

# Briefing

January 2026

SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT



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Clyde & Co on its new approach to corporate sustainability

## DATA DOWNLOAD

Are law firms warming up to the idea of private equity investment?

## THE QUEST FOR ROI

Leaders find the AI value-add needs more than numbers



## *Strategy for a new world*

*Rod Harrington, chief operating officer at Norton Rose Fulbright, on why discipline, agility and calculated ambition are essential for success in today's volatile market*

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## EDITOR'S LETTER

**J**anuary feels a bit like Marmite: you either love it or hate. I, for one, find the start of the year quite refreshing (even if the weather's bleak). It's a time to refocus, make new and exciting plans and set the tone for the months ahead.

Granted, it's not an entirely clean slate. Worldwide uncertainty and volatility are still here, as are many of the challenges that firms have faced over the past few years. If anything, this just reinforces the importance of having a strong strategy in place to navigate these tumultuous waters — and now, as we enter a new year, feels the perfect time to explore how to get this right.

For this issue's cover story, Rod Harrington, chief operating officer for EMEAPAC at Norton Rose Fulbright, tells all how to steer a global business towards long-term success — and shows why real discipline, agility and calculated ambition are non-negotiables. In addition, we catch up with Clyde & Co's chief sustainability officer Paddy Linighan, who explains the strategic thinking behind the firm's new approach to carbon removal, and how such sustainability initiatives can deliver several advantages.

As the hype around AI diminishes in favour of tangible results, firms must also reassess their implementation strategies to reap the benefits they seek, and this edition highlights the core areas that require a new approach. For a start, fostering a culture of creativity and safe experimentation is key, argue leaders from Brodies and Browne Jacobson. Then, a careful balance between black letter law, humanity and technology must be achieved to train the next generations of lawyers effectively — as the director of knowledge management at McDermott, Will and Schulte outlines in our regular brain training section. And, of course, one must have the right toolkit to measure the results accurately — an area where several leaders who joined our latest roundtable discussions think more progress is needed.

We hope these varied reads on offer from **Briefing** this month spark new ideas and lively debate, and help you start the new year on the right foot!

ANDREEA DULGHERU **EDITOR**



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"If your ambition is to grow significantly and compete, your risk appetite, your investment levels and your pace of decision-making need to reflect that"

*Rod Harrington, chief operating officer, Norton Rose Fulbright*



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## 65 SECONDS WITH PADDY LINIGHAN

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In November 2025, Clyde & Co announced it was pioneering a new approach which treats carbon removal as a balance sheet asset rather than a profit-and-loss expense. The firm's chief sustainability officer Paddy Linighan explains the rationale, and outlines how strategically tackling sustainability can benefit a firm's long-term reputation, compliance and profitability

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### **Q** What prompted Clyde & Co to opt for this approach to carbon removal investment?

**A** Our decision was shaped by several strategic and market-driven factors. Regulatory bodies and initiatives, like the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), are increasingly recognising the importance of carbon removals for addressing emissions that cannot be avoided. Additionally, forward-looking market analysis indicates that the value of carbon-removal credits could rise significantly by 2038.

By applying international accounting standards to recognise our net zero commitment as an obligation and classify carbon removal credits as contingent assets, we avoid an immediate impact on profits. This enables us to invest in sustainability at scale without undermining financial performance.

Furthermore, treating these credits as assets provides flexibility – if we achieve greater decarbonisation, surplus credits can be redeployed or monetised, particularly if their value increases as forecasted.

By securing credits now, we are proactively managing future price volatility and potential supply constraints. This strategy also aligns with our commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2038, ensuring we remain on course and show leadership in climate action.

### **Q** Beyond compliance, what strategic advantages does the firm expect?

**A** This approach offers several strategic benefits. It enhances our competitiveness in client procurement processes, as many clients now prioritise sustainability. It also supports talent attraction and

retention, particularly among professionals who value firms with demonstrably strong ESG credentials. Our brand is differentiated as an innovator in climate finance and legal strategy, and we are positioned for future regulatory changes.

Treating credits as assets creates long-term value, and forward procurement ensures supply security. Finally, our active engagement with industry bodies allows us to help shape ESG best practices.

### Q How does this approach strengthen long-term financial resilience and client confidence compared to traditional carbon offsetting?

A Traditional carbon offsetting typically funds projects that avoid future emissions, such as renewable energy, but does not address existing atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>. Our approach directly tackles the core issue by permanently removing CO<sub>2</sub>. Financially, it enhances resilience by treating credits as assets and hedging against price increases, providing flexibility for future compliance or resale.

This strategy is also aligned with evolving scientific and regulatory guidance, which increasingly emphasises the need for removals rather than avoidance credits. By procuring credits in advance, we secure future supply and pricing, which strengthens our credibility with stakeholders who expect robust, future-proof climate action.

### Q What should other law firms have in place before adopting this model?

A Firms should ensure they have a robust data infrastructure for comprehensive emissions tracking, strong governance with clear

leadership accountability, and alignment with frameworks such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD).

Audit readiness is also essential, including clear documentation of valuation methodologies and independent validation of carbon credits.

### Q What common pitfalls should firms avoid when embarking on carbon reduction initiatives?

A In my opinion, firms should:

- Avoid purchasing low-quality credits by prioritising projects with robust verification.

- Ensure measurement, reporting and verification systems are reliable to prevent overestimating impact.
- Ensure they don't rely solely on offsets; they must prioritise real emissions reductions and communicate transparently about the role of offsets.
- Secure clear contractual terms regarding ownership, delivery and remedies for non-performance, and consider insurance or guarantees for project failure.

### Q What strategic value have sustainability initiatives delivered over the years – and how do you quantify the enterprise value?

A Our sustainability programme has evolved into a core business strategy, delivering value in client growth, brand reputation, risk management, talent attraction and supply chain transformation.

We measure this value through cost savings, incremental revenue from climate-related services, risk avoidance and the appreciation of carbon credits as assets.

### Q What cultural shifts are needed to treat climate action as part of core business strategy, rather than as a side initiative?

A Climate action must be integrated across the organisation, not limited to a dedicated sustainability team. This involves aligning climate risk management with business planning, ensuring all colleagues understand their role in achieving climate goals, and establishing governance structures for oversight. Emphasising value creation and fostering collaborative leadership are also key to driving meaningful cultural change.

### Q How do you communicate the value internally to avoid scepticism or short-termism?

A We present sustainability as a business imperative. By connecting sustainability to financial performance and sharing tangible success stories, we foster engagement and understanding.

Leadership visibility, authenticity and transparency about challenges and progress are central to reinforce that sustainability is about long-term resilience, not just short-term cost. ▴

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**“Climate action must be integrated across the organisation, not limited to a dedicated sustainability team”**

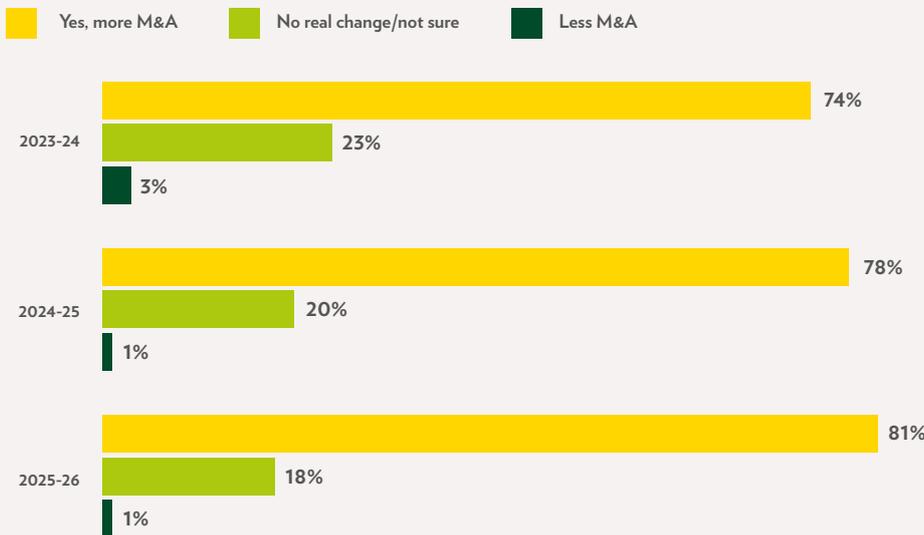


# DATABASE

How have leaders' expectations of M&A activity, and attitudes towards private equity investment changed over the past few years? We investigate, using the annual **Briefing**/HSBC UK law firms strategy and investment report data

## Leaders have consistently expected increasing levels of M&A activity over the past three years

DO YOU BELIEVE WE WILL SEE MORE M&A TRANSFORMING THE SHAPE OF THE LEGAL SECTOR OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?



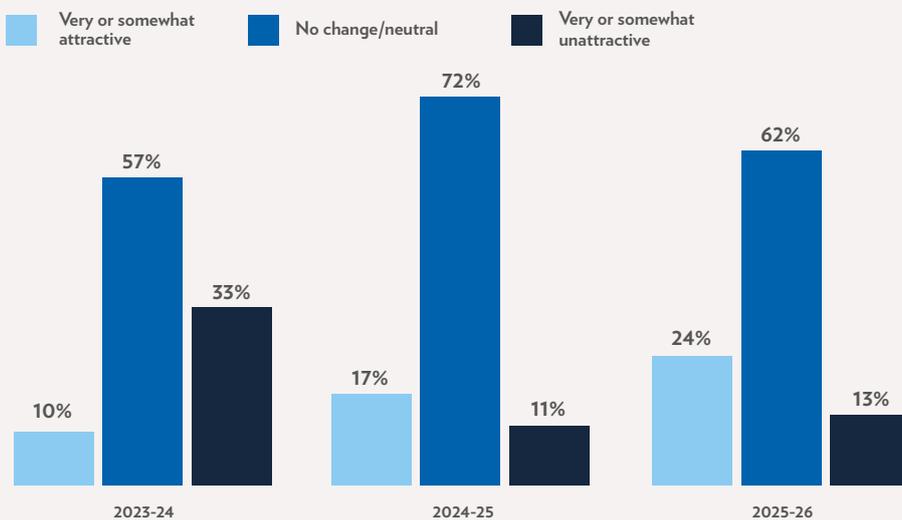
## Briefing's perspective

Despite the geopolitical turmoil and macroeconomic volatility, international growth has stayed on many law firms' priority lists — with 45% of firms eyeing this path in 2025/26 alone, according to the latest **Briefing**/HSBC UK data. As such, it's no surprise to see most leaders have anticipated, and still expect to see, more M&A activity in the legal market. It has certainly materialised over the last three years — with notable examples including the completion of the A&O Shearman and Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer mergers in 2024 and 2025 respectively, and the recent transatlantic merger plans announced by Ashurst, Hogan Lovells and Taylor Wessing (on the UK side).

When it comes to private equity, it seems some leaders have had a change of heart, and more now view it as a more attractive option. Given that firms' IT spend has increased year-on-year, the salary war rages on, and younger lawyers are less tempted by the idea of becoming equity partners, this perfect storm could be the reason why some are looking at PE more favourably. That said, in 2025 only 7% of firms said they were actively exploring PE investment — so it's still uncertain whether we'll see changes in firms' funding models anytime soon. ▴

## More law firm leaders have warmed up to the idea of private equity (PE) investment as a route to growth or transformation

HOW HAS YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF PRIVATE EQUITY INVESTMENT AS A ROUTE TO GROWTH/TRANSFORMATION CHANGED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS?



## SPEAK UP

# In the driver's seat: leading and thriving in the era of AI

DAMIEN BEHAN

Innovation and technology director, Brodies

As 2025 progressed, the AI hype subsided, the tools improved and the use cases became clearer. We expect those trends to continue in 2026, with genAI technologies fuelling innovation. The time for kicking the tyres is over. Now we're driving, though perhaps with the L-plates on. And the good news is that humans are in the driver's seat, where they belong, with AI adding horsepower, but not taking the wheel.

It's clear that AI is not a magic wand. Value comes from understanding what you want to do and adapting and adopting the technology – whatever it may be – to assist. While AI is the innovation du jour, products such as workflow and document automation tools, client relationship and matter management systems, data analytics and collaboration solutions, remain essential components of our toolkit.

For those leading transformation, the job is to work with people and processes to identify where and how the technology fits. Being a change agent, fostering a culture where teams experiment, and investigating and implementing new ways of working in a safe and secure environment: these are the traits required of leaders today.

We must encourage teams to map out the tasks they perform every day, step by step. They don't need to know or guess how technology might help them. By pairing lawyers who understand the nuances of legal work with legal engineers, we can turn those repeatable, reliable patterns into solutions for everyday use.

Part of the trouble with AI is that it

promises everything. It can be disappointing to realise that it has limitations and requires effort (or at least adjustments to the work process) to see returns. Countering the hype of the past three years has been challenging. Communicating the potential without overselling the benefits demands that we use essentially human skills, like storytelling. Unlike other technologies, AI can't be learned in a two-hour training session: it's a process of guided discovery, experimentation and incremental improvement.

Client attitudes to technology are also evolving, with more nuance and an understanding that it can be a force for good when used well, while recognising risks and costs. Clients don't just want faster: they want better, safer and explainable. Firms must be prepared to clarify their use of AI and show they have carried out the necessary due diligence on their providers. Initiatives like the Litig AI Transparency Charter will help the industry continue to mature in 2026.

The challenge for leaders is the need to preserve quality and consistency without hindering innovation. Providing clear guardrails, prepared workflows and prompt libraries, and embedding quality checks into playbooks, all help to ensure speed doesn't compromise quality. Supervising work is more important than ever where generative technologies are involved, so human-in-the-loop reviews and transparency of tool use is needed.

The thriving firms will be those that foster a culture of experimentation and evolution with tech, while focusing on the things their people do best. ▀



**Being a change agent, fostering a culture where teams experiment, and investigating and implementing new ways of working in a safe and secure environment: these are the traits required of leaders today**

## SPEAK UP

# Embrace some O with your AI



**ABBY EWEN**

Chief operating officer at Browne Jacobson

**H**ere's a question that keeps many law firm leaders awake at night: how do you get lawyers, trained to be right 100% of the time, to embrace experimentation and AI?

As chief operating officer, my approach to innovation is consistent with our identity as an O Shaped firm. Since becoming the first law firm to join the O Shaped movement, we've championed a culture built on seizing opportunities and taking ownership. This mentality differentiates us: it's about finding new ways to solve old problems by combining the best of being human and of AI.

Creativity emerges when you provide the right foundations. When you create the right environment, people naturally embrace innovation. For us this meant rolling out comprehensive digital training alongside our AI tools and ensuring everyone has the digital fluency and critical thinking skills to experiment confidently. Crucially, our people have permission to experiment. The traditional legal mindset is built on precision and accuracy. However, AI and innovation require a different approach: prototyping things and throwing them away, doing things differently, and accepting that iteration is progress.

We encourage our people to experiment with AI tools, to test approaches that might not work. It is why we launched a specific initiative for this, to facilitate knowledge sharing across the firm, allowing people to learn from one another's successes and failures.

By removing administrative tasks and data processing, our lawyers can focus on complex work requiring careful

judgement. We've built fully digital platforms that generate live data analytics for global clients and automated complex document-heavy tasks, boosting productivity by 19% in pilot programmes. The AI handles information management and our lawyers apply their expertise to interpretation, strategy and counsel.

This is the strategy we used to create our AI governance support pack for schools and academies, for example — using this technology to produce timely and high-quality articles on different topics that reflect our expertise and firm perspective. AI helped transform this static resource into a dynamic knowledge base, and shows how it can enhance existing knowledge and extend human creativity to deliver thoughtful, on-brand content quickly and confidently.

## What did we learn?

The broader creativity message applies across all professional services:

- Create the conditions for creativity: provide training, tools and psychological safety rather than mandating participation.
- Embrace experimentation as a cultural value: make intelligent failure valuable learning.
- Challenge traditional professional mindsets: balance precision with iteration and experimentation.
- Let enthusiasm be your guide: voluntary engagement indicates you've built the right foundations.

Ultimately, driving real innovation requires making the most of our people's skills and fostering creativity — that balance is essential. ▀

**Creativity emerges when you provide the right foundations. When you create the right environment, people naturally embrace innovation**

**INDUSTRY VIEW**

# Solid ground to nurture growth

**PAUL SUFFIELD**

Chief executive officer at Attest Group

**T**he final period of this fiscal year, when budgets become a dominant focus, can be an ideal time for executive leadership to define or reassess what their firm's overall strategy and aspirations are.

This process involves asking questions that will help pin where the firm believes opportunities for growth lie, and how this ultimately relates to partner profit share targets, including:

- Where do we excel from a legal, market and industry perspective?
- How do we attract and retain talent?
- What are our USPs in a highly competitive market?

## Empowering growth through a shared vision

A defined firm-wide strategy will enhance collaboration between business services leadership and the partnership. It should also form the foundation of the strategic investment decisions currently being discussed by leadership at many firms during budget review and approval cycles.

This enhanced collaboration will empower business services leaders to take a more strategic view of their departments and align budget requests with firm strategy. As for the wider firm, this approach enables it to look beyond traditional channels to drive competitive advantage and differentiation — ultimately, encouraging growth.

## Overcoming obstacles

Whether or not they have explicitly defined a company-wide strategy, all

firms are executing one, as the business and practice of law is increasingly digitised.

However, while initiatives are generally received with the right intentions, their execution can sometimes be difficult. Challenges occur for many reasons, but in our experience they often stem from low partner engagement and lack of alignment or clarity. A particular challenge we often see in setting and executing a firm-wide strategy is the impact of the 'business-as-usual' mindset.

In our view, there's one element that should be at the heart of every firm's strategy: removing data silos to enable better analysis — as this gives the clarity to see what steps are necessary to achieve the goals the business is targeting. Aligning investment and data organisation is critical to success, ultimately forming the foundations needed to execute any firm strategy.

We recommend keeping the strategy simple, and aligning investment in a way that empowers business leaders to improve their respective departments in line with that strategy. This will not only enhance collaboration but also generate new ideas, enabling the firm to continue unlocking the potential of the most critical asset — its people. **▲**



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**There's one element that should be at the heart of every firm's strategy: removing data silos to enable better analysis — as this gives the clarity to see what steps are necessary to achieve the goals the business is targeting**

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# FEATURES

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### THE EVENT

Andreea Dulgheru hears from several knowledge and innovation leaders about why quantifying AI's value-add goes beyond the P&L

## 16

### THE BIG IDEA

Rod Harrington, chief operating officer at **Norton Rose Fulbright**, outlines how discipline and calculated ambition define the firm's new growth strategy

# THE MISSING VARIABLE IN THE FORMULA FOR MEASURING ROI

In the hunt for unveiling AI's true return on investment, one vital clue seems to have been missed. At our recent **Briefing** breakfast clubs, several knowledge and innovation leaders weighed in on the missing pieces of the puzzle. Andreea Dulgheru reports

It is hard to find a large law firm that is not trialling or implementing any AI or genAI solution, or is showing no interest in this technology – in fact, only 2% of leaders said they don't expect to be using genAI at all within the next 12 months, according to the latest **Briefing**/HSBC UK law firm strategy and investment report.

However, after years of dazzling with its potential to drive greater efficiency, the AI hype seems to have faded somewhat. Novelty alone isn't enough anymore; leaders increasingly want proof of how AI is delivering value in their firms.

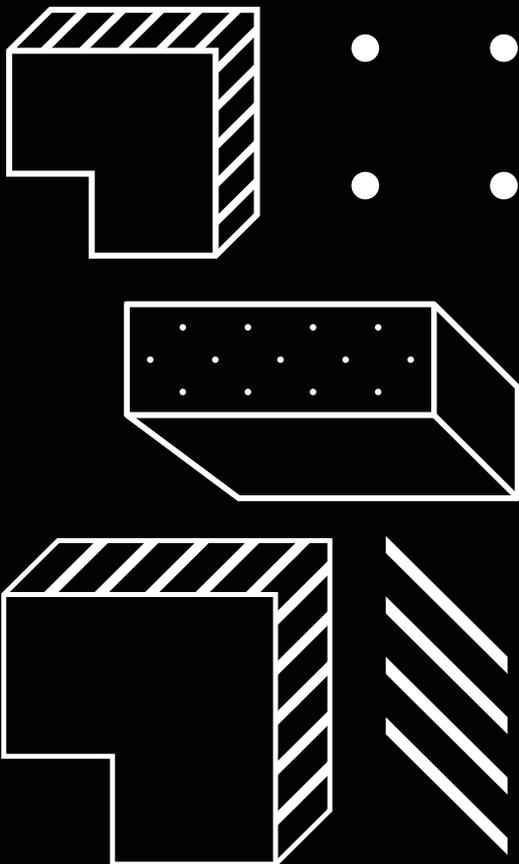
Despite this, getting an accurate measurement of ROI remains a struggle. The 2025 **Briefing**/HSBC UK data shows one third of leaders cite lack of evidence of ROI as a barrier to genAI adoption. It's certainly a sentiment echoed by many leaders – including several that have attended our most recent **Briefing** in-person roundtables.

Depending on who you ask, you will likely get

mixed opinions on where exactly AI is currently delivering value, or has the potential to do so. Some see opportunities in helping on the business services side (particularly for automating repetitive admin tasks), while others see AI as a great solution for aiding business-as-usual tasks in the practice of law, such as drafting contracts, and document creation and review.

With such a spectrum, and firms still experimenting to discover more use cases for AI in their business, the chances of finding a one-size-fits-all formula to measure ROI is slim to none. And yet, the P&L spreadsheet tends to be the first port of call for firms trying to measure just how much value they're actually getting – unsurprising, given the large sums firms are paying for these systems.

Experts note that firms often focus on how many hours the AI solution can save per user, and how that ultimately translates into greater monetary return that can justify the tech's hefty price tag. And the higher the investment, the



## Leaders highlight that focusing solely on the numbers ends up casting the human benefits of using AI into the shadows

One expert explained how their firm asks its people to write down the key results they personally want to achieve by using AI. These are then examined by the transformation leaders to identify KPIs that can be used to quantify the personal value AI can deliver across the firm. While this certainly needs a careful assessment — as selecting criteria that is too subjective or not relevant may end up leading firms on a wrong path — this offers a great springboard for the firm to quantify the human-centred benefit of deploying AI.

As AI and genAI continue to evolve and reshape law firm operation models, there's no denying that quantifying the value of AI will remain front and centre for leaders. However, one thing's for certain: the ROI equation has more variables than hours saved and pounds won — and those that focus on the more subjective, human-led results will likely get the accurate result. ▶

higher the pressure to prove ROI from a financial point of view, which ultimately influences how AI is deployed in the first place — prioritising internal cost savings and using the extra time saved with AI to win more business and increase profits above all.

That's not to say this is a wrong approach: after all, you don't want all this money going down the drain. It is merely an incomplete one. Leaders highlight that focusing solely on the numbers ends up casting the human benefits of using AI into the shadows — as those are inherently more subjective, and thus harder to measure, yet equally impactful for the firm.

Take employee satisfaction, for example. One leader explains that AI could certainly support people with admin tasks that they find tedious or challenging — or perhaps with tasks that could see neurodivergent talent struggle. This ought to result in higher job satisfaction and thus lower staff turnover, which is inherently valuable. Not to mention that this could also shave firms a pretty penny off recruitment costs.

But how can you quantify something so subjective? That remains the million-pound question, although some firms are starting to make some progress in this area.

### KEY ADVICE ON GETTING THE ROI EQUATION RIGHT

- Don't look at the numbers alone — ensure you also assess the human-centred impact of AI, such as personal productivity and job satisfaction
- Educate your people (and your clients) on what exactly AI can and can't do, to avoid setting unrealistic expectations
- Set specific KPIs to get a more accurate picture of the value AI delivers in a specific area — and make sure those are relevant for what you're trying to measure
- Understand that AI is not infallible — recognise that it is a tool that can be continuously improved, and needs investigation to find where exactly it can deliver the greatest value

# NORTON ROSE FULBRIGHT'S PLAYBOOK FOR THE GLOBAL GAME

As global legal markets evolve and more firms vie for international reach, Norton Rose Fulbright's new firm-wide strategy aims to redefine what it means to compete worldwide. Chief operating officer for EMEAPAC Rod Harrington talks to Andreea Dulgheru about how agility and holistic thinking are powering the firm's quest to stand out on the international stage

**N**ine years ago, when he last graced our **Briefing** magazine, Rod Harrington was deeply immersed in the delivery of Norton Rose Fulbright's 2020 strategy, just a year after his appointment as chief operating officer for Europe, Middle East and Asia.

Back then, the legal world looked different, and so did the business's direction of travel. Following several mergers since 2010 — most notably the one in June 2013 which gave birth to the Norton Rose Fulbright powerhouse, and the three mergers with Bull Housser, Chadbourne & Parke, and Henry Davis York in 2017 — the firm had one priority in mind: build a cohesive global business.

"Our 2020 strategy was fundamentally about integration and establishing ourselves as a genuinely international firm, rather than a collection of regional practices — so focusing on

how to create common systems, aligning on priorities and building a unified culture. Back then, simply being a truly global firm with reach across all continents was relatively distinctive."

Since then, the legal landscape has certainly changed significant. As several firms have expanded globally through organic growth or the recent wave of transatlantic mergers — with Hogan Lovells and Cadwalader being the latest to announce their proposed merger in December 2025 — simply having a global presence is no longer a key differentiator, he notes.

"These moves also underscore an important reality: clients increasingly expect seamless service across the world, not just strong regional capabilities that are loosely coordinated, and they want transparency, predictability and demonstrable value," adds Harrington. "As such, the strategic question has shifted from 'how do we become global?' to 'how do we compete and win in a market where multiple firms can offer



global capability?’ — that’s a fundamentally different and more complex question.”

Reflecting on the changes from the last decade, Harrington emphasises that external market dynamics have also become far less predictable, and technology is now a major disruptor — and changing fast. As such, the need for flexibility, adaptability and agility is even greater.

“Today, you can’t develop a strategy in isolation and expect it to remain valid for five years. You need much more regular sensing of what’s happening in the market, much faster decision-making cycles, and more willingness to adjust course when the facts change.”

“The interdependencies are also much more complex,” he adds. “You can’t think about growth strategy without thinking about technology capability — which, in turn, requires you address talent and change management. You can’t think about geographic expansion without thinking about client needs and competitive positioning. These forces aren’t independent variables, they’re all connected and form an entire system, which makes the strategic planning process much more multidimensional.”

The legal market isn’t the only force that has changed. For the past few years, Norton Rose Fulbright has focused on enhancing operational strength and financial discipline, and addressing inefficiencies across its systems and data, to build a foundation for the firm’s next strategic ambition. And now is the time for it to reap the benefits of this work.

“We’re simply a much better-run business now,” says Harrington. “Our profitability has increased substantially, our operational disciplines are stronger, and we’ve built the financial foundation that allows us to invest from a position of strength rather than necessity. That positions us very differently as we think about the next phase.”

### **Growth with real discipline**

The newest chapter for Norton Rose Fulbright

comes in the form of its new firm-wide strategy — dubbed ‘Focus for growth’, which was officially set out three years ago.

At the core of this strategy lies greater ambition, says Harrington. The firm is targeting growth rates that are meaningfully ahead of where it had been historically, and is already on track for double-digit revenue growth for its current financial year. “We want to sustain and accelerate this momentum, and that requires us to be bolder about the opportunities we pursue.”

To achieve this growth long-term, Norton Rose Fulbright is charting a slightly different course to previous years — prioritising the key practice areas and industries where the firm has genuinely market-leading positions and reputations, he says. These include corporate, M&A, competition, regulatory and investigation matters and contentious cross-border dispute resolution in various sectors, particularly financial institutions, energy and renewables,

transport, technology, consumer markets, and life sciences and healthcare.

“We’re not interested in revenue growth for its own sake. We want to grow in our positions of strength and in areas where we can genuinely be market-leading and drive commensurate returns. That means accelerating growth in practices and geographies where we already have strong

reputations and client relationships. And this means evolving our business in line with clients’ needs across specific markets.”

Linked to this is the firm’s 2025 decision to consolidate its EMEA and APAC regions into one, and separate from its South African arm — built over 10 years ago following the merger with Deneys Reitz, which will become an independent law firm on 31st March 2026.

“The APAC region has a lot of emerging markets and growth potential, particularly in southeast Asia. Bringing these two together into one integrated financial entity is part of our strategy to service the clients in this region better,” says Harrington.

“This move has created much clearer

**“A strategy that doesn’t involve saying ‘no’ to some things isn’t really a strategy — it’s just a wish list. The hardest part isn’t identifying opportunities; it’s choosing which to pursue and which to decline”**



accountability and alignment. It's far easier to execute strategy when you're not constantly negotiating between different regional priorities and governance structures. The result of this is a more streamlined global business with nearly US\$2.5bn in revenue and a better strategic alignment on our vision."

To complement this, Norton Rose Fulbright streamlined its leadership structure in 2024 to include its regional leaders in the firm's global senior leadership group. According to Harrington, this has created much greater alignment and joint accountability, as regional leaders are now directly involved in the wider business decisions, and can impart valuable perspectives based on trends they are seeing in their respective areas.

He adds: "This has changed the quality of strategic conversations enormously. You get

better decisions when the people making them have skin in the game across the whole firm, not just as part of their piece of it."

### **Giving clients what they want**

All these chess moves are part of achieving the firm's overarching goal: providing a holistic end-to-end global service to clients in its target markets.

It's driven, in part, by the fundamental shift in how general counsel now buy legal services, explains Harrington. Clients have become more sophisticated and versed in how AI and genAI can be harnessed to handle legal matters — including to complete more work internally. Expectations have increased significantly, and they are now managing legal spend with the same rigour as any other major cost centre. Transparency, predictability, demonstrable value

and efficiency are paramount.

“In recent years, clients have increasingly focused on working with smaller panels that can handle matters end-to-end, rather than manage dozens of law firms that each do individual things. Plus, they now expect their firms to bring technology, process efficiency and project management capabilities, not just technical legal excellence. In the end, they want that seamless service across multiple practice capabilities, industries and geographies. It’s no longer about being cheaper, but delivering more value.”

Delivering complex, multi-jurisdictional work in a holistic way is also the key to unlocking more challenging, profitable work, adds Harrington — a strategy that could certainly prove valuable as clients scrutinise bills and expect to pay less for firms’ technology use and time savings.

“Technology and automation have been taking over routine matters for decades, and this trend will only accelerate as genAI continues to evolve and become embedded in the fabric of the legal sector. Those who focus on this type of work end up in a race to the bottom, with the winner often being the firm that offers the cheapest rate. That’s not where we want to be,” he says.

“That is why we’re pursuing larger clients where we can deliver complex, multi-jurisdictional work that plays to our strengths, and where technology isn’t seen as a means to a cheaper bill, but rather a way to provide next-level support and expertise.”

### The yellow tech road

Digital innovation is also high on the firm’s priority list. It’s a space where he has personal responsibility as executive lead of the firm’s digital transformation programme across EMEAPAC.

This encompasses many layers, he explains. At the client-facing level, the firm is rolling out a range of AI solutions, including Microsoft Copilot as a general productivity tool, as well as several legal-specific products.

Paired with that is a significant investment in the firm’s underlying data infrastructure. This includes the introduction of Microsoft Fabric — an AI-powered analytics platform — to unify the



firm’s data and identify insights that could, in turn, be used to deliver more value to clients and enhance the firm’s internal operations.

One use case under exploration is using this technology and agentic AI to interrogate previously completed client work. “For example, we can analyse the work we’ve done over the last few years. This creates thousands of pieces of metadata that we can then use to identify what types of work have been most in demand — and thus where we should spend our time on business development,” he explains.

The long-established legal process hub in Newcastle — which now houses over 200 permanent staff across 19 teams and 10 departments that focus on enhancing the efficiency of delivering legal services — will continue to play a key role. “We’ve had our innovation hub in Newcastle for some time now, but we’re now taking it to the next phase. We’ve made some strategic hires to further develop these capabilities, and we’re expanding how we

think about leveraging technology and process innovation in client delivery.” In the past three months, the firm has welcomed the arrival of Jana Blount as director of client solutions and digital strategy, and Paul Orchard as director of innovation and legal transformation.

To reap the benefits of new and improved data analytics infrastructure, you also need a solid foundation. And Norton Rose Fulbright is therefore investing in upgrading its financial systems and core infrastructure. “You can’t be data-driven and digitally sophisticated if your underlying systems are outdated,” he says.

On the internal operations side, the firm is exploring how AI and agentic AI solutions can transform how it runs the business — not the legal work itself, but the operational infrastructure around it, Harrington clarifies. “We’re looking at speeding up client onboarding, our internal workflows, how we process bills.

The goal is to be more efficient internally, which ultimately creates capacity for our lawyers to focus on the high-value work.”

Accelerated implementation of new technological solutions is certainly on the to-do list. Harrington recognises that law firms are considered to be notorious for being very slow to adopt new technologies, but says this is due to extensive compliance and infosec due diligence. While this is certainly good practice — after all, no firm wants a cybersecurity incident on its hands — it is also directly at odds with the incredibly fast pace at which technology evolves.

“It can often take several months to introduce a new product, but the technology will continue to evolve within that timeframe. You could end up discovering that the cutting-edge product you spent all that time bringing on board is now almost obsolete, or that one of your existing suppliers has delivered the same capability that you could access at a lower or no cost,” he says. “Speed is much more important now, we need to be able to onboard these new tools faster.”

So he has committed to creating a new research and development lab with dedicated

compliance and infosec capabilities to ensure a faster and more streamlined onboarding process for firm-wide tech solutions — the aim is to reduce deployment to mere weeks or even days.

The lab will also be tasked with staying on top of latest developments in the legal tech space, plus client markets and geographies, to identify upcoming trends that present innovation or service-improvement opportunities.

“This R&D lab will enable us to be more proactive in coming up with new solutions for our clients or implementing cutting-edge technology, rather than react to what GCs are telling us or what other firms are doing — and ultimately help us stay competitive.”

### Boosting people power

Beyond ambitious profitability target, Harrington explains that the direction of travel, and the specific initiatives undertaken

as part of this journey, have been carefully crafted to create the right environment to build and nurture a truly engaged and motivated global team.

“The war for talent isn’t just about compensation anymore. The best lawyers — particularly the new generations — want to work on sophisticated, cross-border matters. They want exposure to technology and

innovation, and want to be a part of a firm that’s growing and ambitious, not one that’s comfortable and static. Our ability to attract and retain the best people is directly linked to whether we’re seen as a firm on the rise, or one that’s standing still.”

He’s keen to be “cross-pollinating the different parts of the firm” to give people the chance to better understand the business and strengthen the firm’s culture of global collaboration.

It means offering people the chance to work in different offices and teams, so they can experience other ways of working, as well as create meaningful and supportive connections.

“The other thing we’re increasingly doing is cross-border transactional staffing — which also involves resource managers,” he adds. This links

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**“We’re not interested in revenue growth for its own sake. We want to grow in our positions of strength, and in areas where we can genuinely be market-leading and drive commensurate returns”**

directly to the goal of driving more multi-jurisdictional client work.

“We’re encouraging teams to use our vast network of resources and expertise available across our many offices, rather than simply focus on their local bubble. By doing so, we’re offering our people a much more interesting experience. It also reinforces to clients that when they hire Norton Rose Fulbright, they’re not just getting legal support from one office – they’re getting the full breadth and depth of our global expertise, which is ultimately what they want.”

As it continues to invest in emerging technology and AI, it’s also essential to ensure people are equipped with the right skills to use these new resources to the fullest.

While the firm offers support to help with this, Harrington recognises that the best method is learning by doing – and is committed to creating the right space to enable this. The firm gives associates up to 125 hours for values-based activities per year that count as bonus-eligible hours. This can be used for innovation-related activities, such as technology and AI experimentation and use.

He adds: “We’re also launching a network of AI champions around the business, which will have additional non-billable time allowance to support other colleagues with training, build a library of use cases and help with this education piece. That will hopefully offer our people a

**“What’s different to 2020 isn’t just the strategy itself – it’s our level of ambition, the strength of our financial position, and our willingness to make the investments required to achieve it”**

network they can use to get them on board and ready for this path to innovation.”

### Eye on the prize

The strategy doesn’t just reflect the need for continuous evolution in a rapidly changing market and Norton Rose Fulbright’s growing ambitions – it’s important that it tells the story of how the firm has matured over the past few years, says Harrington.

“What’s different to 2020 isn’t just the strategy itself – it’s our level of ambition, the strength of our financial position, and our willingness to make the investments required to achieve it. We’re not making these investments because we’re struggling, we’re making them because we’re in a position of strength and we want to extend that advantage.”

Having lived through multiple strategy cycles now, Harrington knows the key to a successful firm-wide strategy rests on a few key principles: agility, discipline and calculated ambition.

“A strategy that doesn’t involve saying ‘no’ to some things isn’t really a strategy – it’s just a wish list. The hardest part isn’t identifying opportunities; it’s choosing which to pursue and which to decline. At the same time, you can’t set bold targets and then operate with conservative decision-making and modest investment. If your ambition is to grow significantly and compete, your risk appetite, your investment levels and your pace of decision-making need to reflect that,” he explains.

“The firms that will succeed over the next decade are those that can make clear strategic choices, match their actions to their ambitions, move quickly, invest in their own capabilities, and keep evolving – and that’s exactly what we’ve committed to do.”

## IN A NUTSHELL...

Norton Rose Fulbright’s current firm-wide strategy – dubbed ‘Focus for growth’ – reflects the firm’s increased ambition, operational strength and discipline, and desire to deliver a holistic, end-to-end service to global clients.

As part of the strategy, the firm is prioritising growth in several key practice areas and industries (including M&A, competition and cross-border dispute resolution). The firm is also targeting large global

clients who require multi-jurisdictional legal advice.

Technology and innovation remains a key focus for Norton Rose Fulbright, with the firm investing significantly in enhancing its data infrastructure, upgrading core systems, and delivering a new R&D lab.

Moreover, it will continue to upskill its people to ensure they have the right knowledge to harness new technology, like generative and agentic AI. ▀



# BRAIN TRAINING

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### **A BALANCED APPROACH TO TRAINING**

Sharon Jenman at  
**McDermott Will & Schulte**  
on why and how the firm has  
tailored its training approach  
to technology change  
models

# BALANCING LAW, HUMANITY AND TECHNOLOGY

Sharon Jenman, director of knowledge management (London) at McDermott Will & Schulte, outlines the key pillars that are core to training the next generation of lawyers in an AI-enabled world

**A**s legal professionals, we stand on the precipice of monumental change. Lawyers are not always known for their appetite for change, but transformation is both inevitable and necessary. Our responsibility is to prepare the next generation of lawyers, equipping them with the intellectual rigour, social skills and technological fluency needed to succeed in a world where genAI is rapidly reshaping legal service delivery.

The traditional expectations of great lawyering — mastery of black letter law, sound judgement, integrity and strong business and social skills — remain the foundation. Success in modern practice now demands an additional

pillar: the ability to engage confidently and critically with AI.

## **Mastery of black letter law — the foundation of judgement and critical thinking**

In a genAI-assisted world, it is crucial that our lawyers develop domain-specific critical thinking skills and understand both the law and its application within the transactional or case context of a client mandate. A deep command of fundamental principles remains central to legal education, shaping analytical precision, professional judgement and a solution-oriented mindset.

At McDermott Will & Schulte, this foundation remains non-negotiable. We emphasise the importance of legal acumen and

excellence. In building tech solutions, our focus is on ensuring that our lawyers understand why they are doing what they are doing. We then break down workflows before layering in AI. Junior lawyers must appreciate why a clause matters, not simply how to locate it through a digital tool with little to no context.

The profession must move beyond static learning. The black letter law pillar is about developing flexible, critical thinkers with depth of knowledge who can challenge and validate AI-generated output, learn new areas of law quickly and apply first principles to novel situations. As AI becomes more sophisticated, it will be deployed, with the necessary guardrails, to support that learning and insight.

Critical challenge, problem-based learning and case study simulations are invaluable in developing these analytical skills, and must be embedded throughout training.

### **Human skills: building strong relationships in a digital age**

If knowledge of the law provides the foundation, human skills are the bridge between lawyers and their clients. Emotional intelligence and the ability to listen, understand and connect are two of the most important attributes to develop.

Clients today expect more than technical accuracy: they seek trusted advisers who understand their commercial paradigm and communicate complex advice in a practical, human and wholly customised way. The lawyers who

excel are those who anticipate client needs and explain how emerging legal or regulatory developments affect their clients' businesses.

As technology accelerates, we must be mindful that some interpersonal skills are eroding. Many young lawyers are less comfortable with spontaneous communication — even making phone calls can be anxiety-inducing. At McDermott Will & Schulte, we are addressing this through dedicated workshops that simulate client conversations and triaging scenarios to build confidence and fluency.

As teams become increasingly global and hybrid, collaboration and cross-cultural skills are equally essential. Real-world client exposure, mentoring and cross-practice initiatives help junior lawyers to build commercial awareness and strengthen their ability to effectively communicate in context. These human connections cannot be replicated by AI and remain the true differentiators of excellent counsel.

### **Technology skills: from legal tech literacy to genAI fluency**

The third pillar, technological competence, has moved from being a nice-to-have to a professional expectation. As legal technology becomes more sophisticated, those who can harness it responsibly gain a powerful competitive advantage,

freeing time for creative, strategic, client-centric lawyering.

McDermott Will & Schulte is at the forefront of this transformation. We have implemented Microsoft Copilot, OpenAI's ChatGPT Enterprise and Thomson Reuters' CoCounsel, forming a best-in-class genAI stack that integrates directly into our daily workflows. We have also built custom GPT-powered assistants tailored for legal use cases, including tools for due diligence, litigation summarisation and contract analysis.

These tools enable lawyers to complete document-heavy tasks, such as diligence or expert report summarisation, in hours rather than days, while always remaining under lawyer oversight. The purpose is not to replace judgement but to amplify it. Lawyers must understand not just how to use these systems, but also how to challenge them and recognise their limits, identifying bias and ensuring professional accountability.

Training must now incorporate structured exposure to genAI, from contract analysis and issue spotting

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**Critical challenge, problem-based learning and case study simulations are invaluable in developing these analytical skills, and must be embedded throughout training**

to AI ethics and data governance. The next generation must learn how to validate machine output and integrate it seamlessly into workflows that enhance, rather than compromise, client service.

McDermott Will & Schulte has an AI-focused training programme planned for 2026 built around a core set of mandatory classes covering ethics, genAI risks, foundational prompting skills and best practice in the supervision of lawyers who use AI. In addition to this curriculum, bespoke practice group-specific training will address the distinct needs and workflows of different teams, ensuring that all lawyers and professional staff are equipped to use AI safely, effectively and in alignment with our professional standards.

### **Integrating the pillars: a new model for training**

The challenge lies not in teaching these pillars separately, but in weaving them together. Future legal training must make law, people and tech inseparable.

A single training scenario might involve a simulated transaction, case or investigation, with AI used to summarise, extract and analyse, alongside a negotiation with a human counterpart. Such exercises mirror the modern reality of practice, embedding technology naturally within human-led problem-solving.

Law firms play a pivotal role in fostering this integration. Pairing junior lawyers with mentors skilled in both digital and interpersonal competencies builds confidence. Senior lawyers must remain engaged and understand how AI-generated content is prepared, validating its accuracy and

modelling responsible use to support their junior counterparts' professional growth. At McDermott Will & Schulte, our emphasis is on lawyer-led, AI-accelerated practice, ensuring technology enhances professional expertise.

### **Next-gen lawyers: integrating technology with human expertise**

The next generation of lawyers will operate where human expertise and machine intelligence intersect. Their value will not lie in knowing everything (an impossible task in the information age), but in asking the right questions, interpreting answers critically and applying sound judgement to find client-centric solutions.

The lawyers who thrive will be those who combine intellectual rigour, emotional intelligence and

technological fluency. The profession's enduring duty to serve clients with integrity, insight and excellence remains unchanged. What has evolved is the toolkit.

By embedding the pillars of law, humanity and technology at every stage of development, we can ensure the lawyers of tomorrow are not just competent, but confident and ready to deliver a dynamic, tech-enabled form of legal service grounded in human connection and sound judgement. ▴

**The next generation must learn how to validate machine output and integrate it seamlessly into workflows that enhance, rather than compromise, client service**

## **IN A NUTSHELL...**

A big conundrum for law firm leaders currently is how to train the next generations of lawyers in the new age of AI — in a way that equips them with the necessary skills to use this technology, but also accurately practice law.

To ensure the new cohorts can succeed in today's legal world and deliver the right legal advice, Sharon Jenman, director of knowledge management at McDermott Will & Schulte advocates for a holistic approach where legal, human and technological skills are taught together through traditional and modern teaching methods.

To form a solid knowledge base,

lawyers must know the black letter of the law, and have the opportunity to test their knowledge through problem-based learning and case study simulations — which will also develop their critical thinking and analytical skills.

Lawyers' interpersonal skills must also be developed to ensure they can interact with and support their clients, and build strong, long-lasting relationships.

Lastly, firms must offer the right environment and training to enable lawyers to use various technology solutions that are now more prevalent in law firms, including AI and genAI. ▴



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## INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

# POWER TO UNLOCK ENHANCED AUTONOMY AND PROACTIVE PREVENTION



Aderant chief technology officer Andy Hoyt discusses firing up Aderant's investment in R&D to catalyse AI-driven work-to-cash automation

**A**rtificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping the business of law, particularly on the operational side of legal practice.

At Aderant, our research and development organisation is focused on one clear goal:

responsibly harnessing AI to help law firms operate more efficiently, respond faster to clients, and accelerate the work-to-cash lifecycle.

As the legal industry kicks off 2026, AI is no longer experimental. It is foundational. We are building on that reality by embedding AI deeply across our technology stack, our engineering culture and our client-facing solutions.

## An AI-first transformation from within

The AI strategy begins internally. Across R&D we're driving full adoption of AI-assisted development, testing and cloud operations. From code delivery to platform monitoring, AI tools are already integral to how teams work.

This internal transformation directly benefits our clients. By using AI to streamline investigations, accelerate development cycles and improve system reliability, we're able to respond faster, even when addressing complex operational challenges. The result is a more responsive, resilient and scalable client experience.

To support this effort, we've invested in a

broad range of AI tools across engineering and operations. Solutions such as Amazon Q Developer enable our teams to analyse logs and system data using natural language, generating concise summaries of environments, recent changes and emerging issues. AI-assisted development platforms — including GitHub Copilot and agentic coding tools — are now standard across our portfolio, helping to elevate quality while reducing delivery timelines.

Looking ahead, the focus is shifting from reactive troubleshooting to proactive prevention, using AI to identify and address potential issues before they impact clients.

## AI-powered support with askMADDI

AI is also transforming support for law firms. For example, askMADDI, Aderant's AI-powered chatbot, serves as the first point of triage for support requests. Client firms can describe issues in natural language and quickly access relevant knowledge, diagnostics and guidance.

The chatbot analyses reported issues, identifies known defects or patterns, and proposes solutions. When an issue cannot be resolved autonomously, a support ticket is automatically created and routed to the appropriate team. From there, AI assists support and engineering teams in generating and refining fixes — keeping humans firmly in the loop while accelerating resolution times.

Built on the MADDI virtual associate platform, askMADDI currently supports three core use cases: product documentation and support, troubleshooting, and natural-language data queries. Natural-language querying is already available within the general ledger in Expert Sierra, along with iTimekeep and Onyx solutions, with planned expansion into people management, docketing and additional solutions in 2026.

The impact is tangible: support response times have been reduced from days to minutes or hours, enabling firms to maintain productivity and client service without interruption.

### Work-to-cash is more autonomous

The vision extends beyond support into the very heart of law firm operations — work-to-cash. The 2025 acquisition of HerculesAI's Verify, Apollo and Athena solutions significantly accelerates this vision.

These technologies bring advanced AI capabilities that complement the existing platforms. By integrating the HerculesAI innovations with core systems, we are moving towards a more autonomous, lower-friction work-to-cash experience.

The objective is clear: reduce manual effort while improving accuracy and compliance. In practice, this means capturing time while lawyers work, automatically generating compliant time narratives, formatting bills according to outside counsel guidelines, and routing them efficiently for review and delivery. Partners and billing teams retain oversight, but AI handles the heavy lifting.

### Data and AI working together

Autonomy at scale clearly requires strong data, and Aderant is unifying data from systems such as Expert, iTimekeep and BillBlast into a common infrastructure, enabling AI agents to operate with a complete, end-to-end view of the billing lifecycle.

**AI is no longer experimental. It is foundational. We are building on that reality by embedding AI deeply across our technology stack**

This approach allows firms to automate workflows, from time capture through billing, submission and even appeals, while maintaining transparency and control. Real-time dashboards provide visibility into approvals, exceptions and progress, ensuring quality and accountability at every stage.

### Keeping humans in the loop

Although automation delivers speed and efficiency, human judgement remains essential. Law firms vary in terms of how and where they want oversight, and solutions are designed to accommodate that flexibility.

They can configure guardrails and review points tailored to their processes. For example, the Verify solution supports automated pre-bill review while still enabling human intervention where necessary. The result is a balanced model: AI accelerates routine work, while professionals focus on higher-value review and decision-making.

### A secure, scalable foundation

All these capabilities are underpinned by Stridyn, Aderant's common platform for security, scalability and cloud operations. Significant investment in Stridyn has established consistent security controls, centralised logging and monitoring, and scalable cloud infrastructure across the entire product suite.

In parallel, the R&D team has expanded automated testing, deployment pipelines and resilience frameworks — reducing risk in releases and improving overall product quality.

### Looking ahead

By embedding AI into our platforms, processes and culture, we are helping firms to modernise operations, accelerate work-to-cash and deliver better client service.

In 2026 our focus remains clear: advance responsible AI adoption, deepen automation where it delivers value, and continue to build secure, scalable solutions for the evolving legal industry. ▀

To learn more,  
visit [aderant.com](https://www.aderant.com)



## INDUSTRY INTERVIEW

# OUT WITH THE OLD IN WITH THE CLOUD

Elisabet Hardy, chief product officer at Elite, highlights the core causes of friction within law firms' processes, and why the industry-wide move away from on-prem, bolt-on solutions to cloud-based SaaS platforms is the key to unlocking harmonious and efficient workflows

**O**perational efficiency is the holy grail for law firms, and one of the core drivers behind the ever-growing investment in legal technology — which has now reached an average of 6.5% of total annual revenue, according to the 2025 **Briefing**/HSBC UK law firm investment and strategy report.

Despite the technological advances made over the last few years in the legal sector, firms are still struggling with many hidden frictions in their workflows, particularly work-to-cash, says Elisabet Hardy, chief product officer at Elite. “The stakes have never been higher because rising costs, client scrutiny and cash pressure expose every operational weakness.”

At the core of this lie several issues, a key one being the disjointed approach to handling the work-to-cash workflow. Hardy explains that many firms have very manual processes and use a variety of bolt-on technology products for individual tasks — such as entering time, generating and finalising proformas and dispatching invoices — which may sit outside the firm's financial platform. This often leads to users having to switch between multiple tech tools to piece together the work and the information, ultimately resulting in significant friction and lost hours.

“All these manual workflows waste valuable time for lawyers that could be used for client work instead, and erodes their productivity. Plus, having multiple individual tech products for

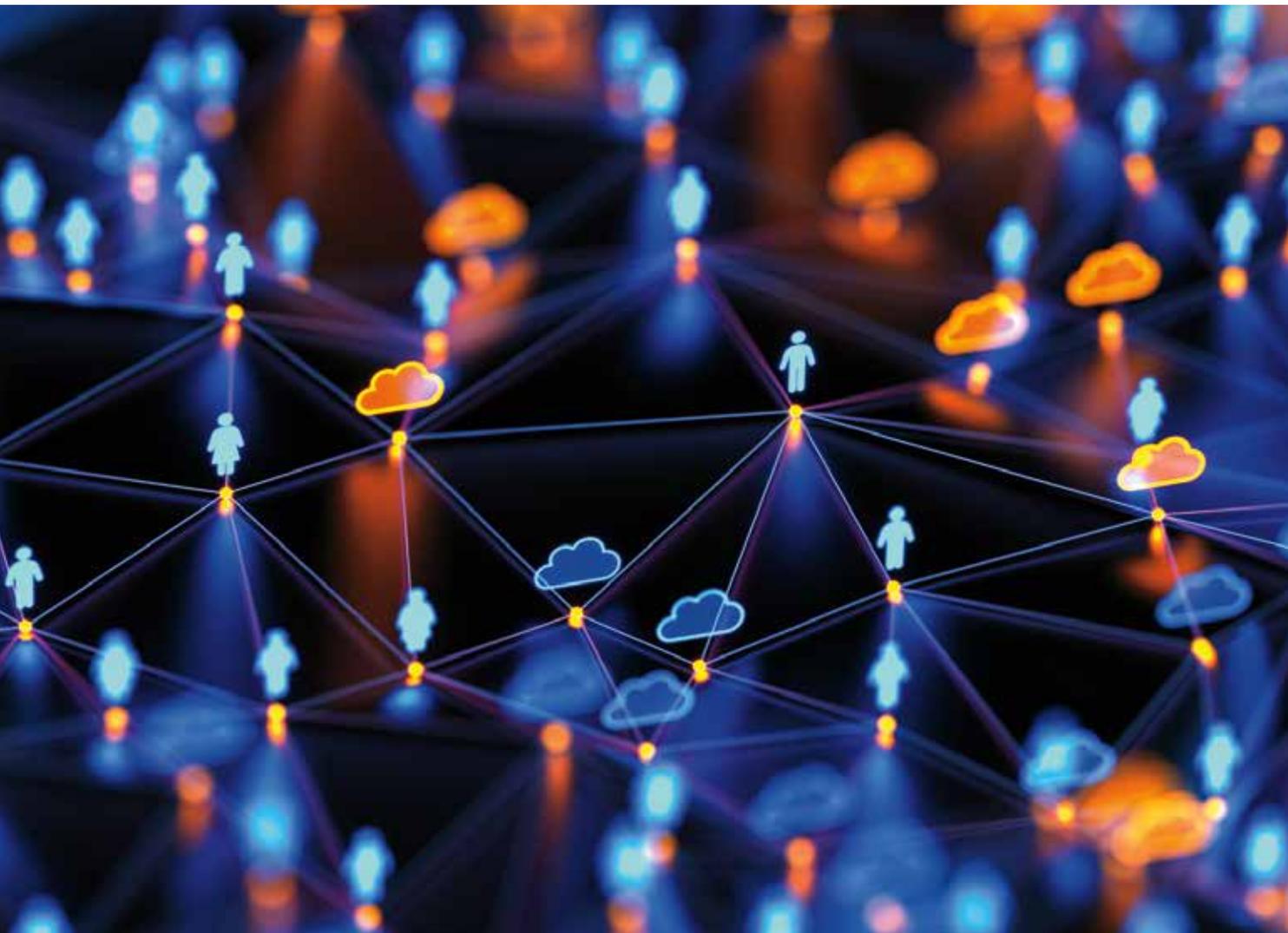
these work-to-cash tasks requires firms to invest time and resources into constantly maintaining these systems — which adds even more friction to the mix. And if firms are using on-prem, outdated architecture and infrastructure, that makes matters even worse,” she elaborates.

Compounding this challenge is data fragmentation — another consequence of using multiple bolt-on applications for individual tasks. Hardy says: “Using different tools and user interfaces ends up creating siloed data stores, which in turn leads to further fragmentation at every step in the work-to-cash process, and makes it extremely challenging to get actionable data to help inform decisions.”

She adds that the disjointed process and data, and frequent context switching between multiple tools could also make the work-to-cash workflow more error-prone. “If you have an error in the proforma that doesn't get identified until much later on in the process, that will not only slow down the whole work-to-cash cycle — as you have to go back again through the friction-riddled workflow to fix the mistake — and cause cashflow issues, but it could potentially erode that client trust and confidence in the firm's abilities.”

These hidden frictions have been the source of





frustration for firms for a while. Despite firms recognising the problem and craving a smoother billing process, Hardy notes that progress to solve this has been slow. From her experience, this is due to firms trying to fix these problems in isolation.

“Because these teams have been working in silos to a certain extent, they’ve only had eyes on their specific problems, and they have either got used to living with these, or they have focused on cobbling together some solutions for these individual issues discretely. That just ends up perpetuating the vicious cycle,” she says. “At the end of the day, everyone involved wants to get through this process as quickly and smoothly as possible. So if you want to truly achieve a harmonious and efficient work-to-cash process, you need to look at the bigger picture.”

### **Digitisation is the way to go**

Hardy says firms can no longer afford to ignore these frictions and carry on with fragmented processes – now is the time for action.

“Firms are looking for ways to operate with more speed, accuracy and visibility, and clients expect them to use technology to deliver a frictionless service and an accurate bill. However, they can’t improve the cashflow, pricing or write-offs if the work-to-cash process is slow and manual. Fragmented systems and late insights hit profitability immediately, and modernisation is now the only way to fix it,” Hardy elaborates.

She adds that AI in particular is shining a spotlight on these inefficiencies, as this solution demands clean and unified data, and smooth processes. This technology is quickly becoming essential for firms to optimise margin and speed, but it only delivers value when it’s embedded directly into the work-to-cash platform. Standalone AI tools simply add another point of friction,

To learn more,  
visit [elite.com](http://elite.com)



while embedded AI can act across workflows end-to-end, turning insight into action without disruption.

“AI is rewriting an industry that has traditionally been slow to change. As technology is evolving at a faster pace, it’s showing there are better ways to work, and exposes just how much value gets lost in slow, manual and disconnected workflows. These outdated processes will no longer be viable in the near future, and firms that don’t modernise their core systems will rapidly fall behind.

### The road to smoother processes, paved by the cloud

According to Hardy, a firm’s successful and effective transformation journey must first begin with a move to an enterprise SaaS platform. In the same way a smartphone map makes navigation seamless compared to paper maps, cloud allows firms to simplify operations, consolidate data and workflows, and unlock unlimited scalability. Cloud also increases security and removes the burden of hardware and software maintenance, giving firms a clear, friction-free path to operate and grow.

“On-prem will always be slower, more fragmented, more expensive to maintain and less secure than multi-tenant cloud,” says Hardy. “Cloud is the only environment that gives firms real-time visibility, a strong security posture, operational discipline and automation — because it unifies data and processes at the core, instead of relying on layers of integration.”

Given the market pressures and the opportunities this technology offers, it seems more firms are now starting to embrace the switch to cloud — almost two-thirds expect all core business systems to be cloud-based by 2027 (including the practice management system), according to the 2025 **Briefing** Frontiers report.

Elite has seen a similar trend, with the company noting a 125% growth in cloud SaaS subscriptions in 2025. Moreover, she confirms that in 2025, over 100 of its law firm clients have gone live on 3E Cloud, its AI-enabled, cloud-native financial and practice management system. This automation platform brings together Elite’s range of financial, invoice, time and data management solutions — including its recently launched purpose-built billing compliance solution Elite Validate — to unify the

## KEY STEPS FOR A SMOOTH CLOUD TRANSITION

### 1 Establish a centralised data structure

Leverage cloud capabilities to ensure data drives informed business decisions.

“One very large customer invested significant effort into this data strategy to ensure fee earners had real-time insight into their performance, as well as, importantly, their customer data. It allowed the partners to make data-driven decisions, leading to higher profits for the firm,” says Hardy.

### 2 Conduct a comprehensive operational assessment

Gain a clear understanding of end-to-end processes, identify gaps between workflows and systems, and uncover

opportunities as you move to cloud.

Hardy adds: “For one very major firm, we first documented their entire process, from an internal as well as external lens. The goal was to identify a minimum of three major changes to how they operate in order to return value from the investment.”

### 3 Create a centre of excellence

Align with the ongoing delivery of new features so firms can absorb value quarterly and take action effectively.

“For example, one of our large-sized law firm clients established a new change board to ensure their entire team is aware of releases, and could communicate the value,” notes Hardy.

### 4 Define clear decision-making stakeholders

Empower individuals who can approve process changes to drive efficiency. Without decisive leadership, old processes risk being replicated, and the true value of transformation is lost.

Hardy says: “One firm we work with established a very clear steering committee under the leadership of their new CIO. He is empowered to drive major change in their work-to-cash process. He is fully supported by the CFO, who is holding on any firm expansion until implementation is complete to ensure successful modernisation.”



themselves: according to Hardy, its customers have seen 50% fewer write-offs and 90% faster validation with using Elite Validate and its electronic billing solution eBillingHub, and 40% faster bill collection thanks to Elite Payments.

### **A calculated approach**

Moving to the cloud is often an opportunity for firms to address outdated processes or one-off solutions they've set up over time. For example, that program that requires you to hover for 30 seconds before demanding a print-out.

"Think of it like you're moving into a new house — you wouldn't pack your broken plates or furniture and bring them along. It's the same when switching from on-prem to the cloud. This is a great opportunity for firms to take an in-depth look at their workflows, identify where the issues lie, and only move what is truly valuable to them and their processes, leaving the outdated capabilities behind," explains Hardy.

### **The time for cloud is now**

In Hardy's view, firms are faced with a pressing challenge — dealing with hidden friction in workflows that are quietly driving up costs, slowing revenue and limiting their ability to operate efficiently.

Eliminating friction requires the right infrastructure to allow them to scale up, something that cannot be achieved by using on-prem solutions and fragmented workflows, says Hardy. Unified, cloud-based platforms are essential because they bring workflows and data together end-to-end, eliminating the inefficiencies and delays that fragmented systems create.

She expects the transition to SaaS cloud platforms to accelerate sharply over the next two years — as leaders quickly begin to realise unification will bring the greatest benefits.

"Firms are quickly moving from scepticism to really understanding the benefits of SaaS platforms, and I definitely expect this to be at the forefront of their innovation agendas," she says. "Every major efficiency gain in legal over the next decade will come from unification, not integration — and firms that stay on fragmented systems will feel that gap widen every quarter, and risk being left behind." ▾

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**“Cloud is the only environment that gives firms real-time visibility, a strong security posture, operational discipline and automation — because it unifies data and processes at the core, instead of relying on layers of integration”**

entire financial lifecycle and allow firms to operate on a single source of truth.

These statistics are signs of a major industry shift toward SaaS financial operations, says Hardy. "Our customers are telling us they want to fully automate the billing process, and want the work-to-cash process to be as smooth as possible. This is exactly what Elite's SaaS platform is designed to help with — reduce all these hidden frictions, harmonise their workflows, ensure they leverage the right data, and harness the power of AI to automate as many repetitive, laborious and error-prone tasks as possible."

And the results Elite has seen so far speak for

## INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

# MAXIMISING MERGER BENEFITS FASTER

Christopher Young, senior director at Harbor, discusses how early planning and disciplined leadership pave the way to successful integration and secure scale for ambitious transatlantic law firm mergers

**T**ransatlantic law firm mergers are increasingly a strategic necessity for the largest firms seeking scale, sector depth and relevance in a consolidating global legal market. As clients expand internationally and demand seamless cross-border advice, law firms are responding by building US/UK and European platforms – often through complex, high-stakes mergers. Yet while announcements attract attention, true success depends on integration across people, regulation, systems and finance.

## A market driven by client expectations

Corporate clients are consolidating their legal panels, favouring fewer firms that can deliver more across multiple jurisdictions. Law firms are meeting this need through lateral recruitment and other inorganic expansion.

In 2024 there were 975 European acquisitions by US corporates overall, worth US\$80.9bn, with

the UK being the top target (368 deals, US\$38bn). Monetary easing should now make dealmaking cheaper, so fuelling cross-border M&A and reinforcing demand for integrated legal advice.

Political and trade barrier uncertainties also push these corporates to expand globally. German foreign direct investment into the US rose 125% over the 10 years from 2012 and 2022, according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, while in 2024 Deutsche Bank predicted the US would eclipse China as Europe's top trading partner by 2025. In employment terms, European-owned enterprises in the US have grown by 10% annually over the past decade, making proximity to leadership teams increasingly challenging for US firms.

A credible US footprint is now essential for UK firms to secure global mandates, while US firms seek European reach in corporate, finance, private equity, technology, energy and life sciences.

The merger of Allen & Overy and Shearman & Sterling exemplified this trend, creating one of the world's largest law firms. With Herbert Smith Freehills/Kramer Levin, Ashurst/Perkins Coie, and most recently Winston & Strawn/Taylor Wessing, it's clear the above pressures are leading to action. Scale created through integration capability is becoming a key differentiator. Greater scale spreads fixed costs

As transatlantic mergers reshape the global legal landscape, integration capability is becoming as important as the deal strategy itself



— property, regulatory, technology — over a larger revenue base.

### Regulatory and compliance complexity across the Atlantic

Strategic alignment is crucial, but regulatory differences often pose early challenges. Anti-money laundering rules are well established in the UK and Europe, less so in the US. Conflicts rules are also interpreted differently. Data governance adds further complexity: GDPR, client consent and cross-border data access must be addressed early to enable systems integration and collaboration.

### Conflicts and day-one readiness

Conflicts clearance is among the most time-sensitive of requirements. From day one, conflicts must be cleared across both legacy firms. Definitions vary between jurisdictions, requiring upskilling and early implementation of waivers and information barriers. Failure to address conflicts early can delay integration and disrupt client service.

### Financial integration: planning beats standardisation

Financial integration presents its own transatlantic challenges. US firms typically use cash accounting, while UK and European firms

use accrual. Currency management, fiscal year alignment and reporting standards all require careful planning. Collaborative matter management is particularly complex: firms expect to produce a single bill while operating separate finance systems. Interim solutions for joint matters are essential.

### Leadership and execution: the deciding factor

Successful integrations share a common feature, however: empowered leadership. A clearly identified leader who has authority to make decisions accelerates progress. Goal-setting matters. In one case, firm leadership set a target of a single time and billing system within 60 days – it was achieved in 56. Such focus aligns teams and prioritises integration over less critical initiatives.

Harbor's experience — assisting almost 60% of law firm mergers over the past five years — shows that planning is a major differentiator. Supplier and vendor management often delivers unexpected benefits. Mergers inherit duplicate HR, finance and practice management systems; renegotiating these contracts strategically can offset integration costs. In some cases this workstream has fully funded the integration.

### Preparing for the next wave

The momentum behind transatlantic mergers shows little sign of slowing, with two more announcements as 2025 ended. Firms with ambitions in corporate, finance, private equity and technology will remain at the forefront, driven by client demand for integrated global advice. Leaders considering a merger in the next two to three years should prepare early: invest in people, systems and advisers before identifying a partner. Advanced preparation reduces risk, accelerates benefits and enhances attractiveness.

As transatlantic mergers reshape the global legal landscape, integration capability is becoming as important as the deal strategy itself. ▴

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## INDUSTRY INTERVIEW

# FIRMS MUST CHOOSE WISELY WHEN SEEKING CHANGE



The global forces facing business have perhaps never seemed more volatile and immediately uncertain. Disciplined demand management, connected strategic decision-making and cultural curation are the order of the day to secure law firms a sustainable programme of effective transformation, says Stephen Brown, managing director at Lights-On Consulting

**T**he start of a new calendar year is traditionally a time to muster optimism about potential changes ahead. Equally, we're reminded just how uncertain the world has become when we see the events unfolding on the news.

Changes outside a law firm include global issues such as shifting political allegiances, priorities and trade decisions, regional volatility/instability, economies attempting to adjust — often known as VUCA issues (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous). There are also the ever-expanding options to navigate new technology. Leaders with a strategic remit must take all of this into account, as well as the firm's own financial and technology position.

Brown also points to regulatory change that tends to lag behind the accelerating march of technology — for example, the emergence of the AI genie — “but which will catch up and impact how firms must behave with it before long”. And there are forces in technology that seem impossible to control — shapeshifting cyberattacks, including at nation-state level, where the best that can be done means preparing for the very worst. Brown says: “There are cases where firms have lost a core system for weeks; how do you adequately insulate against that?”

## Agility to work through instability

“Firm leaders can choose to retrench and raise the drawbridge in relation to change, or focus and deliver on opportunities for transformation these uncertainties present. Corporate clients, in particular, are operating through the same volatility — they'll need services that really help them to react and stay nimble with their own strategies.”

When challenges bite, especially if posing a risk to financial positions, leaders may be tempted to row back on some planned strategic investments as a result. But Brown believes waiting for a more favourable climate before tackling technology needs would be a mistake: “The bold continue to plan and invest — the planning itself must allow for more potential change than in a more stable environment.” This could mean adapting budgets and programmes to shorter investment cycles, a challenge for many firms for obvious reasons.

The **Briefing**/HSBC UK Law firm strategy and investment research 2025 once again found under 10% of strategy-focused leaders plan to pause growth — with 45% focused on finding more across borders. “All managing partners we've recently spoken to say growth is key,” Brown agrees. And there's no escaping the fact that choices about managing risk and investing in the future do have an impact. “For example, some

voice concern that most attention — and then budget — is directed at ‘shiny’ new technology, with risk that focus on foundations such as the practice management system is neglected,” he explains. He highlights that many larger firms are still running ‘on-prem’ versions of their practice management system, while cloud alternatives enjoy automatic upgrades every quarter, and importantly, automatic security patching. After two years those sticking with the legacy may be eight versions behind some of their competitors! The multi-year change involved is, of course, much more complex to handle from a data-management perspective — but that’s not a reason to rule it out (nor perhaps put it off). Indeed, the latest legal market research from PwC found 48% of firms expect a transformation in the finance support function will be underway within the next two years.

### The AI imperative

At the same time, it’s those shiny things — the likes of genAI — challenging the usual three-year planning and buying cycle. “Leaders will surely want some form of ROI within 12 months because by then the AI landscape will have moved,” observes Brown. “Technology skills shortages aren’t a new challenge, but moving faster on AI also makes firm risk there much more acute.” Now the time is right, Lights-On has launched its ‘emerging technology’ service line, with new specialists and upskilling of expertise elsewhere, to support firms. Add to that wildly different client appetites for AI-augmented work to reconcile — can firms really accommodate each and every client demand for AI use or non-use?

Smaller firms in the **Briefing** market can’t imagine they’re immune to the lashing of global headwinds — it’s typically tech from around the world they’re running. With SaaS, the manoeuvres of either Microsoft Azure or Amazon are inescapable, and the pressures on AI and other tech adoption will also ripple down all sizes of firm.

### The power of priorities

Little wonder perhaps some are also worried about their own succession — not only in terms of adequately training lawyers as AI disrupts the usual path in the name of efficiency. Brown says: “Those with the money invested also have the expertise for AI to be effective — so if big-hitters

start to leave firms because they find it all too hard and don’t want to be involved in ‘training the latest LLM’, then you have a real strategy problem.”

So with both business risks and pressure to seize the opportunities ever morphing and intensifying, how do leaders find the way through?

“Demand management is essential,” he says. “You also can’t lock priorities down for a year. One week a new piece of work comes in and now you need to reprioritise.” At the same time, parameters shift within relative business-as-usual, such as the “housekeeping” to, for example, secure post-merger synergies, or choosing the right SaaS solutions.

It’s a key area where Lights-On supports leaders — a framework and language for prioritising today’s decisions balancing both near and longer-term rewards; cost and time-to-delivery as factors, and the risk/cost of doing nothing (or postponing). He continues: “In truth they possibly do have the money to deliver most of what they’d like to change, but there’s almost certainly not the manpower available.” All too often teams just haven’t done such an assessment at all, or priority thinking isn’t aligned with strategic direction such as growth plans and ambitions.

Add also the complexity with shifting roles and reporting lines — remits of incoming data, innovation, AI and security heads — and it’s never been more important to fully understand and appreciate the rationale for such alignment. The last thing they want is for lawyers to see IT as a frustrating block to business progress and seek other ways of delivering their work. A common language helps, and the underlying culture on which it rests is critical to a sense of a camaraderie that takes everyone forward on transformation together.

“Projects fail where relationships between people are weak,” Brown concludes. For a strong return on investment they must be invested themselves, so strengthening communication and cultivation of mutual respect are also strategic choices.

“With no vested interest, one of Lights-On’s prime responsibilities working with firms is to give affirmation at the right points, but also confidently to call out the bad or insensitive behaviours when that’s needed.” The early days of 2026 are certainly a time to be considering how to approach change in a firm. ▽

To learn more,  
visit [lights-on.com](https://lights-on.com)



## INDUSTRY INTERVIEW

# PATHWAYS TO PROCESS THAT FITS THE PRACTICE

Nigel Williams, product director and interim head at LexisNexis Enterprise Solutions, says a firm's technology strategy in 2026 needs tools with the flexibility to fit a range of possible futures — and practical routes for reaching them

**A** forward-thinking law firm's technology strategy today is a world away from the work that faced Nigel Williams when supporting lawyers at his first firm three decades ago. In 2026, firms are trying to balance modernisation, operational resilience and AI adoption — all without destabilising live work.

Risk profiles, for example, have radically shifted in line with multiple pressures — including more efficient remote and dispersed work, demonstrating ROI from AI pilots moving beyond experimentation, democratised toolsets and agile response to transformation-hungry clients — and increasing scrutiny on governance, data, and security — all while leaders must protect both revenue and reputation from bad actors.

In short, you can no longer simply assess suppliers every few years and select the best/most cost-effective case or matter management system. Solutions must still fit a firm's approach and immediate goals but also have the flexibility to move with these contexts — without locking it into decisions it may later need to unwind — including how the firm governs AI use, captures and trusts matter data, and manages change without disrupting fee earners.

## Let the system serve the work required

A good example is a firm that has to manage changing levels of demand — from lower value, higher volume, highly processed work, to more complex, often multi-party instructions. It's a characteristic that made Clyde & Co the go-to

collaborative partner when LexisNexis Enterprise Solutions developed Lexis Everyfile to complement the established, customisable Visualfiles case management system (version 7 arrives in 2026). A key lesson from that work is that supporting different teams isn't only a workflow challenge — it depends on agreeing and governing consistent matter data that can flex across use cases.

Williams says: "Whether it's case management for conveyancing, matter management in corporate, document or legal project management, it's all ultimately legal work — and there's always a client at the end." This is the ethos of Everyfile — delivering workflow solutions that are easily tailored to the specific tasks at hand." In simple terms, Visualfiles remains best suited to complex, bespoke, repetitive and high-volume casework. Everyfile is designed for rapid change and lower adoption friction where firms want flexible work management with less intrusion and access anywhere, on any device — reflecting that not all legal work, or team, operates in the same way.

"Lawyers need a toolset to match their way of working more effectively, whether that's with process, documents, in client-facing interactions, or collaborative project management."

In addition, most **Briefing** firms will be exploring options to apply genAI in parts of

**"Consistent structure puts you in a much better position to see reliable AI outputs and a return"**

workflows — weighing the cost and expected outcomes. “The worlds of legal work management and advances in AI work best together as a blend. Is repetitive, high-volume work best handled by AI? If something happens outside the norm, for legal guidance, or complex document operations, AI is a great assistant.” He points to the power of tools such as LexisNexis Protégé, which support lawyers to be more productive where work takes place. These AI tools enhance professional judgement.

### Demands on firm data run deep

On top of being an aid to efficiency in the moment, genAI can also work on processes to spot patterns and identify possible business improvements for the longer term — or support deeper analysis of multiple matters to yield extra layers of market insight (for example, cycle times, bottlenecks, leakage and client reporting).

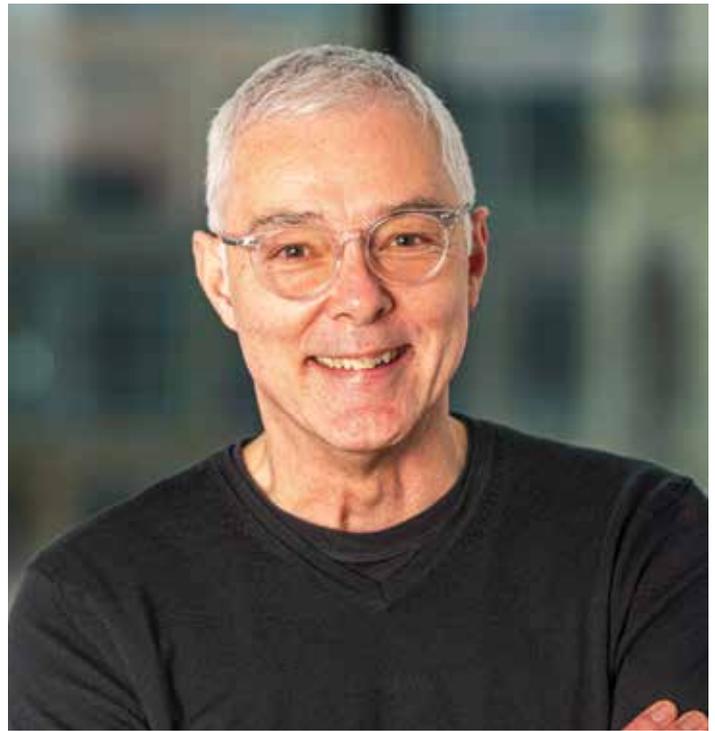
But success here heavily depends on data quality, which many leaders acknowledge can be a major area of organisational weakness — tied to a long sequence of technology decisions and developments perhaps, but also typical user behaviours and responsibilities. AI increases both the value of trusted data and risks of getting it wrong.

“Consistent structure puts you in a much better position to see reliable AI outputs and a return,” says Williams. “Governance continually grows as a critical risk factor, and firms also need a grip on specific use cases that could transform client or employee experience.” A firm like Clyde & Co, where clients increasingly value data as a service strand, has taken significant strategy strides on this front.

“Our solutions reflect the importance of data as a strategic asset. Visualfiles remains a strong data foundation, with version 7 introducing Microsoft document management and its associated data benefits. Everyfile offers simpler customisation to accommodate changing dataset needs. Optimising how data is captured, governed and used is a core driver for both — underpinned by the cloud capabilities of Microsoft Azure.”

### Standalone or staging change?

Williams believes end users’ (including partner) technological empowerment over the years is a major shift. It’s such a challenge, he says,



because, even with an approved menu of tools, a default ‘no’ to the more difficult conversation isn’t the solution — especially when governance and data controls are now board-level concerns. You don’t want to lose engagement and enthusiasm for exploring where new tech could take the firm.

Inevitably to govern is, of course, to challenge thinking and then choose. One example: considering recent security incidents, firms are asking harder questions about assurance, resilience and operational control — including whether they have confidence in identity, access and data controls.

Leaders increasingly recognise there is no single ‘right way’ to approach major change. In some contexts, a decisive leap may be appropriate, but in others the most daunting change projects can be managed in more palatable ways — less pain endured to reach promised gain by way of more manageable “staging posts” rather than single “rip and replace”. That approach can reduce delivery risk and shorten time-to-value. Williams isn’t convinced that best-of-breed is best replaced with one tool to rule them all.

This thinking about change is part of the Lexis Everyfile proposition — a system that stands alone where a firm is in the right place, but where it could also securely move data or workflow in stages on a pathway to more appealing ways of working as client mix and strategy dictates. ▲

To learn more,  
visit [lexisnexis-es.co.uk](https://www.lexisnexis-es.co.uk)



# TRUST AT THE CORE OF IT INNOVATION

As technology reshapes the legal and consulting sectors, IT departments are stepping up to drive transformation and deliver better client outcomes. Matt Haynes, global director of IT at OC&C Strategy Consultants, shares how a proactive, people-centred approach, and a partnership with Modular Services, is helping his team to build trust and offer exceptional support across the business

**H**aving worked as a senior IT decision-maker at a leading UK law firm for over eight years, Matt Haynes – now global director of IT at OC&C Strategy Consultants – understands what makes an IT department tick, and the key part it plays in a firm’s operations.

He says it goes beyond helping people with their business-as-usual IT needs. As new technology such as AI is introduced, the IT function is a key player in helping firms to adapt and turn these market forces into opportunities to deliver better outcomes to clients.

For this, trust is essential – and Haynes argues the IT team has a responsibility to deliver a great user experience for the firm’s people, to instil that confidence. “If the IT team can’t get the basics right, people won’t trust their ability to carry out more advanced initiatives, like rolling out a change management strategy or implementing AI.”

He notes there are two common blocks to building such trust. One is the way the IT

department decides how it will interact with and support users. “Where I’ve seen many businesses – including legal and consulting firms – fail is when they force people to use a certain means of communication to report IT issues, like a portal or a specific ticket submission process. This leads to the issue being solved much slower, and creates a poor user experience for the team member that needs tech support, thus eroding trust.”

Moreover, he notes that IT teams are often stuck in reaction-mode, responding to different requests from users rather than being proactive – an issue he was determined to solve at OC&C from the moment he joined the business.

## A perfect match

After assessing the current state, Haynes decided to team up with an external partner that would supply round-the-clock tech support – one that shared OC&C’s values, that would act with empathy and kindness, and that could deliver a highly customised experience that felt like an extension of the firm.

“Just like law firms, OC&C has a hierarchy, and each group of people has different tech pain points and needs. To service these, you need someone who truly understands their issues and how to solve them,” says Haynes. “When we spoke to the Modular Services team it was clear they genuinely cared about delivering that customised, empathetic service that we wanted.”

After selecting the key people from the

**“If the IT team can’t get the basics right, people won’t trust their ability to carry out more advanced initiatives, like rolling out a change management strategy or implementing AI”**



Modular team who would provide the services, and a team-building exercise during which the two companies' teams worked together for a month both remotely and in Modular's Romanian headquarters, the 24/7 IT support service officially went live on 1 September 2025.

The outsourcer initially handled 60% of OC&C's IT tickets, growing to 80% in three months. This, in turn, allows the company's own people to handle more complex projects. "We're doing five office moves this financial year – including a big retrofit for our London location – so having Modular's support has given more time to our internal IT team to deliver the necessary infrastructure for these offices with a higher level of quality and attention to detail," he adds.

According to Haynes, Modular's understanding of OC&C's operation model and ability to deliver the desired service was evident from the start, as none of the firm's staff could tell the IT tickets were handled by an external partner, or noticed a drop in the quality of support – a big win for him.

Not only that, but within the first month of the partnership the company's global IT service desk achieved 98% customer satisfaction.

"For us, that is one of the biggest indicators of success. It is why we regularly ask for feedback from those who log the IT tickets, and we always make sure that any negative comments are addressed to further improve our service. This is another area where Modular's dedication shines – before I even have a chance

to check these comments, the service desk team lead from Modular is already on it and has come up with ideas. That means a lot, and shows this is a real partnership."

### Looking beyond cost savings

Having seen first-hand the value of such service, Haynes believes a 24/7 IT service desk could be the right solution for many firms looking to boost their IT department's efficiency – particularly as technology continues to be embedded in the fabric of law firm operations.

"Legal and consulting firms have some real challenges ahead, particularly with AI reshaping our business models and redefining how we empower teams to deliver a better outcome and stay competitive. There's enormous pressure on the IT function to help the firm respond to all these market forces, so it needs the necessary resources to do so. This is where partnering with an external provider of IT services like Modular could be an easier and more cost-effective solution for a law firm, compared to other options," he says .

For firms looking to take this step, Haynes has a piece of advice: don't assess the ROI of such a solution solely based on the money, but rather look at the overall value the supplier will deliver – such as to team and client experience.

"Costs matter, but you also need to assess how this solution will improve the productivity of your people, how it will help with employee retention and job satisfaction, and a lot of other human-led factors that don't sit in a P&L spreadsheet," he says. "All these things stack up – and they ultimately contribute to both productivity goals and the firm's bottom line, so it's essential to look holistically at the true value of implementing the solution." ▲

To learn more,  
visit modular.  
services





**LUCY RAO, global business development director, Kennedys**

I aim to do more of the things that motivate and drive me, that I value and, above all, make me smile. These range from being more curious and trying new things to making new connections, getting out of my comfort zone and joining new social groups (I can be quite shy!). Top of the 'continue doing list' is to keep learning. I'd quite like to learn to use a drill so I can hang my son's blinds and pictures rather than paying for a handy person to come in. I'd also like to continue to learn from my peers and teams — hearing their career experiences, finding new ideas and new ways of doing things and embracing change are all things I'll build on in 2026. Plus, of course, keeping clients front and centre of everything I do!



**JACINTA MURPHY, head of commercial and legal operations, Kingsley Napley**

In 2026, the focus is on translating our new managing partner's vision into practical outcomes and maintaining momentum through increased collaboration across the firm. In this context, my team's priority is advancing the next phase of our client and matter lifecycle review and design project. This work goes beyond incremental process improvement: it's about creating a more consistent, transparent and scalable operating model that supports client experience and firm performance. Our focus over the year will be moving from design into execution, embedding sustainable change and ensuring new ways of working are understood, adopted and delivering value.

On a personal level, this period has sharpened my thinking about what it means to lead through uncertainty. I have learned that leading effectively in these moments requires a balance of clarity and openness, setting direction while also being honest about what is still emerging. That thoughtfully expressed professional vulnerability can build trust, support better decision-making and create space for people to contribute with increased confidence.



**LYNNE JONES, head of research and knowledge resources, HFW**

The knowledge management team at HFW has one clear resolution for 2026: to transform how we manage and share knowledge across the firm. This year will be pivotal, and busy for us as we launch our new knowledge management database and redevelop our intranet. These initiatives are more than technology upgrades — they represent the firm's commitment to smarter, faster and more collaborative ways of working. With the knowledge database, our goal is to create a single, intuitive platform where knowledge is not just stored but actively leveraged to deliver insight and value. To achieve this, we'll focus on three priorities: seamless integration with our existing workflows, robust training to empower every user and an increased emphasis on recognising the value of a knowledge culture. Our aim is to make knowledge accessible at the point of need whether it's for client work, research or innovation. In 2026 we want to generate more impact from information, ensuring people have the tools to work effectively and to share their expertise effortlessly. ▀



**RICHARD GASTON, head of knowledge and research, Addleshaw Goddard**

My touchstone phrase for this year will be 'content is king, and a hard taskmaster' — my resolution for 2026 is to ensure this is recognised and valued across our global business. Knowledge professionals are familiar with invisible and often unappreciated hard graft. Many, like my own research and knowledge services team, plus our wider community of knowledge lawyers, will continue to be occupied with the painstaking tasks of sourcing, verifying and producing the trusted content that helps our colleagues win work and do it well, while ensuring our clients can successfully navigate future risks. Our trusted content will be an indispensable part of the innovative transformation of both Addleshaw Goddard and the practice of law, as we head towards the 2030 milestone of our firm's strategy.

## NEW HORIZONS

Four law firm leaders share their personal and professional New Year resolutions for 2026



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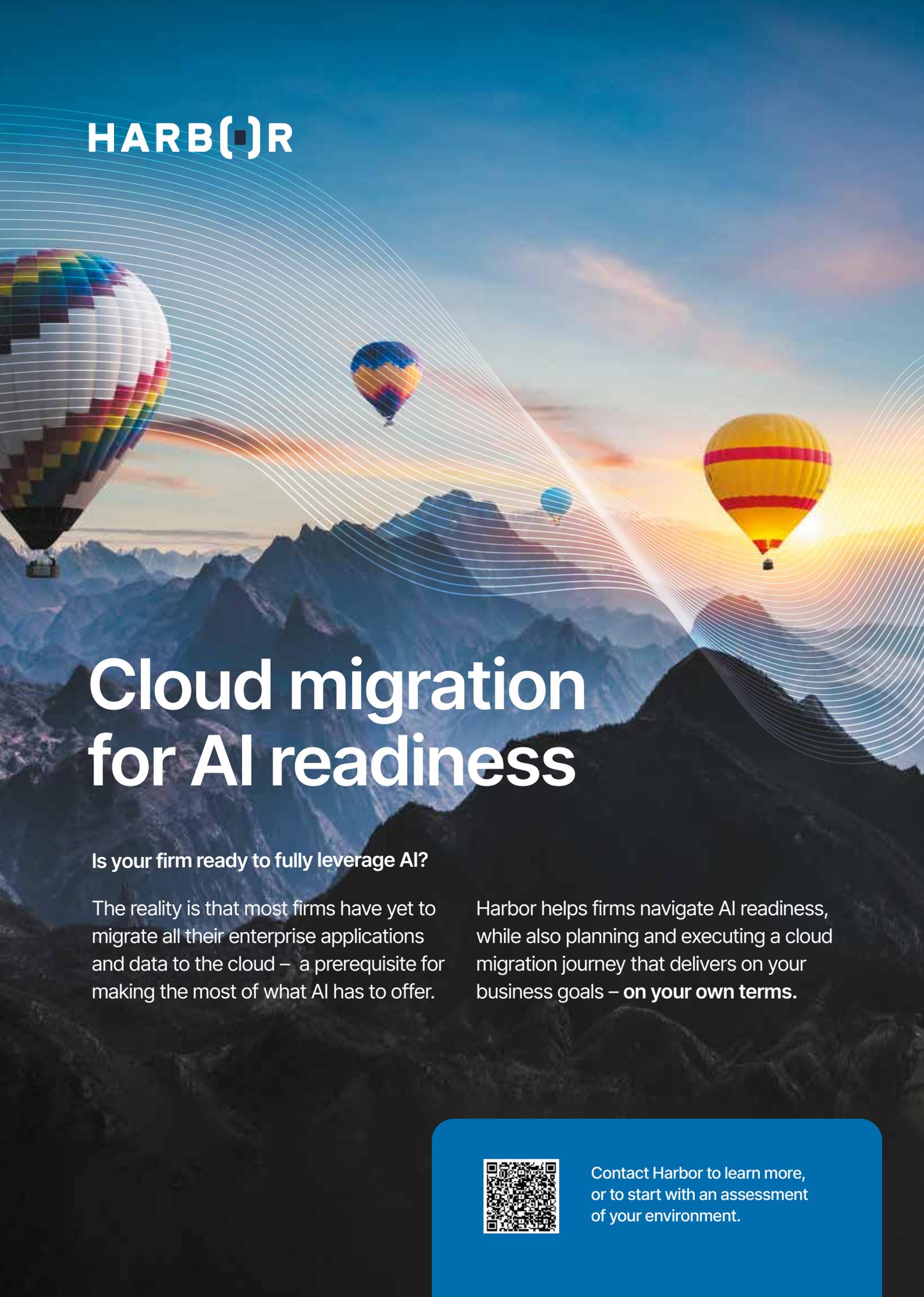
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# Cloud migration for AI readiness

Is your firm ready to fully leverage AI?

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