiating, managing sensitive stakeholder dynamics, or shaping commercial outcomes. AI can also support analytics-led insight, helping teams spot patterns across matters — for example, recurring negotiation points, bottlenecks in contract turnaround, or drivers of disputes — and bring those insights into decision-making. The ROI can take many forms: faster turnaround times, more consistent work product, and more cost-effective delivery, all of which contribute to operational excellence.

Since CoCounsel Legal UK can be surfaced directly in the collaborative workflows of HighQ, users can take the benefits of AI beyond their own organisation to help others navigate legal challenges. For example, in-house teams can empower internal business colleagues with tools that reduce legal bottlenecks, improve decision-making, and even let them self-serve their own legal needs. Law firms can differentiate themselves by giving clients access to AI-powered tools delivered through client-facing sites, enabling them to self-serve knowledge and insights. This enhances service delivery while positioning firms to support clients as they explore and adopt AI within their own legal processes.

So, not only can users automate routine tasks, draft documents, and extract insights from their documents and data, they can also visualise and share key findings with colleagues, clients, internal and external stakeholders, and collaborate more effectively without needing to switch between multiple platforms. By bringing together secure collaboration and advanced AI, legal professionals can benefit from deeply embedded AI functionality where they work. Over time, this aids teams in building the foundations of a resilient, future-forward operating model that can adapt to changing client expectations, capacity pressures, and regulatory and risk requirements.

In this way, AI becomes a meaningful business development asset for U.K. law firms. Clients increasingly expect a modern, tech-enabled approach to legal service delivery; often including AI-supported workflows, not just for efficiency, but for consistency, transparency, and better day-to-day collaboration. Many general counsel and in-house legal teams in the U.K. are also actively exploring how to use AI themselves. As highlighted in the Thomson Reuters State of the UK Legal Market Report, productivity and value remain top priorities for GCs, and there is growing optimism about AI's potential to simplify and streamline legal processes. This may prompt some clients to reassess which work is sent to external firms, but it also creates a major opportunity for AI-forward U.K. firms to build closer relationships by aligning on shared ways of working and partnering with clients as they develop their AI journeys together.

Organisations with clear, formalised AI strategies are **twice** as likely as those without to see revenue growth from their AI investments, and **3.5 times** more likely to experience tangible AI benefits.

## Strategic recommendations and next steps

One of the most striking findings from our [Future of Professionals Report](#) is that organisations with clear, formalised AI strategies are twice as likely as those without to see revenue growth from their AI investments, and 3.5 times more likely to experience tangible AI benefits. In a U.K. context — where legal and professional services teams are balancing client pressure on value, tight capacity, and heightened expectations around risk and governance — those results underline a simple point: pilots and experimentation are useful, but only up to a point. An ad hoc approach can kick-start momentum, but it needs to evolve into something defined, repeatable, and well-governed if AI is going to deliver tangible, sustained business value; whether that's improved matter delivery, better client service, stronger knowledge capture, or more resilient operations.

All this brings up a critical question: how do you design an AI strategy?

Assessing individual and organisation readiness and familiarity with AI is a sensible place to start. Identify what tools people are already using, ensure this aligns with your firm's or company's policies, and confirm you have appropriate oversight and governance in place. From there, look at what legal-specific AI tools are available in the U.K. market, and whether AI capabilities are being introduced into the legal solutions you already rely on. Consider how these tools could support your team's work and, where possible, prioritise AI that's embedded in platforms your people already know to reduce change fatigue, speed up adoption, and streamline work.

Next, clarify your business priorities, such as faster contract turnaround, improved matter management, better knowledge reuse, or stronger risk control. Build an implementation roadmap that gets you there while bringing your people along with you. Support this with regular training to close any early knowledge gaps, keep pace as the technology evolves, and create clear channels for questions and shared learning so good practice spreads across the team.

AI transformation works best when it's led from the top. Leaders need to demonstrate clear commitment to implementation, sponsor the right governance, and play an active role in shaping the cultural change that makes adoption stick. It's also crucial to work with a vendor that truly understands the day-to-day realities of legal practice and offers more than a standalone tool. With CoCounsel Legal UK, we provide AI-powered capabilities designed around lawyers' workflows, underpinned by reliable content from verified legal sources and insight informed by real legal expertise, all delivered in the tools, platforms, and processes you already use.

At Thomson Reuters, we go beyond the technology. We partner with you throughout the journey, providing practical advice, guidance, and hands-on support to help you implement AI responsibly, embed best practices, and achieve measurable value.

# From AI-curious to AI-empowered

Amid rapid innovation and change across the U.K. legal sector, the time to harness AI to create genuine competitive advantage is now. Early adopters and fast followers are already pulling ahead — improving speed, consistency, and client service — while those without a clear plan risk falling further behind. Put simply: organisations with a strategic roadmap tend to progress faster than those without. Confidence and capability are critical. For many, this may be unfamiliar territory and it's not always obvious where to start or how to proceed safely. To move from being AI-curious to AI-empowered, teams need more than technology: they need a plan, and they need a trusted partner that brings deep legal expertise, proven solutions, and end-to-end support.

CoCounsel Legal UK uniquely combines authoritative legal content, professional-grade AI capabilities, and seamless integrations to deliver a unified experience that makes complex tasks not only quicker and easier, but reliable. It enables a smooth transition to an effective, AI-enabled legal practice, delivering tangible benefits today while helping you stay at the forefront of innovation as new capabilities continue to be developed.

Find out more about how [CoCounsel Legal UK](#) can support your team's AI transformation and help build a lasting competitive advantage.

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