



Lawyers: AI a great tool if used wisely

[Hope Keller](#)//Special to The Daily Record//January 27, 2025//

Nearly 50% of legal professionals say overwhelming work volume is their greatest challenge, according to a report released this month by the legal services company Consilio.

Nevertheless, only 32% of the law firms and 20% of the in-house legal teams surveyed said they were using or planning to use artificial intelligence programs to help lighten their workload.

While there are no statistics about AI usage among legal practitioners in Maryland, attorneys here say that they and their colleagues are increasingly using AI as the programs improve.

"I think there's been a material change in the (AI) market in one year," said Jason Balog, a principal at Miles & Stockbridge in Baltimore and a member of the firm's Corporate and Securities practice group. "Some of the products that are out there that were essentially rumors a year ago are now becoming mainstream."

Balog distinguished between traditional AI programs, which perform specific tasks using established rules or algorithms, and generative AI programs, which generate new content based on patterns found in datasets.

"The thing that has come onto the scene in the last year plus or minus is these generative AI tools that are in essence whiteboards or sandboxes," he said, citing Thomson Reuters's CoCounsel and the OpenAI-backed Harvey as two of the "Gen AI" products used by law firms.

Balog also stressed that because lawyers must follow rules of professional conduct and maintain client confidentiality, the AI products designed for legal use are "closed universes," unlike AI tools such as ChatGPT, which add uploaded information to a pool of data open to anyone.

Training AI programs is crucial, Balog said. To teach Gen AI to draft a stock purchase agreement, for example, he said he would give the program multiple examples of agreements, as well as information about the buyer, seller and transaction. And attorneys must carefully craft their prompts, or specific instructions to the program, he emphasized.

"The quality of the products (produced) is really based on the information that it is grounded in," he said. "The more you pump in those kinds of specifics, the better the product you're going to get."

Joseph Gibson, executive director and general counsel of the Employment Law Center of Maryland, said the Frederick-based nonprofit firm has a corporate AI account with OpenAI and uses it to review documents and to draft client correspondence, among other things.

"We use it quite a bit to review document sets," Gibson said. "You can dump a case file into it and get a summary that's relatively accurate pretty quickly and then you can ask questions."

The program is also used to pull out discrete pieces of information from case files.

"You can question it: 'Find me this person's contact information in this document,' " Gibson said. "That would have taken quite a while earlier."

He emphasized that all materials generated by AI are checked by human beings.

"You have to supervise it just like you would any other staff member and take that pretty seriously because it does hallucinate," or invent information, Gibson said, recalling a situation where he asked the AI tool a yes-or-no question and got a positive response when he knew the correct answer was negative.

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Gibson has high hopes that AI will allow more people to afford legal counsel.

"I think it's part of access to justice," he said. "I think either by virtue of being able to take routine tasks off lawyers' desks or by making lawyers so much more efficient that more people are going to get service. If we can draft a routine document in half the time, for half the price, I think ultimately it's going to be really helpful."

Matthew Kohel, a partner at Saul Ewing in Baltimore who chairs the Maryland State Bar Association's AI task force, says artificial intelligence is still not on the radar of many lawyers.

"Even concepts that I think are pretty commonplace like hallucinations, there are still attorneys that are not aware of that concept," he said.

Kohel added that AI's very usefulness could pose a problem.

"You get in a routine of doing things, you might just have it check the grammar or make some suggestions on an email, and you may not realize that you didn't anonymize the email or you put some confidential information in it, like a letter to your client, and you hit 'enter' and there you go," he said. "It's almost too easy to do it."



Miles & Stockbridge's Balog emphasized that AI programs are simply new tools.

"They don't give you perfection, they don't give you a finished product," he said. "And they are not going to replace lawyers because you need to have a lawyer who is confirming the accuracy of the information."