

Law firms prep for a deeper AI integration in 2026 as it enters workflows

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December 29, 2025



Summary

After a year of pilots, India's top law firms are embedding AI into core workflows as clients push for faster and more insightful turnarounds and a sharper pricing. As adoption deepens in 2026, firms face talent and governance questions, with an apex court panel also examining guardrails for AI use.

Dear reader, as 2025, a year of global tumult and volatility, rolls by, Mint's reporters and columnists look around the corner on what is coming in 2026—to help you know what to expect and prepare for it. Tell us what you think at feedback@livemint.com.

After a year of testing the waters, India's top law firms are heading into 2026 facing a decisive question: can [artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#) move from a promising pilot to everyday legal infrastructure? What began as cautious experimentation in 2025 is now shifting toward deeper, workflow-level integration, even as firms remain measured about governance, client confidentiality and the impact on pricing. And the transition is unfolding alongside growing judicial scrutiny, with a Supreme Court panel examining guardrails for AI use in legal processes.

Senior partners at the law firms say AI is increasingly being deployed across research, knowledge management, due diligence, drafting and dispute preparation, though adoption remains practice-specific, rather than uniform across firms.

The focus for 2026, the firms say, is not about adding more tools but redesigning legal workflows where technology can consistently improve speed, accuracy and predictability.

Some firms are already scaling aggressively. Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas says it has moved decisively beyond pilots. "In 2025, we moved from experimentation to full adoption, and today over 80% of our total headcount actively uses AI," said Cyril Shroff, managing partner. "Our priority for 2026 is to take this to 90% plus, and shift the focus from adoption to intelligent automation."

Shroff said the firm's strategy is to deploy technology practice group by practice group, rather than rely on generic solutions. "Different teams have different needs, and one tool will never solve everything," he says. "Our approach is to ensure the right technology for the right workflow, supported by strong interoperability so systems speak to each other and reduce platform fatigue." The firm is scaling tools such as Legora, Copilot, Litera and Casemine across research, drafting, diligence and knowledge retrieval.

At Trilegal, technology is already embedded in day-to-day practice. The firm says it is widely used for document review, contract summarization, diligence support, multilingual translation and chronology building, particularly in corporate, projects and disputes practices. "These tools are reducing friction, accelerating turnaround, and improving the precision of our work product," says Nikhil Narendran, partner-technology, media, and telecommunications at Trilegal, adding that usage has moved well beyond the pilot stage.

CMS IndusLaw describes the shift as moving from a "nifty helper" to "invisible infrastructure". Founding partner Kartik Ganapathy says the firm is prioritizing depth over breadth. "We intend to work on a few workflows taken end to end, rather than sprinkling technology everywhere like magic dust," he says, pointing to transaction diligence, dispute chronologies and knowledge systems as focus areas.

Still, not all firms see wholesale transformation yet. At Khaitan and Co., the adoption remains deliberate. "Our 2026 priority is to move from pilots to thoughtful, workflow-level transformation built on our existing data and knowledge systems," said Rohit Shukla, chief digital officer. He adds that automation is being scaled only where it genuinely improves consistency and turnaround time, with research and knowledge access leading the way.

Automation targets due diligence, contracts

At Singhania and Co., managing partner Rohit Jain says technology has already delivered tangible gains in contract lifecycle management through the firm's proprietary platform DocuGuard, that has cut turnaround time for high-volume contracts by nearly 60% using Aadhaar e-signing and automated workflow triggers.

"For 2026, our primary target is corporate due diligence," says Jain. "Due diligence is a bottleneck, highly manual and prone to fatigue-based errors." The firm is piloting a merger and acquisition (M&A) automation tool that scrapes and structures data from corporate affairs ministry filings, court records and trademark registries, presenting associates with consolidated dashboards so they can focus on risk analysis, rather than manual data entry.

Billing models under pressure

Mint reported in August that technology is beginning to disrupt [the decades-old hourly billing model](#) used by law firms, as automation sharply cuts time spent on routine legal work. Law firms said time spent on research and documentation has reduced by 20-30%, and in some cases by 40-60% of daily workflows, particularly in large disputes and document-heavy matters.

Clients, the firms say, are increasingly demanding disclosure on how much work is supported by technology, with billing decisions factoring in such transparency. Firms are preparing for hybrid billing models that combine fixed fees for technology-driven tasks with hourly billing for complex, judgment-heavy advice.

While around 60% of lawyers still rely primarily on hourly billing, nearly 40% are experimenting with flat, capped or milestone-based fees. However, most firms say the benefits are currently reflected more in faster turnaround and deeper analysis than immediate fee reductions, with cautious adoption continuing amid concerns over accuracy and oversight.

Client data and governance

Despite rising adoption of AI, client confidentiality remains non-negotiable. "Client confidentiality is the foundation of our approach," says Khaitan's Shukla, noting that client data is never used to train external systems.

Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas echoes the view. "Client confidentiality is at the heart of our programme," says Naval Chopra, partner, adding that the firm uses secure environments and plans to further strengthen auditability and governance in 2026.

Singhania and Co. says “data sovereignty is non-negotiable”, relying on ring-fenced environments, source verification for system-generated data points and strict role-based access controls.

Hiring: hybrid skills, not fewer lawyers

Firms pushed back against fears that technology will replace lawyers. Instead, hiring is shifting toward hybrid legal and technology skills. Khaitan says it is building multidisciplinary teams combining legal expertise with workflow and systems design.

Ganapathy says 2026 will bring more hybrid roles, rather than headcount cuts. “The future is not about shrinking teams but redeploying time saved into higher-value strategy and client engagement,” he says. Singhania and Co. expects technology-focused roles such as legal process engineers to account for nearly 15% of non-fee-earner recruitment.

Clients want value, not just speed

Client expectations are evolving alongside adoption of AI by firms. “Clients increasingly expect faster, more insight-driven legal solutions,” Khaitan says, adding that reliability and robustness matter as much as cost.

Trilegal says clients are seeking predictive insights and judgement beyond what their internal systems can generate, while CMS IndusLaw notes growing resistance to pure time-based billing and rising interest in value-based pricing for accelerated work.

A balancing act

Most industry experts agree that embedding AI in core legal work entails a tough balancing act. Speaking to *ET Legal* at a Microsoft AI and cloud roundtable on 10 December, Swapna Parambath, head of legal affairs at Microsoft India, said AI adoption in legal teams requires both a personal and institutional mindset shift. The value of tech tools becomes clear only when users understand technology does not replace legal judgment but augments it, she said. Resistance to adoption, Parambath noted, often reflects generational and hierarchical tensions, with senior leadership cautious about data security and junior professionals more willing to experiment. Managing expectations, particularly within the legal profession, remains a key challenge.

At the same panel, Damini Marwah, group chief legal counsel and chief ethics officer at Axis Bank, said [Indian regulators](#) have consciously avoided hard-coding AI regulation at this stage, allowing institutions space to innovate while building internal governance frameworks. The real challenge, she said, lies in

defining accountability. As AI becomes embedded deeper into decision-making, questions around data inputs, model oversight, human review and responsibility increasingly fall on legal and risk leadership.

Some law firms are also putting internal oversight in place as adoption deepens. Saraf and Partners, for instance, has constituted a dedicated AI committee to guide its approach in 2026.

“To ensure that our adoption is thoughtful and future-ready, we have set up an AI committee that oversees tool selection, usage protocols, training and validation processes,” said Sahil Arora, partner at Saraf and Partners.

Judiciary enters the debate

As law firms deepen AI integration, India’s judiciary is also confronting the growing footprint of technology in legal practice, raising questions that could shape how far firms can rely on such tools in court filings.

In a recent case, the Supreme Court flagged the misuse of AI-generated content in court filings in a high-stakes insolvency dispute between Omkara Assets Reconstruction Pvt. Ltd and Gstaad Hotels Pvt. Ltd, promoted by Deepak Raheja. The issue pertains to a litigant filing a rejoinder containing hundreds of fabricated case citations that did not exist in any judicial record.

The top court has since constituted a committee to conceptualize, implement and monitor the use of such tools within the judiciary. The panel is chaired by Supreme Court judge Justice P.S. Narasimha, with senior high court judges from Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab and Haryana and Karnataka as members.

Looking ahead to 2026, the committee’s findings are expected to play a critical role in defining how technology can, and cannot, be used in judicial processes, particularly in filings and evidence. Any limits imposed by courts could directly shape how law firms deploy these systems in litigation and dispute-related work.