Thomson Reuters CoCounsel Core

Getting Ahead of the Game with Generative AI tools

O'Neill Associates

> "It's inevitable that there's going to be a time when every firm is going to have this kind of tool, so we wanted to be comfortable with it from the start and see how it can fit into our day-to-day work. Like most people we explored ChatGPT when it came out, but we knew it wasn't suitable for us to use in our legal work. Knowing that CoCounsel Core is developed specifically for lawyers was crucial for us."
>
> **– Andrew Mawdryk**
> Associate Lawyer, O'Neill Associates

Since 2018, boutique labour and employment law firm O'Neill Associates — which is based in Ontario, Canada — has been positioning itself to compete with larger national firms. With six full-time lawyers and a total staff of 12, the firm serves both employer and employee clients on issues from labour relations to litigation. Recognizing that generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) would soon become an intrinsic part of the legal landscape, in 2024, it started investigating how Thomson Reuters® CoCounsel Core, the first AI assistant developed specifically for the lawyers, could transform its day-to-day operations and create competitive advantage. In a short space of time, it has delivered significant efficiency gains, and the firm continues to identify new possibilities for its use.

Robust Search and Research Capabilities

O'Neill Associates already uses several other Thomson Reuters products, including legal research platform Westlaw.® Having considered another competitor as well, it chose CoCounsel Core because of that relationship, because the technology was robust, and because it was confident that Thomson Reuters would continue to invest heavily in its development to keep it at the cutting-edge of innovation.

Initially, the firm deployed CoCounsel Core to streamline its precedents database, to make it easier to delve into documents such as HR policies

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and employment contracts, and to search for clauses. Previously, manually searching through precedents relating to certain issues or angles a lawyer was looking to take was very time-consuming. Now, with CoCounsel doing the work, it's much faster and more efficient.

The firm also saw the potential to turbocharge its research capabilities, for example so that lawyers can answer a client's complex legal questions faster, review contracts quickly and easily, or to assist in the litigation discovery process. For example, the firm is often tasked with conducting collective agreement reviews, which means going through each 50-page plus document line-by-line looking for specific wording (which can often be hidden). This used to be laborious when done manually — but no longer now that AI can do the job. "It sounds simple, but having a powerful search mechanism is so important," says Mawdryk.

A Springboard and a Checker

O'Neill Associates uses CoCounsel Core as a springboard to originate certain aspects of its work on the one hand, and on the other to help check and augment the outputs its lawyers create.

For instance, one of the firm's lawyers uses it to create first drafts of communications. By putting a few prompts into CoCounsel, it can create correspondence in no time, which the lawyer then simply adapts for her purposes. What used to take over an hour now takes around just 15 minutes. Another colleague sees its potential to help create precedents where none currently exist by inputting basic information and then editing the results.

"From a client's point of view, CoCounsel Core is a real time and money saver. When they're paying an hourly rate, and it's taking 10–15 minutes as opposed to an hour, or an hour and a half, to deliver the same advice, that's just much more efficient," Mawdryk points out.

He also relies on it as a summary tool, for instance to distill details of a potentially interesting case into a short precis, so he can see if it's relevant and worth digging into more deeply. It is also useful for translation purposes, or for creating brief "explainers" for clients on fundamental aspects of law. For another lawyer on the litigation side, it's proving valuable for pre-trial preparation, streamlining the discovery process, and suggesting what questions should be asked ahead of the trial.

"There are clear benefits for litigators, but CoCounsel Core is also very useful for day-to-day legal work," Mawdryk says. "We can throw in some details and use what it generates as a starting point, obviously with some oversight and editing. It's also a helpful brainstorming tool — it gives you a good sense of anything you might have missed, say when you're drafting a clause in a settlement agreement. And when it comes to litigation, where it's critical to get the right questions to ask in preparation for a trial, it's a really helpful aid for that complex discovery."

Future-proofing the Firm

Being an early adopter of CoCounsel Core is expected to help future-proof the firm, so that it is ready to harness generative AI capabilities as they advance and stay ahead of the curve. "We didn't want to be the last ones to start to use CoCounsel Core," explains Mawdryk. "We don't want to be left behind, and we don't want the bigger firms to have an advantage over us. We're just looking to make sure that, competitively, we stay on top and we're able to offer our clients services that are just as good, if not better, than any other firm."

He believes CoCounsel Core has the potential to be of benefit to any lawyer in any practice area, and that its use cases and advantages will continue to expand as the technology develops and as lawyers come to lean on it more heavily to help them do a good job faster. "We trust CoCounsel Core," he concludes. "It's a great tool. I see it as being a huge advantage for us."

O'Neill Associates

O'Neill Associates covers all aspects of labour and employment law, with knowledge and resources in human rights in the workplace, grievance arbitration, collective bargaining, wrongful dismissal, workplace safety, policy development, and alternative dispute resolution and mediation.
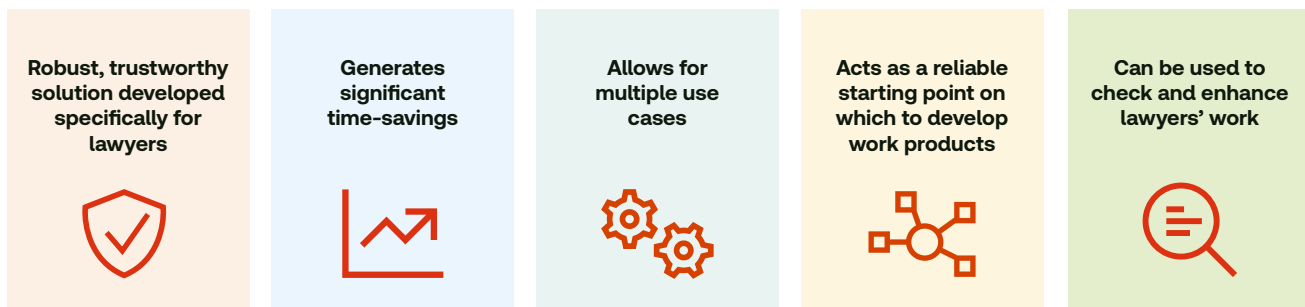
Challenges

With generative AI fast becoming a hot topic in the legal profession, O'Neill Associates was keen to discover how it could assist with the firm's day-to-day work and make its services more efficient to gain an early competitive advantage.

Why CoCounsel Core?

As a Thomson Reuters solution, the firm could be confident that it is a best-in-class product and that continued investment will keep it that way. Its powerful search capabilities were a key selling point, and O'Neill Associates trusts the results it delivers.

Benefits

Robust, trustworthy solution developed specifically for lawyers	Generates significant time-savings	Allows for multiple use cases	Acts as a reliable starting point on which to develop work products	Can be used to check and enhance lawyers' work

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