

Digital differentiation in the Indian legal market

An executive briefing from RSGI & iManage



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The leaders



From data to knowledge to wisdom

At its RISE India events in February 2026, RSGI convened the leadership of premier law firms and general counsel to discuss how to address the operational implications of AI. In an AI-saturated market, what keeps a law firm competitive?

The discussions among managing partners reflected a general sentiment that there is a growing need to build a “data moat” around institutional intelligence. This is a priority that the iManage research confirms: some 52 percent of Indian respondents believe that firms in their industry will compete on the quality of data and AI, compared with

“If you don’t organise your data, you have no wisdom to sell. You are just a lawyer with a chatbot.”

Indian Managing Partner

46 percent globally. Leaders at the table recognised that, while AI is necessary, it is the process of data-structuring that allows practitioners to unlock a firm’s deeper expertise.

Nishith Desai, founder of Nishith Desai Associates, said: “If you organise data, it becomes information. Information interpreted becomes knowledge; when you add experience, it becomes wisdom. But all these do not per se solve a problem. When they solve a problem creatively and create value, it becomes innovation. We have now entered an innovation age.”

The Indian managing partners shared a collective anxiety: the narrowing gap between the high-level wisdom that law firms are expected to provide and the baseline knowledge that clients can now access independently via their own AI tools. If law firms fail to nurture their wisdom, they risk obsolescence as clients become increasingly AI-sophisticated.

On a mission to centralise

While each law firm has its own approach to digital differentiation, RSGI’s discussions revealed some key similarities. Whether through iManage or other repositories, most Indian law firms have set a goal to capture all their historical and current knowledge and expertise in a single place.

Komal Gupta, chief innovation officer at Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas, said the firm adopted iManage in 2009 and now has 100 percent usage. Local hard drive space on practitioners’ laptops is deliberately limited, so they have no choice but to save their work centrally. Local storage, said Gupta, fractures the firm’s institutional knowledge. Even when temporary local storage was granted for an AI pilot, it was revoked the day the pilot ended to maintain data integrity. “Everything has to happen inside my iManage,” Gupta said.

Khaitan & Co. integrated iManage in early 2024, following a digital restructuring programme. Rohit Shukla, executive director and chief digital officer, took a

“Everything has to happen inside my iManage.”

Komal Gupta, CIO

two-pronged approach to achieving total data centralisation. The model blends a forward-looking, prospective approach, described as the “iManage movement” by Shukla, with a backwards-looking, retrospective recovery project.

The prospective strategy is a cultural initiative designed to ensure that no new work is lost to local drives, while its retrospective counterpart aims to reclaim any knowledge locked in local storage drives. The goal is achieved through rigorous training, knowledge sharing and the recovery of scattered documents to layer into the firm’s preferred AI.

Change is in the air

Initiatives to centralise data or to implement AI require sustained engagement by everyone in the firm. A key theme emerging from RSGI's February events is that leading Indian firms see change management as a critical strategic investment. One managing partner put it bluntly: "We are very happy with iManage and Harvey. Not so happy with my users." Harvey's representative noted that prompt engineering courses are no longer the only priority. "Now, we teach mindset shift because the tools are so good," she said. "We are trying to teach people to think creatively as to how they use it."

During a session on information architecture and AI, panelists — all AI leaders from private practice and in-house explored how to activate firm-wide mindset shifts. They identified three key steps:

1 Demonstrate immediate value:

Win over sceptical users by showing them immediate efficiency gains in low-effort, high-impact tasks.

2 Lean on vendors:

See them as partners who can demonstrate "the art of the possible". After all, they know the tools better than anyone — and want them to be used.

3 Identify power users:

AI champions act as translators who turn an intimidating piece of tech into a practical, everyday tool with relevant use cases for their colleagues.

From change to disruption?

Some participants on RSGI's event panels warned of more drastic change on the horizon. Among them was Premji Invest's general counsel, who threw out this challenge.

"While you are all obsessing over Indian [legal market] liberalisation," he said, "the real disruption will come when native Indian AI law firms are established."

AI is already transforming incumbent law firms, which cannot risk falling behind their peers as they embrace the technology. As yet, India has not seen its first native AI law firm — though someone will surely seize the opportunity. Are the incumbents ready to compete?

All power to the power user!

One trend that RSGI has seen both internationally and in India is the rise of the AI power user. These are people who use AI tools to maximal effect wherever appropriate in their work – expert users who often become the AI champions in their organisations, helping accelerate the adoption of digital tools.

Firms are selecting innovation champions in each practice area or office to test practice-specific AI agents, build prompt libraries, and share their knowledge with colleagues. Each firm has its own approach.



cyril amarchand mangaldas
ahead of the curve

Case study 1:

Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas requires every partner to nominate one AI innovation champion from their team. These champions drive AI adoption by testing and customising tools, sharing knowledge, and managing feedback loops. Those who rank among the top 10 are acknowledged through firm-wide recognition and receive special bonuses.



AZB & PARTNERS
ADVOCATES & SOLICITORS

Case study 2:

At **AZB & Partners**, the firm has deployed AI champions across all offices to identify high-impact use cases tailored to specific practice areas. The firm views AI as a mechanical “autopilot” that clears the way for lawyers to differentiate themselves through intellectual judgment. One of AZB’s leading power users observed that AI disruption is just a case of “the mechanical versus the intellectual: autopilots haven’t made pilots redundant, they’ve made flying better”.



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