

THE LAWYER

The 60 second interview: Not every lawyer will need to learn to code

Julia Hayhoe talks to The Lawyer ahead of the Business Leadership Summit, which focuses on the law firm of 2025.

Will AI be as commonplace as photocopying by 2025?

More common, given the parallel shift to paperless workplaces – even for law firms! There are also big generational issues at play, whilst I grew up as an Article Clerk printing out and hand-marking up documents, the associates of today work by preference online. Further out, my 10-year-old son, a ‘born digital’ will be 18 in 2025 and his world will be voice activated and have crossed the wearables Rubicon.

The challenge for law firms is to deploy machine learning at scale with consistency of delivery across differing markets and cultures. Looking out to the 2025 horizon, I really like Rohit Talwar’s framing on this – it is all about seeking to understand and shape the future of emergent technologies and the impact on the world around us, not just as lawyers but of our wider communities.

Especially thinking of data privacy and cyber security issues. This requires partnering with the wider ecosystem: such as my Bakers with the University of Ulster’s Legal Innovation Centre and the World Economic Forum’s Center for the 4th Industrial Revolution in San Francisco.

Will every 2025 lawyer know how to code?

Not every lawyer will code. Every lawyer will need to have a larger toolkit to draw from; they will increasingly team with a broader range of business professionals. Law schools will offer cross-discipline legal training, interfacing with computer science, business and other schools. Instead of opting between real estate or corporate, students and junior lawyers will also have the choice of specialising in AI engineering or data visualisation. Professionals from other competencies are already and will increasingly find new opportunities in law firms, such as data analysts, project managers and computer programmers.

To excel, lawyers will also need to be strong in the competencies of emotional intelligence, client relationship development and judgement – feeling is the new thinking! Also key are critical thinking, creativity and a desire to do things differently, bringing ideas on how to redesign services to changing client needs. There will be more opportunities to work in an R&D environment, as we are doing by applying design thinking to select services lines or by working on Secondments to the WEF or partner University Innovation hubs.

It is key to be rethinking talent and how to develop this integrated AI and human workforce and the changes in professional staffing mixes, recruitment, retention and continual development through encouraging a growth mindset.

What is the future of legal service delivery?

Exciting and full of opportunity! The lawyer of the future will provide machine learning enabled judgement. Legal advice will no longer be confined to lengthy documents, spreadsheets and slide decks. We are already focused on enhancing clients’ user experience with interactive work product – quick and easy to absorb when necessary but also providing the ability to drill down into the advice, model different scenarios to improve decision-making and more. This will be the norm in the future.

How do you envisage private practice and in-house working to deliver value in 2025?

By 2025 in-house departments will be using more technology to undertake repetitive, routine tasks. They’ll be partnering with firms to embed the best technology for their needs and delivering expert legal judgement enabled by that technology. For example, working with CLOC Corporate Legal Operations Consortium on their mission to optimise the legal services delivery model, e.g. by identifying ways law firms and in-house legal departments can work together to leverage technology, share knowledge and identify value.

In the short term, firms still need to focus on operational excellence, with knowledge management, efficiency and delivering to budget high on their agenda. To help deliver this and especially for the most complex cross boarder work, we’ll increasingly see multi-disciplinary client teams where Business Professionals (pricing, project and relationship managers) play crucial roles in delivering value for fees and the shape of the legal team changing with a greater paralegal to legal ratio.

Tell us two truths and one lie about yourself (in any order).

On my travels I have:

- Been stalked closely by a brown bear in Vancouver.
- Ridden the world’s fastest roller coaster.
- Worked as a drystone waller.

With agile working becoming the norm, which spot in the world would you most like to work from?

A small village called Bolgari in Italy. I had a wonderful year working as a house and animal keeper there, just after Law School. Not sure the Wi-Fi bandwidth would be up to it though!