



Access to Legal Services in the Digital Age

How Adapting is addressing the disparity between affordable legal services and the cost of providing them

As humanity continues its march into the digital age, the legal industry has finally begun to respond to technological disruption. Artificial intelligence is being used to predict judgement outcomes, while customised legal client intake forms are promoting efficiency and accuracy in-house. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Smart self-service legal products have trickled into the market, but many predict that the trickle will soon turn into a flood. Intelligent legal technologies are making it not only possible, but simple, for legal services to be provided without (or with minimal) intervention from legal professionals.

As we've seen with AI-generated art and chatbot failures, the mere potential for technology to complete tasks doesn't mean it should do that task. So, is there demand for intelligent legal technologies to expand into areas that have traditionally been the domain of legal professionals?

At Adapting, we developed a SaaS solution called AdaptingLegal. It caters to legal service providers looking to intelligently automate their processes. We've seen first-hand how automation can increase access to legal services while significantly lowering the cost of providing them – and the time required to do so.

This white paper will briefly examine the current state of online access to legal services before taking a look at the potential role of self-service legal products in the future, including the benefits of 24/7 access to self-service legal products.

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The Evolution of Online Access to Legal Services



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Legal institutions have shown remarkable resistance to technological interference. Incredibly, paper is still a prominent form of communication between lawyers, courts, and other stakeholders in the majority of jurisdictions around the world. Digital solutions that promote access to legal services are gaining traction, however.

Increasing Access for Legal Customers

While legal institutions have been trudging towards the 21st-century, the legal marketplace has rapidly undergone tremendous change. Legal customers now hold the power, according to Thomson Reuters who note in the 2019 Report on the Legal Market that “since 2008, there has been a complete shift from a seller’s to a buyer’s market in legal services”. As their power has increased, so too have the demands on legal professionals. Legal customers want legal service providers to deliver more high-quality work for less cost in less time.

The legal industry’s cry for help, fuelled by the downward pressure placed on the costs of providing legal services, was heard by digital innovators. And the slow but steady increase in adoption of legal technology within the industry began.

The Current State of Self-Service Products

In recent years, online legal service providers have gained favour with those who can't afford a lawyer and those who don't want lawyers involved. Knowledge alone is no longer sufficient since legal knowledge is becoming increasingly accessible online – often for free via the courts and other quasi-judicial institutions that oversee justice systems around the globe. The proliferation of this availability has demanded a shift in the provision of legal services and the fee structure associated with access to those legal services.

One might assume that legal professionals would, nonetheless, be in a better position to apply that knowledge. That assumption has proved incorrect. Rebecca Sandefur noted in her paper “Access to What?”

that “applications for no fault divorce filed by laypeople using do-it-yourself divorce kits contained fewer errors than applications filed by attorneys.”

So, what space does that leave legal service providers to ‘add value’ for their increasingly demanding customers?

A Glimpse into the Future

The 2019 Report on the State of the Legal Market notes that legal professionals who want to survive into the future will need to reconsider how they provide the bulk of their legal services. They consider that approximately 60%-70% of legal services will be affected by legal customers demanding greater efficiency and lowered costs.

At the same time, legal professionals are suffering from stress and burnout at staggering levels. In a report published by Advocatie Magazine, 40% of the Dutch lawyers assessed the pressure of their workload as being too high, with many noting their work-life balance suffered as a result. Moreover, the 2019 Wolters Kluwer report ‘The Future Ready Lawyer’ (the WK report) asserts that less than one third of legal professionals felt their firms were prepared to address any of the looming challenges – including increased volume and increasing demands for productivity and efficiency - expected within the legal industry.

Requiring lawyers to work longer hours to meet budget or increasing the workload of your firm's paralegals are both options, but technological intervention has offered up solutions too.

New Industry Paradigms with Self-Service Legal Products

Technology that's able to create accurate and timely legal documents for specific purposes already exists. Today, it's possible to create customised self-service legal products that are available to your customers 24/7 for a fraction of the price of traditional legal services.

In a recent survey, our users indicated that their costs of providing legal services have been reduced by upwards of 50% after implementing the AdaptingLegal software.



Photo: Pexels

These self-service legal products can be automatically generated so the final document is tailored to the customers' situation based on the responses provided via the platform. Anything additional, unusual or complex that the customer requires in their document can then be drawn up by a legal professional as an optional add on - for an additional fee.

The self-service legal products can contemplate any number of common situations and are generated using wording that the legal professionals in your company have provided. You're able to adjust the language and document-generation settings for the self-service legal products as changes occur in the law or in industry best practice.

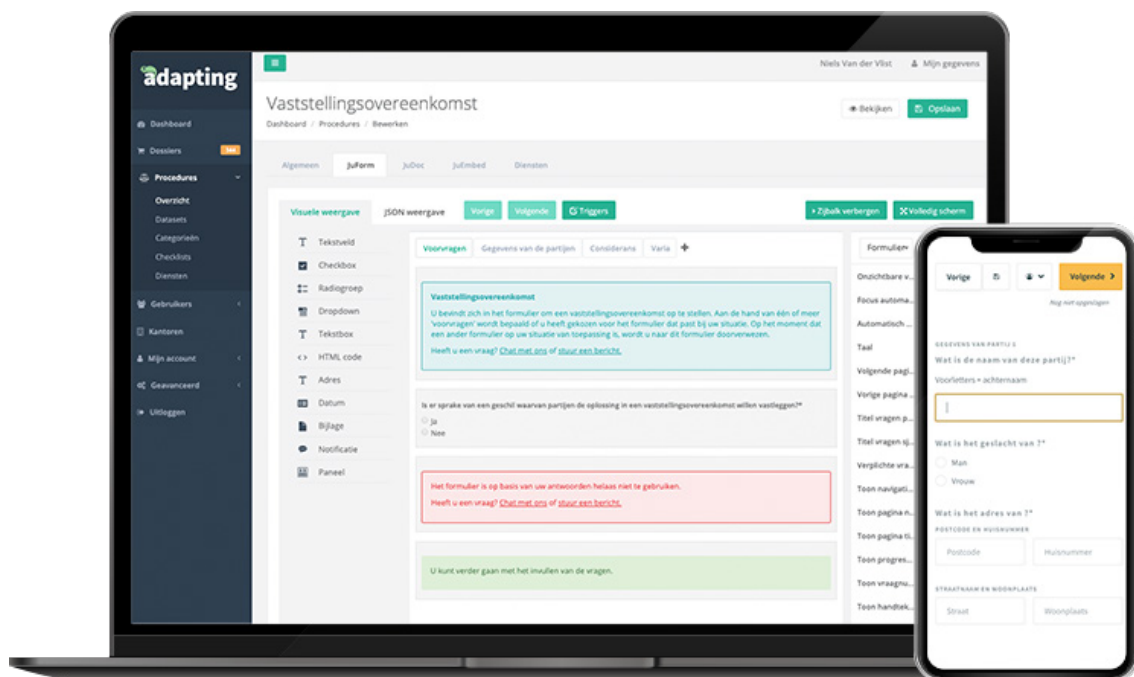
User Stories

De Nationale Adviesbalie in the Netherlands has already begun to offer self-service legal products to their customer base. They use AdaptingLegal's software to provide their legal customers with 24/7 access to competitively priced, legally-enforceable parenting plans.

The parenting plans provided via De Nationale Adviesbalie's self-service portal can be tailored to consider (amongst other things) the number of children, common shared care arrangements, and arrangements for special occasions. They hope to expand their self-service offering into the future and expect to gain a larger market share as a result.

Similarly, financial service provider ING has commenced using AdaptingLegal's software for GDPR-related services designed to unburden its SME clients via the one-stop shop principle. The online GDPR checks allow ING's SME clients to confirm whether they have all the relevant GDPR documents. If not, ING's clients can choose to complete a short questionnaire. They'll then receive a complete set of documents, checked by a lawyer, within 24 hours. ING are able to offer these services at a price that's 80% lower than the regular market.

And, finally, one of the world's largest providers of legal insurance, ARAG SE has been running experiments using the AdaptingLegal software. These experiments relate to the automation of tenancy law and labour law procedures. Ultimately, they aim to lower the workload and the threshold for offering these crucial legal services.



AdaptingLegal Smart generators

Do legal customers want self-service legal products?

Research undertaken by AdaptingLegal and other market participants indicates that the demand for self-service legal products is likely to grow in the near future.

Wolters Kluwer note in 'The Future Ready Lawyer' that 24/7 access to services is ranked as one of the ten top factors contemplated by legal customers in both Europe and the US when they choose a law firm. When we consider that these are the same legal customers who are increasingly price conscious and who are demanding increased efficiency, it's easy to see that self-service legal products are likely to play a significant role in the future of legal services.

Meanwhile, Adapting's users have indicated that legal professionals are increasingly contemplating a future where competitive legal service providers offer automated self-service products at a fraction of the cost.

"As the costs of standard legal work can be reduced through the use of automation, this service is therefore more easily available to a larger target group. If lawyers use their self-service facilities intelligently, and also offer customised solutions online at an additional cost as a supplement, I expect that the target group for legal self-service documents will increase by at least 25% in the coming years."

Sandra van Nieuwkerk
Corporate Lawyer
(Vocarius Advocatuur)

This model of legal service provision addresses the pain points anticipated by legal customers and legal professionals in such a way that cost savings can be expected by both parties. Legal customers pay less for 24/7 access to standard legal services while the time required for legal service providers to offer these products is also significantly reduced.

For instance, the Central Bureau for Name Change in the Netherlands uses AdaptingLegal to provide end-to-end services digitally. The technology allows the customers of our users to determine whether they're eligible for a name change. If so, a request for a name change is automatically generated by the intuitive Adapting technology before financing options are offered to the applicant.

"If our clients become more involved in the legal process (by entering basic data themselves), the legal services can be provided more quickly as a result. And, most importantly for the client, costs can be reduced. Depending on the degree to which the process is automated, cost reductions of about 50% could be achieved."

Willem Jan Ausma
Criminal Lawyer
(Ausma De Jong Advocaten)



“

We are what we
repeatedly do.
Excellence, then,
is not an act,
but a habit.

Will Durant

”

Factors Driving the Change

The 2019 Report on the State of the Legal Market suggests that legal customers are exhibiting changes in behaviour that reflect their desire to achieve cost savings, namely by disaggregating matters and by moving matters 'down market'. While these factors are certainly major contributors to the immense shift occurring in the legal marketplace - the shift that has resulted in the demand for self-service products - there are other elements at play:



Increased access to justice

There is a chasm between the number of people who might benefit from legal assistance and those who can afford to pay for it. By providing affordable self-service legal products, society will benefit from increased access to a previously impenetrable justice system.



Increased customer satisfaction

Lowered prices, convenient access and fast turnaround times all contribute to increased customer satisfaction. In fact, legal service providers already using AdaptingLegal predict a 20% increase in the satisfaction of their customers following the implementation of self-service legal products.



Lowered costs (and increased profits) for legal service providers

Legal technologies are designed with the legal industry's pain points in mind. Self-service legal products promise to reduce the amount of time legal professionals spend ensuring accuracy and repetitively piecing together precedents with minor changes - to nil in some cases. The software is able to generate limitless numbers of these self-service products for just the cost of the subscription, resulting in large savings in terms of human-hours.



Illustration: Shutterstock



Decreased administrative burden

Legal customers can access these documents via the AdaptingLegal portal, thereby minimising the administrative burden on your legal professionals. This, again, drives cost savings and savings in human-hours.



Increase lawyer contentment with their role/meaningful legal services

The reduction in the number of stressful hours legal professionals spend performing rote and repetitive tasks means that they're able to engage in work they find more meaningful. This paves the way for a healthier and happier workforce.



Broaden service offerings and expertise

Introducing self-service legal products is a simple way for legal service providers to expand their current product offering. You'll no longer need to employ an entire team to introduce new services, instead, you can hire based on expertise in the specific field so any 'made-to-measure' services can be provided.



Get in touch

Adapting was established in 2017 with the aim of simplifying legal processes and improving access to justice. The first solution Adapting has delivered to the market is AdaptingLegal.

AdaptingLegal helps you stay agile and future-proof via automated legal services. Whether you want to automate client intake processes, automatically direct queries to the right department or offer your customers innovative self-service products, our software-as-a service solution is for you.

Our users benefit from increased efficiencies, happier clients and happier staff. Get in touch to see how AdaptingLegal can help you.

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