

How Technology Will Change the Role of Lawyers

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As is often the case, the legal industry arrived a little late to the technology party. That changed following last decade's financial crisis and the "Great Recession." These momentous events led to downward pressures on legal fees, increased demand for alternative billing practices, greater competition for fewer opportunities, and, yes, a deeper understanding (or, perhaps, resignation) that technology must play a more significant role in delivering efficient and effective legal advice.

There is more than a whiff of fear in the air about the impact of technology on legal services. Technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain are changing, and will continue to change, the legal industry in myriad ways. But technology will almost certainly not displace lawyers.

Some lawyers, as Deloitte predicts, will inevitably be negatively impacted. Jobs will be lost. Routine, high-volume legal tasks previously performed by highly-paid lawyers will be automated out of existence. But, as in other technological revolutions, new opportunities will emerge. No, lawyers won't go the way of early 20th-Century buggy whip makers. The lawyers of the future, however, must recognize that the jobs they're used to performing, and the expectations of their clients, are changing as a result of the emergence of legal tech.

As general counsel of a FinTech company operating at the intersection of financial services and technology, I've witnessed firsthand how technology is disrupting a traditionally conservative industry (financial services). As a consumer of legal services that support financial services, I have a front row seat to witness the evolution of the legal industry as well.

What's missing from the conversation about how technology will continue to transform the legal industry is that technology's ripples will extend well beyond things like e-discovery and AI-powered legal research. These are important tools for lawyers to use and understand, and more technology is coming online every day. In 2018, investments in legal tech exceeded \$1 billion for the first time, and over \$1.2 billion has already been raised by legal tech companies in 2019—with several months of fundraising left to go. Legal tech is reaching maturity and soon will achieve ubiquity across the legal landscape. Accordingly, it's time for lawyers to adapt their roles in light of this paradigm shift.

More important, however, is that lawyers appreciate how technology is impacting their clients' businesses. Every lawyer knows that one of the primary qualities that in-house counsel looks for from outside lawyers is a deep understanding of their business. That means gaining deep knowledge of a client's industry, customers or clients, products or services, as well as the technologies that are integral to the business.

As technology continues to automate routine tasks, lawyers will no longer be relied upon as heavily to draft contracts and review documents, but instead will be called upon to manage risks with greater sophistication and efficacy than ever before. In my industry, the most effective lawyers will understand how things like blockchain, bitcoin, digital assets, and digitized securities are changing calculations as to risk, reward, and more broadly how they are transforming the very nature of financial services. It's not about simply "doing" legal work anymore; it's about deeply understanding the implications of the work and helping clients to walk the fine line between risk and return. To succeed in this environment, lawyers must embrace a collaborative relationship with technology, not an adversarial one. The best of the next generation will not only use advanced technology but also learn its inner-workings.

I do not want to paint a doom and gloom picture of the future of the legal profession in light of the transformational effect of technology. Rather, I argue that technology will unshackle lawyers—particularly those early in their careers—from many of the routine, mind-numbing tasks that are widely despised within the industry, and free them up to tackle more creative and interesting problems. In this sense, technology offers lawyers the hope of more enriching, satisfying careers spent operating at their highest and best capabilities.

As FinTech counsel whose job depends on finding smart lawyers who understand our business and can help us manage risk, I can tell you that, without a doubt, the pace of technological change that lawyers must confront is not slowing down. It's only accelerating.