

## A Roadmap for Legal Professionals: Navigating the Complex Path to Generative AI Adoption

**By Brandi Pack, Legal Ops Analyst & AI Specialist**

For legal professionals, caution and conservatism are often vital in fulfilling their job responsibilities. Discretion and thoroughness are required to protect clients' best interests. So it's no wonder that many in the legal field are hesitant to adopt new, untested technologies. Even with potential benefits on the horizon, the risk of using tools that haven't been fully vetted can be enough to slow down innovation.

The promise of generative AI presents a unique challenge for those in legal operations. While this technology undoubtedly has the potential to improve efficiencies and create strategic advantages, it's not an easy decision. Being overly cautious could mean falling behind the competition and missing out on opportunities, but moving too quickly may expose the company to unnecessary risk. In particular, concerns around privacy and security can make organizations hesitant to move toward adoption.

With so much uncertainty, a growing divide is emerging between the smaller group of enthusiastic early adopters and the rest of the legal community. The early adopters, who are already reaping the benefits of generative AI, typically fall into a few categories: law firms involved in heavy litigation, firms managing significant trademark or patent portfolios, and large corporate legal departments. For these organizations, the potential benefits of generative AI seem to outweigh any perceived risks, leading them to move forward more quickly.

For in-house legal teams at small- to medium-size companies, the decision to adopt generative AI is not always as clear.

While these organizations may see the importance of leveraging generative AI in their operations, they often struggle to determine the best approach. Concerns about cost, resources, and risk can all contribute to hesitation. To move forward, these organizations must carefully assess their needs and create a strategic roadmap for adoption.

The ideal timeline for adopting generative AI will differ depending on the product category. Generative AI capabilities and functionality are already developed and readily available, meaning adoption can happen relatively quickly. For others, however, development is evolving more slowly, necessitating a more patient approach.

There are a few areas in legal operations where generative AI is already making a major impact, such as document and contract analysis, legal research, and eDiscovery. With vendors already providing significant jumps in capability, organizations can reap the benefits of this technology today without worrying that they have moved too quickly. Legal professionals should not hesitate to move forward in these areas.

Regarding contract management, eBilling, and process automation, vendor transitions to generative AI will likely happen slower. These more complex systems require additional development time to fully build generative AI functionality. Most vendors have started incorporating minor enhancements and will gradually expand from there. As such, it will likely take years for organizations to see the technology's full impact in these product categories.

If your organization already uses a system in a product category that has not matured, check with your vendor to learn more about their development timeline for generative AI incorporation. More importantly, if your organization wants to implement something new, it is advisable to avoid systems only utilizing older AI

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technologies. Since generative AI will likely simplify the software implementation process significantly, a wait-and-see approach makes sense to understand what more fully developed options from vendors will look like. Once these more complex legal tools are fully built out they will be an even more significant game changer for the legal profession.

Ultimately, legal organizations should adopt a strategic and targeted approach to generative AI. For product categories that are developing at more rapidly, it makes sense to move quickly to stay ahead of the curve. However, a wait-and-see approach could be prudent for products that are still evolving.

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