

Legal services

Insiders and outsiders who have reshaped legal work

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These 20 individuals selected from 20 years of the FT Innovative Lawyers series have together delivered radical change in the practice and business of law

Lists and commentary researched and compiled by RSGI and FT editors

One feature of the global legal industry over the past 20 years is the number of people outside mainstream practice who have pushed for or catalysed change.

Many are not practising as lawyers, such as **Liam Brown**, who trained as a doctor, and then founded two of the industry's so-called alternative legal service providers (ALSPs): Integreon and then Elevate. This serial entrepreneur was a pioneer of the idea of bringing efficient service delivery to both law firms and in-house legal teams. In the same vein, **Mark Harris** as co-founder of Axiom built an alternative legal services business that has been recognised in Innovative Lawyers reports several times for its approach to talent, fees and billing, and technology. In 2020 the firm split into two different businesses, Factor and Axiom.

Top 20 market shapers

Full Name	Current Role	Current Organisation	FT / RSGI Recognition
Ajay Agrawal	Co-founder, chief executive	Sirion	Legal entrepreneurship
Neil Araujo	Co-founder, chief executive	iManage	Legal entrepreneurship
Connie Brenton	Founder, chief executive	LegalOps	2018, Intelligent Business, at NetApp
Liam Brown	Founder, executive chair	Elevate	2018, Intelligent Business
Tim Cummins	President	World Commerce & Contracting	2019, Intelligent Business
Jim Delkousis	Founder, chief executive	Persuit	2008, Europe, at DLA Piper
Dana Denis-Smith	Founder, chief executive	Obelisk Legal Support	2022, Europe
Michele DeStefano	Professor of law	University of Miami	Public speaker and author
Heidi Gardner	Distinguished fellow	Harvard Law School	Public speaker and author
Simon Harper	Founder, director	LOD (Lawyers on Demand)	2015, Europe - joint winner

Mark Harris	Chair	Factor	2013, Europe, "special achievement", at Axiom
Daniel Katz	Co-founder	273 Ventures	Legal entrepreneurship
Ajay Patel	Founder, chief executive	HighQ	2019, Intelligent Business
Richard Punt	Global legal leader	Deloitte	Law business leadership
Dan Reed	Founder, chair	UnitedLex	2018, Intelligent Business

Simon Harper also pioneered flexible resourcing by founding LOD (Lawyers on Demand) while at UK law firm Berwin Leighton Paisner (now BLCP), before its spinout and eventual sale to Consilio, the legal tech company, in 2023.

20 years of outstanding individuals

Read about the other 80 individuals across four categories who collectively epitomise how the legal sector has changed since the Innovative Lawyers series began

[Law firm leaders](#)

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Dan Reed, co-founder and now chair of UnitedLex, appears on the list because of his role as another renowned trailblazer in legal services over the past two decades.

Dana Denis-Smith, a former lawyer and founder of Obelisk Legal Support in the UK, another flexible resourcing business, is included for bringing female lawyers back into the workplace and charting female pioneers in the legal profession, via the 100 Years Project archive.



Liam Brown

Tim Cummins, president of World Commerce and Contracting, recognised that commercial contracting in big organisations was often a hindrance to everyday business activities such as sales and procurement. Setting up his 80,000-strong association in 1999 to improve these processes gave those in the field a voice and professional identity. Another significant network founder in the list is **Connie Brenton**, founder and former chief executive of Cloc (Corporate Legal Operations Consortium), which gave a voice to the operations experts working for in-house legal departments.

Other influencers include **Richard Punt**, a Deloitte partner who joined Allen & Overy to head its Peerpoint flexible resourcing business before briefly heading up Thomson Reuters global legal strategy. Punt is not a lawyer but has influenced the strategy of many law firm leaders.

The list is not complete without the founders and leaders of some prominent legal tech companies. These include: **Ajay Agrawal** of Sirion, one of the first to see the potential of artificial intelligence in improving the commercial contracting process; **Noah Waisberg**, co-founder of Kira Systems, another AI-driven software business, sold to Litera in 2021; and **Ajay Patel**, co-founder of HighQ, the matter-management platform, set up in 2001 and sold to Thomson Reuters in 2019. The service remains a commonly used tool for many law firms. **Neil Araujo**, co-founder of iManage, a knowledge management system that services around 2,500 law firms worldwide, is also included along with **Andrew Sieja**, founder of Relativity, the widely-used e-discovery platform.

One legal tech founder in the list has also featured in the Innovative Lawyers series for his work as a lawyer. **Jim Delkousis** was highlighted in 2009 for his work at DLA Piper in automating Middle Eastern law libraries. Pursuit, which he founded in 2016, has notably both improved the efficiency and cut the cost of the process for in-house legal teams hiring outside counsel.



Dana Denis-Smith

Academics and authors have also played a significant role in reshaping the legal market over the past two decades. Writer **Richard Susskind** has been highly influential in helping the profession to understand the impact of technology on the law. **Daniel Katz** has made an impact as an academic and latterly in showing the effect of AI on lawyers — including getting a version of ChatGPT to pass the American Bar Exam. He is also co-founder of legal tech consultancy 273 Ventures.

David Wilkins, director of the Center of the Legal Profession at Harvard Law School, has promoted study of the development of the profession as a discipline in itself; **Michele DeStefano**, professor at the University of Miami's law school and a visiting professor at Harvard Law School, is the founder of LawWithoutWalls, a programme that brings together students with law firms, businesses and tech experts to include innovation in training and practice. Research by **Heidi Gardner**, also of Harvard Law School, has opened the eyes of many law firms to how colleagues can collaborate to work better.



Ajay Patel

One individual who has not yet featured in any FT Innovative Lawyers reports, because his company is still young, is **Winston Weinberg**, co-founder of Harvey, the legal AI start-up backed by OpenAI. Founded in 2022, the business announced a further fundraising of \$300mn in February at an implied valuation of \$3bn, with another round of financing at a yet-higher implied valuation reported to be imminent. Generative AI's reshaping of the legal industry has only just begun.

Lastly: a special nod to **Michael Mills**, co-founder of Neota Logic, one of the first software companies to apply AI to legal work. He was a pioneer in developing professional support at law firms, creating legal technology systems for Davis Polk. Sadly, Mills passed away in 2023.

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