

From today to 2031: A five-year blueprint for AI, automation, and talent #TRIC226



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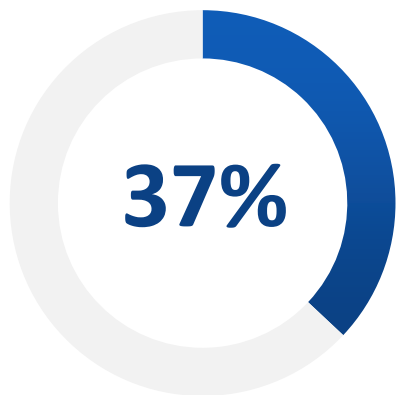
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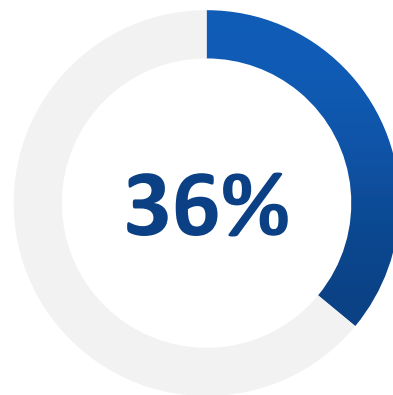
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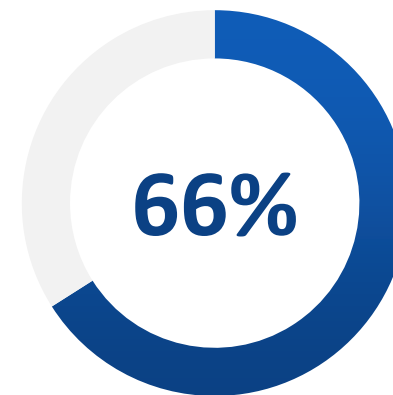
The profitability model is evolving



of clients want visibility into where **technology drove efficiency**¹



of clients want **financial transparency** on staffing and billing²



of firms **do not formally document AI efficiency gains**²

¹BigHand 2026 Annual Law Firm Finance Report

²Blickstein 2026 COO Survey

Running the business today while redesigning it tomorrow



Technology spend

Technology and knowledge management spending rose 11.6% overall and 8.7% per lawyer in Q2 2026. Compensation and staffing costs continue to outpace demand growth, while equity partner demand fell 1.2%.¹



Operation priorities

COOs and ops leaders are solving three core problems: proving the payoff on AI and technology spend, keeping and reshaping the people who run the operation, and defending margin while clients demand transparency.²



Profit visibility

Firms often have high-revenue cases with low or negative margin, overloaded lawyers, and practice areas that have aged out of profitability. This lack of visibility alone costs six figures in annual profit.³

¹Thomson Reuters Institute, Q2 2026 LFFI Analysis

²Caddi, Legal Operations in 2026

³Cathcap Consulting, The 2026 Law-Firm Operating Model

Learning, iterating, and scaling without waiting for perfection

81%

of firms with a defined AI strategy are already seeing ROI

Firms with a defined AI strategy are far more likely to see ROI. They focus on specific workflows where AI improves productivity, rather than testing tools in isolation.

23%

of firms with no strategy at all

Successful pilots use real firm data, realistic working conditions, and flexible trial periods, with hands-on onboarding tied to billable work. Metrics like “70% weekly active users” can be used as measures of success.

¹Global Law Lists, How to Build an AI-Ready Law Firm in 2026

²Thomson Reuters Institute, ILTACON 2026: “Does it make the boat faster?”

Bringing people and organization along



Structural inertia

96% of in-house legal departments have adopted AI, but only 31% use it at scale. The barrier is structural inertia: legacy processes, unclear ownership, and cognitive defaults make the familiar choice easier than the right one.¹



Multidisciplinary talent

Law is becoming multidisciplinary, adding data scientists and AI specialists and creating new career paths. Process design, workflow management, and organizational effectiveness are now strategic capabilities.²



The human edge

Senior professionals excel at situational awareness, empathetic counseling, and building team and client loyalty. As AI handles routine work, recruiting and rewarding for these skills becomes the differentiator.³

¹Axiom, 2026 GC Report: Beyond the Billable Hour

²Wolters Kluwer, The AI-Ready Law Firm

³Cleary Gottlieb, Thoughts on Managing the AI Transformation

A blurred, long-exposure photograph of a modern office lobby. The scene is filled with people in business attire walking through a spacious area with a polished, reflective floor. Large potted plants are placed throughout the space, adding a touch of nature. The architecture features high ceilings with exposed wooden beams and large glass windows that let in natural light. The overall atmosphere is one of a busy, contemporary professional environment.

The legal firm of 2031