

Artificial Intelligence – What is it? How can it help a law firm?

The term “Artificial Intelligence” or “Ai” is ubiquitous in the media these days. We read and hear about its negative impacts on jobs and industries. We hear vague and incomplete explanations of how Ai is going to take over the world one day and make us all slaves. I have even read silly stories of Ai replacing attorneys. There is a term called “singularity” or the point when the machines become smarter than humans that is often the focus of media stories. This type of hype creates fear and shades the truth about Ai and its immediate benefit to the world, business, and the legal field. The truth is that Ai is joining cloud, social and mobile technologies in transforming our lives in the constantly evolving digital economy. The other truth, that is often not reported, is Ai has major limitations and the gaps to achieve human level intelligence are much larger than generally believed.

The loss of administrative jobs in the legal field from Ai is a concern and difficult to predict. However, there is an argument that the number of jobs created by Ai could equal the number lost in the legal field. Administrative jobs could be enhanced and evolve with new skills to manage Ai technologies garnering higher salaries.

As humans, we tend to fear what we don’t understand or cannot predict. I became so concerned about Ai’s effect on marketing that I decided to learn about it from the experts and enrolled in a graduate certificate program from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to learn from the experts on Ai and specifically its effects on business. Instead of fear, I found opportunity and focused my business, Market4Law on applying Ai technology to marketing for law firms. This article is a summary of my education from the Ai program at MIT, and an introduction to law firms on how to use artificial intelligence to grow their firms with lower costs to acquire clients.

First, the definition of Ai in its simplest form is “Machines that think and act like humans.” The definition can be much more complex but this definition sums it up well.

Second, it is important to understand that there are three types of artificial intelligence technologies.

1. Natural Language Processing – Like Apple’s Siri or Amazon’s Alexa. In the legal field, chat bots on websites often use natural language processing technology to begin conversations with website visitors.
2. Robotics – Utilizing actual robots to assist humans in completing tasks. This technology currently has little utilization in the legal field. Think of a factory assembly line robot or driverless car as good examples of robotics.
3. **Machine Learning – This Ai technology, currently has the most applications in the legal field.** Simply put, humans teach and give rules to Ai programs to sort through massive amounts of data and present that data in actionable ways.

Law firms are already employing machine learning to save time on their cases by finding specific information within large amounts of documents. A recent article in the *Triad Business Journal* by Robert Lopez from August 2018 highlights the uses of machine learning in the legal field for document review and even predicting the outcome of trials. The uses of machine learning for these purposes will only grow as it gives attorneys more time to prepare for cases. The less time spent per case can increase case load, revenues and potentially profits.

In legal marketing, machine learning is used to develop behavioral profiles of consumers searching for an attorney. Behavioral profiles are derived from analyzing thousands of client conversions from many law firms across the United States and the client's digital "path to purchase" through web activity like keyword searches and social media behavior. Machine learning combines this type of behavioral data with consumer tracking to identify when someone is searching for a specific type of attorney in a specific area. Ads can then be served to consumers when they are actively searching for a specific type of attorney. There are limitations on the technology like false behavior (when the behavior shows someone is seriously searching it just happens to be coincidence) but the targeting is much better than targeting through demographics or other traditional methods.

Machine learning makes this type of hyper targeting possible along with "closed loop analysis". In other words, when conversions using this data are realized on a law firm level then machine learning can help better identify the path to client conversion for that specific law firm to develop and sharpen the algorithm for even better targeting. Furthermore, over time and observation of conversions on a firm level, very specific practice areas and very specific specialties within practice areas can identify their own paths to purchase. The behavioral profiles are also shared with Facebook and Google to activate their advanced Ai targeting capabilities.

By utilizing machine learning to better target ads to the right audience, advertising costs are lowered by reducing audience size. This reduction in cost is attributed to only marketing to those consumers likely to be in market for a specific type of attorney. A more relevant audience will enhance engagement, increase client conversions, and make client conversions more predictable. The combination of increased client conversions with reduction in cost for campaigns means that law firms can significantly lower their cost per client acquisition by utilizing machine learning in their marketing.

What does it all mean? Ai is very proficient at tasks humans cannot perform efficiently like quickly searching for small bits of information within millions of documents or developing behavioral profiles by analyzing internet behavior. Humans, on the other hand are naturally skilled at things machines currently cannot accomplish with consistency like reading human body language or fully understanding another human's intentions. There are no indications that machines will ever be able to effectively and consistently perform as human replacements in fields where complex human interaction is required like legal representation. My conclusion, after completing the program at MIT is that humans and machines are more effective when working together and at this point in human history law firms have little to fear from artificial intelligence and a lot to gain.