

How to buy legal services in the age of AI.

A verification-first approach.

What to require from your law firms before their AI agents touch your matters, and how to check that they did it.

Clients want AI-enabled quality from their firms. Almost none say they actually get it.

Say it is very important or essential

78%



of corporate clients, on AI-enabled quality improvements from their providers

Say most or all providers deliver it

3 to 6%



the same clients, asked whether they receive it

A third are reconsidering provider relationships within twelve months.

Source: Thomson Reuters, Future of Professionals 2026, 1,816 professionals, 62 countries.

Most legal departments cannot say whether their firms use AI on their matters.

59%

of in-house teams do not know whether outside counsel uses generative AI on their matters.

80%

neither require nor encourage their firms to use it.

32%

of corporate clients are reconsidering provider relationships within twelve months.

Sources: ACC and Everlaw, October 2025; Thomson Reuters, Future of Professionals 2026.

Today's guidelines ask firms to describe their process, but none ask them to prove it.

✓ WHAT GUIDELINES ASK FOR TODAY

- Disclose when AI is used on substantive work
- Approved and prohibited tools
- No client data in unapproved tools
- Human review before delivery
- Audit rights, after the fact

✗ WHAT NONE OF THEM CAN TELL YOU

- Which actions an agent **actually took** on your matter
- Which actions your requirements **stopped** before they ran
- Whether the check happened **before** the action or after
- Any of it **without trusting the firm's own log**

Sources: ACC sample AI guidelines for outside counsel; Law.com and Litera RFP guidance, July 2026; ICME Labs review.

A firm can hand you four things. Only one of them verifies the legal services rendered.

4 Receipt

Issued before the action runs. Tamper-evident. Verified by you, without the firm's systems or its file.

NO TRUST REQUIRED

3 Log

The firm's system's account of itself, written after the fact, editable by an administrator.

**TRUST THE FIRM'S
SYSTEM**

2 Disclosure

A note that AI was used. Says nothing about which actions, or which were stopped.

TRUST THE FIRM

1 Policy

A document. Read at onboarding, cited after something goes wrong.

TRUST THE DOCUMENT

The billing problem. ABA Opinion 512 says bill actual time but you have no way to check.

Firms may not bill for time AI saved, and only **15% of in-house professionals** expect fees to hold or rise as firm AI use grows. Yet the invoice is the firm's account of itself.

A receipt for every agent action gives you the count that matters: **how many actions cleared without a human touch**. That number is where the savings are, and it is the number no e-billing review can produce.

Sources: ABA Formal Opinion 512, July 2024; Thomson Reuters 2026 Legal report.

Malpractice insurers now ask firms about AI controls. So can you.

1,600+

court decisions worldwide finding reliance on AI-fabricated material, and the count grows near daily.

\$110K

largest known U.S. sanction to date, in *Couvrette v. Wisnovsky*.

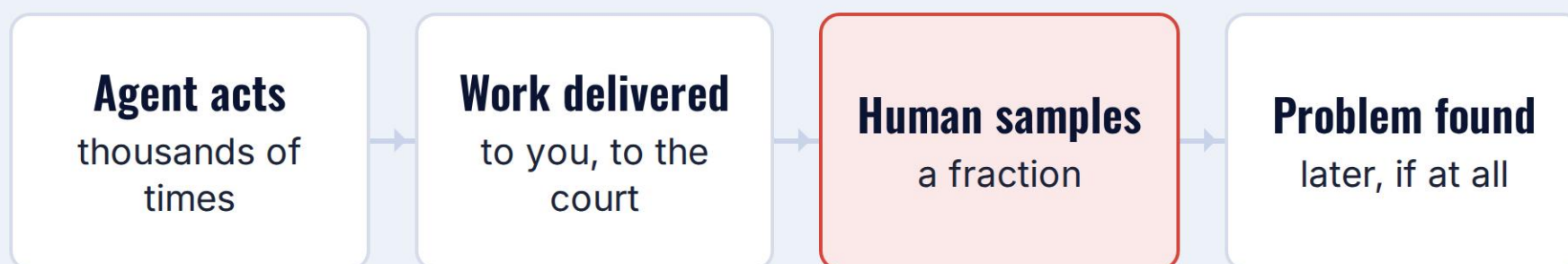
60%+

of lawyers' liability carriers now ask about AI use at intake; 7 of 13 report rising AI-related claims.

Sources: Damien Charlotin, AI Hallucination Cases database, mid-2026; EPIC Insurance Brokers, 16th Annual LPL Claims Survey, May 2026.

Check every legal AI agent action before it runs, not a sample after.

X REVIEW AFTER: HOW MOST FIRMS SUPERVISE AGENTS TODAY



✓ CHECK BEFORE: A VERIFICATION-FIRST CONTROL



Human review is reallocated, not removed: the control handles the checks a person was never going to perform at volume, and the person handles the judgment only a person may render.

The minimum standard for AI-enabled litigation, made verifiable.

STEP	AUTHORITY	MUST BE TRUE BEFORE THE FILING LEAVES THE FIRM	THE RECEIPT PROVES
Conflicts	Model Rules 1.7, 1.9	Conflicts check has run against the current party list with no unresolved hit , or a waiver is on file	Check ran against the party list, at a time
Deadline	FRCP 6; local rules	Due date computed under the rule and compared against the docket	Date computation and comparison result
Research	Rule 1.1; FRCP 11(b)(2)	Full text of every cited case retrieved and on file, not the headnote	Retrieval at content hash • support routed to lawyer
Cite check	FRCP 11(b); Rule 3.3; ABA Op. 512; Starr and Baylson orders	Every citation checked for existence, quotation match, and negative treatment ; pass bound to the document	Checker pass at content hash • yellow flags routed to lawyer
Record cites	FRCP 11(b); Baylson order	Every pin cite resolves to a page of the filed record	Resolution result at hash
Privilege	Rule 1.6; FRCP 26(b)(5)	Production set screened; zero flagged documents remain in the release set	Screen ran; count of flagged items in set is zero
AI verification	ABA Op. 512; Tex. Op. 705; N.D. Tex. LR 7.2(f)	A named human verified AI-generated content; required certification attached	Verification record and certification exist
Sign-off	Model Rules 5.1, 5.3	A named supervising lawyer signed off, bound to the final content	Identity and time, at hash

Routed to lawyer marks the judgment the control cannot decide and sends to a named person instead.

What the receipt proves and does not. It proves the check ran and passed against this document at this time. It does not prove a case supports the proposition, that nothing privileged was misclassified, or that the brief is right. Those remain the lawyer's, and the receipt shows the lawyer was in the loop.

The minimum standard for AI-enabled deal work, made verifiable.

STEP	AUTHORITY	MUST BE TRUE BEFORE THE REDLINE OR SIGNATURE PACKAGE GOES OUT	THE RECEIPT PROVES
Conflicts, KYC	Model Rules 1.7, 1.13	Conflicts and KYC checks run with no unresolved hit	Checks ran, at a time
Entity, authority	ABA Model SPA and APA; review practice	Each party's legal name matches formation records ; each signatory's authority document is on file	Name match; authority document exists · validity routed to lawyer
Playbook	ACC, CLOC playbooks; Stark; Adams	Every playbook clause conforms or carries a logged, approved deviation	Clause map at hash · deviation approval routed to lawyer
Defined terms	Adams, Manual of Style	Zero undefined or unused terms; zero broken cross-references	Integrity check at hash
Market terms	ABA Deal Points Study 2025	Key economic terms compared to the current benchmark ; off-market terms flagged	Comparison result · acceptance routed to lawyer and client
Diligence	Practical Law, Bloomberg Law checklists	Every required diligence category has a status ; none blank	Coverage count
Closing	ABA Model SPA and APA; Practical Law	Every condition precedent and deliverable satisfied or waived	Set check: zero open items
Execution	Execution practice	All exhibits and schedules attached ; every signature block present	Attachment and presence check

Routed to lawyer marks the judgment the control cannot decide and sends to a named person instead.

What the receipt proves and does not. It proves the check ran and passed against this draft at this time. It does not prove the resolution is valid, the findings are complete, or the deal is wise. Those remain the lawyer's, and the receipt shows the lawyer was in the loop.

Proof of process, per matter. A report you can ask for.

Agent controls report

Matter 26-1183 · August 2026 · illustrative

Agent actions **checked** against your requirements before they ran

1,412 receipts RCPT-A1...

Actions **stopped** because they would have violated a requirement

9 each names the requirement

Actions **cleared without individual human review**

1,403 where the savings are

Three numbers that describe what happened, not what was bought. Nothing in e-billing, citation checking, or vendor evaluation produces them today.

Sample clause for outside counsel guidelines.

"Where the Firm uses AI or software agents on our matters, the Firm will operate **pre-action controls** that check each proposed action against our requirements before it executes and block violations. On request, the Firm will provide a **tamper-evident record we can verify without access to the Firm's systems**, showing the actions checked, the actions stopped, and the actions cleared without individual human review. A licensed attorney retains responsibility for all work product."

Harbor's 2026 report found no participating firm can measure AI's impact. Firms change when clients insist. This is what to insist on.

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