

Top lawyer on AI: Our future depends on educating tomorrow's lawyers

The use of artificial intelligence in advocacy has gone beyond purely administrative tasks and can now partially automate some work typically performed by junior lawyers and legal assistants. However, an AI system cannot be an independent provider of legal services but only a tool in the hands of the lawyer who provides these services and bears responsibility, says Peter Štrpka, one of the founding partners of the soukeník – štrpka law firm, which is regularly ranked among Slovakia's top law firms and has received the Largest Law Firm in Slovakia award.

Are you a technology enthusiast who adopts AI tools and assistants as soon as they appear, or are you more cautious?

I'm more of a technological "Fred Flintstone". When something new and useful comes along, I start using it cautiously and gradually. I don't have any social media profiles. I see not only the benefits of new technologies but also their risks. The safety and privacy of my family and clients are my top priorities.

These challenges also apply to artificial intelligence (AI). I do not use AI for work or private communication. However, when specialised AI tools for lawyers appeared on the market and it became clear that this trend was unavoidable, we implemented them in our firm.

What can AI be used for in advocacy? Can it handle more than just administrative tasks and research?

The use of artificial intelligence in advocacy has

undoubtedly gone beyond purely administrative tasks. AI can process large volumes of legal documents, assist in research, analyse and connect pieces of evidence, estimate litigation outcomes, and even identify non-standard or missing clauses in contracts. It can also suggest alternative wording or arguments. However, the so-called "context" is crucial, meaning the amount of information the system can "keep in its mind" and work with. Our experience also shows that the quality of AI output depends heavily on the quality of the input data.

On the other hand, I don't believe that, at its current stage of development, AI can replace a lawyer's strategic decision-making, ability to solve complex legal problems, critical thinking, empathy, or understanding of a client's needs. In other words, AI in advocacy today is a helpful assistant, not a strategist.

What does high-quality data look like in practice?

First and foremost, a lawyer must ask the right questions. If an AI tool is not given a clear brief, it will go in the wrong direction, "hallucinate" and produce unusable results. The user needs to formulate the prompt (question or task) clearly, and then verify whether the AI tool has understood it correctly.

In this respect, AI reminds me of working with law students. When you give them an assignment, everything depends on how you ask the questions and define goals. If you don't do it properly, students can waste a lot of



Peter Štrpka (Source: Courtesy of soukeník – štrpka)

time going in the wrong direction. Equally important are the scope of the data and the tool's capabilities. There is a difference between using a basic tier and having access to advanced features (e.g. deep search) and relevant sources.

What tools do you use in your work?

We are currently testing a specialised generative AI system called Harvey, developed specifically for lawyers. This system, built on GPT technology, has the potential to assist in legal

analysis, allowing lawyers to focus on more complex and creative aspects of their work. At the same time, we continuously monitor and evaluate other AI tools.

To what extent can this tool navigate Slovak law?

First, it must be connected to Slovak external sources such as the Collection of Laws and relevant case law. Then it performs quite well. We also tested it on closed cases, where it was able to find connections between pieces of evidence and highlight links that a

person might overlook when reviewing a thousand-page case file.

To what extent do you verify AI output?

We thoroughly verify all AI outputs. A lawyer can never blindly rely on AI. The practice of advocacy involves personal responsibility for providing legal services professionally, in the client's best interest, and in accordance with legal ethics. An AI system cannot be an independent provider of legal services but only a tool in the hands of the lawyer who provides these services and bears responsibility.

If you must check everything, then AI will not save you much time, right?

It saves time on simpler tasks, early case analysis, and sourcing materials for that analysis. It's true that we must verify everything afterward, but I see the benefit of AI in advocacy less in saving time and more in improving the quality of our work. At the end of the day, I feel better knowing I have worked more deeply with the available resources and subjected my conclusions to additional scrutiny by the algorithm. The net time savings are not significant yet.

However, in the long term, what will likely happen is what happens with other modern innovations – AI will increase the pace and demands placed on our performance rather than make our work permanently easier.

How do you address client privacy protection?

I am convinced that no responsible lawyer should load confidential client data into a publicly available AI application. Anonymisation can help, but it has limits. The lawyer, and

no one else, is responsible for confidentiality and data protection towards the client – this rule always applies.

That's why we have invested in our own internal software running on our own infrastructure. Of course, we have no chance of competing with the pace of development of commercial systems, but the advantage lies in control and security.

So, you do not even load anonymised data from live cases into AI? You only ask general legal questions?

Yes, for now, we only ask in general terms and then apply these answers internally to specific cases.

Do you know any cases where lawyers blindly relied on AI outputs and faced consequences?

I don't know of such a case in Slovakia, but we are already seeing the first problems abroad. There are known cases where AI "hallucinated", and lawyers were sanctioned by the court or local bar association. Recently, the case of an audit for the Australian government containing flawed AI outputs made headlines.

It is only a matter of time before something similar happens here. I am the chair of the Disciplinary Committee of the Slovak Bar Association, so I follow these matters closely. I appeal to my colleagues to realise that, at the end of the process, the lawyer is a human being and is responsible for the correctness of the service provided. If this responsibility is neglected, disciplinary action and sanctions from the Slovak Bar Association may follow.

Could it happen that people and companies will no longer need lawyers and will rely solely on AI assistants?

To some extent, this is already happening. If,

for example, an apartment renovation does not go as planned, a person can turn to a regular AI tool, describe the problem, attach photos, and the AI will suggest further steps. However, it is questionable to what extent non-lawyers can critically evaluate the accuracy of such outputs.

Business models providing simple legal services, such as debt collection, entirely via AI tools without the client ever contacting a lawyer are emerging abroad. However, these models require that the provider, not the AI tool, take ultimate responsibility for the quality of the service.

Lawyers must accept that they will no longer be needed for some simple tasks. However, we must not give up on more complex cases. It is precisely the lawyer's duties, responsibilities and guarantees (such as mandatory liability insurance) that justify why our profession still makes sense. Lawyers have specific skills and experience that AI cannot replace. Over time, I believe the difference between quasi-legal advice from a machine and the qualified services of a lawyer who bears responsibility will become even more evident in society.

What does the advent of AI tools mean for legal business? Will large firms have an even greater advantage over small ones because AI tools are expensive?

High-quality and relatively secure AI legal tools are expensive not only for small firms but also for medium-sized ones. Currently, the big players have the advantage. I assume that, over time, two or three key providers of specialised legal AI tools will dominate the market, as they

have invested the most in development.

Smaller firms wanting access to these high-quality tools will likely cooperate, for example, to obtain bulk licences within groups or with the support of the Slovak Bar Association.

Are you not worried that AI might replace young lawyers, leaving them with no way to gain experience?

This can happen if we don't act responsibly. It's true that AI can already replace part of the work done by assistants or trainee lawyers, but it would be short-sighted to exclude them from the hierarchy of the legal profession. If we fail to educate the next generation of lawyers, who will eventually replace us, in real practice, the protection of law and justice will face serious problems within a few years.

Similar problems can arise throughout the legal system, from lawyers to prosecutors to judges. Does the Bar Association address such strategic issues with the state?

Yes, we actively raise these topics. At the same time, we see that state institutions are under various pressures from what society currently considers important. It's difficult for them to deal in depth with strategic topics such as AI and its impact on society. Moreover, developments in this area are progressing so quickly that by the time you prepare a strategy and regulation, the situation will have changed, and you'll have to start over. However, this cannot be a reason to give up. This concerns our future – not only in law and legal practice.

By Roman Cuprik