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# 'Elite' Law Firms May Be Among Earlier Adopters of Artificial Intelligence Platforms

Many clients appear to be moving forward with the Watson technology.

Ed Silverstein, Legaltech News

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Watson – the promising cognitive computing platform from IBM – has yet to engage many law firms, but looking ahead some of them may have little choice but to become an adopter. This is especially true given the momentum that similar platforms have gained with law firm clients industries.

“Our expectation is that clients ... [and] especially large banks ... [and] ‘SIFI’s’ [systemically important financial institutions] will adopt it first .... Since they’re such critical clients for BigLaw, elite firms will have to follow,” Bruce MacEwen, president of Adam Smith, Esq., said in a statement to Legaltech News.

One tool already utilizing Watson for legal issues is ROSS – which was developed at a class at the University of Toronto, and came in second-place in the Watson University Competition. [ROSS](#) takes in natural-language legal questions, performs legal research related to the questions and attempts to answer the questions, according to [Legaltech News](#). It also monitors the law to notify users of new court decisions that can affect a case. One sample question it could answer is, “When can a debtor reject a collective bargaining agreement as per the US bankruptcy code?”

Now a start-up, ROSS is backed by the Y Combinator, a prestigious accelerator in Silicon Valley.

Andrew M.J. Arruda, who is a co-founder of ROSS, called it “the world’s first artificially intelligent attorney. ROSS is trained to read the law, understand the type of questions that lawyers might ask one another, and get smarter the more lawyers use it.”

“They’re getting tons of support to launch in the [United] States,” says Helen Kontozopoulos, who co-taught the initial class at the University of Toronto with Mario Grech – where they co-direct the Department of Computer Science Innovation Lab.

Kontozopoulos predicts that in the next five years there will be experimentation and use of Watson in law offices.

Adoption of such technologies may be encouraged by chief technology officers at the firms; or a single attorney may want to see if it helps them to do a better job on their work; or even some law firms may have management recommending that Watson technology be used in the firm, according to Kontozopoulos.

“This is a competitive advantage,” Kontozopoulos said.

Often younger attorneys are more open to such technology than their more veteran colleagues. Some attorneys, she said, were concerned that technology like ROSS could take away from billing time, but that is not the case. “You can bill and do your best work with your clients,” she told Legaltech News. Technology cannot replace the “expert knowledge,” as well as the “motivation” and “negotiation skills” that lawyers have, she adds.

“There needs to be a human factor in it,” Kontozopoulos said. “You always need someone to ask questions....It [the technology] can’t do it on its own.”

Given the increasing amount of information out there, Watson and similar technology is needed. “There’s just too much information. You need a tool to sift through it,” Kontozopoulos explained.

Last year, IBM announced the IBM Watson Group, which is focused on development and commercialization of cloud-delivered cognitive innovations. Also, IBM also set up Watson Health Cloud that provides offerings for healthcare.

The use of IBM’s Watson technology could be a major cost-saver in the near future.

“Within a year, somebody will have purchased Watson in an Am Law firm,” Tom Clay, co-author of 2015 Law Firms in Transition Survey from Altman Weil, told [Legaltech News](#) in May. “It could be more than one ....”

Clay says it would not surprise him if everyone in the legal profession would want the capabilities of Watson. Firms will likely use it as a differentiator to target existing and potential clients, and it could be particularly useful in the management of documents, litigation and e-discovery.

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