

The Agent Era Is Here.

Now Square Up the Basics

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Over the past few months, the tone of the AI conversation has changed.

Not long ago, we were talking about prompts, copilots, and small workflow experiments. It felt incremental. Useful, but contained. Now the focus has shifted to agents: AI systems that can monitor inboxes, execute tasks, trigger workflows, and operate with a degree of autonomy.

If you've been paying attention, you can feel the difference.

There's a new urgency in the room. Vendors are showcasing autonomous capabilities. Leadership teams are asking what can be automated next. Legal departments that were cautiously piloting AI are now questioning whether they're moving quickly enough.

It feels like the kind of moment where you either accelerate or risk being left behind.

That reaction is understandable. The technology is advancing quickly, and the capabilities are real. Agents are no longer limited to drafting assistance. They can initiate actions and carry out multi-step processes. That changes the operational equation.

But when momentum builds this quickly, it is worth pausing to understand what kind of moment this truly is.

Why It Feels Like a Sprint

The instinct to move fast makes sense.

The demonstrations are compelling. Agents can triage inboxes, generate responses, initiate contract workflows, summarize documents, and coordinate across tools. Tasks that once required multiple handoffs can now be triggered automatically. The potential efficiency gains are significant.

At the same time, external pressure is building. Boards want to understand automation strategy. Executives are asking how AI will reduce cost or increase throughput. Vendors are positioning autonomy as the next competitive differentiator.

No legal team wants to hesitate while others move ahead.

Acceleration feels like the responsible response. Build the agent, deploy the automation, capture the gains.

But speed and readiness are not the same thing.

This Is a Fundamentals Moment

As autonomy increases, discipline becomes more important, not less.

Agents do not repair weak processes. They magnify them.

Unclear intake categories will scale confusion. Inconsistent templates will be reproduced at speed. Informal approval paths introduce exposure once decisions are delegated.

Autonomy is multiplication. It accelerates whatever structure already exists.

That is why, despite the urgency, this moment is fundamentally about groundwork. Before layering autonomy into workflows, legal teams need clarity about how work actually flows today. What qualifies as routine. Where judgment is required. What can be standardized. What must be escalated.

A strong foundation makes agents powerful. Without it, velocity simply increases risk.

What Squaring Up the Basics Actually Looks Like

Before deploying agents, teams should be able to answer a few practical questions.

Is intake standardized, or does classification depend on individual interpretation? Can routine matters be identified consistently, or does each request require fresh evaluation?

Are response frameworks documented? If an agent is drafting or sending communications, agreed language, tone, and escalation triggers should already be defined.

Are approval boundaries explicit? Effective delegation depends on clear limits. Everyone should understand where automation ends and human review begins.

And perhaps most importantly, has the team developed shared AI literacy? Not everyone needs to be technical, but there should be a common understanding of how these systems function, where they are reliable, and where oversight is essential.

None of this is glamorous. But it is the difference between sustainable integration and reactive experimentation.

Agents perform best inside structured environments. When the structure is solid, autonomy becomes a force multiplier. When it is not, risk scales alongside efficiency.

A Personal Observation

I've seen several waves of legal technology move through the industry. Each arrived with urgency and the promise of transformation. The teams that ultimately benefited most were not always the first movers. They were the ones who understood what they were scaling.

This shift feels more consequential because delegation carries more weight than assistance. When a tool drafts, you review. When a system acts on your behalf, the stakes change.

There is a difference between being behind and being unprepared. The pressure to move quickly is real, but so is the cost of automating a process that was never clearly defined.

Progress does not require hesitation. It requires intention.

Lead With Discipline, Then Scale with Confidence

The agent era is here, and it will reshape how legal work gets done. Departments that integrate autonomy thoughtfully will see meaningful gains in responsiveness and scalability.

But this is not a race to deploy first. It is a moment to decide what truly belongs in an automated workflow and what requires professional judgment.

When the fundamentals are clear, autonomy becomes an advantage. When they are not, speed magnifies exposure.

Square up the basics. Clarify workflows. Align guardrails. Then move forward with confidence.

That is how sustainable transformation happens.