

Pioneers and Pathfinders: Greg Dickason

(This transcript was generated using AI technology.)

Kevin Young: Welcome to Pioneers and Pathfinders, Seyfarth's podcast about the people and ideas reshaping the legal industry. I'm Kevin Young, an employment litigator and counselor, and I've spent my career putting new tools and ideas to work in client service and helping colleagues and clients to do the same.

Zeynep Ersin: And I'm Zeynep Ersin. I lead innovation and design thinking at Seyfarth, focusing on reimagining how legal services are built, delivered, and experienced. Each episode, we sit down with someone on the front lines of legal innovation to unpack what they're doing and what it means for where our industry is headed. We'll keep it fresh, we'll keep it fun, and we'll keep it to 30 minutes. Let's jump in.

Kevin Young: Today, we're joined by Greg Dickason, Executive Vice President and Chief Technology Officer for Global Legal Business at LexisNexis. Greg has led technology and transformation initiatives across industries and around the world, so he brings a unique perspective on how organizations adopt innovation and navigate periods of rapid change.

Zeynep Ersin: We'll explore the evolution of legal technology, what comes next in the age of AI, and how LexisNexis's new Customer Innovation Lab is creating a hands-on environment where customers and innovators can work together to develop the next generation of legal solutions.

Well, hello, everyone. Greg, thank you so much for joining us today. We're thrilled to have you on. I wanted to kind of just kick things off. So you've led technology organizations across multiple industries and geographies. What experiences have most shaped your approach to innovation and leadership today?

Greg Dickason: For me, it's a lot about talking to a diverse set of people as possible. And that's really, I think, where innovation comes from. You need lots of different thinkers in the room. You need to understand the problem and have people who can build the solution near them. And I think that's where you get innovation a lot, particularly that diversity of thought that comes in. And what I've loved is I've worked all over in five continents now, and often you get also different cultural backgrounds help people to see things from different angles.

Kevin Young: Greg, echoing Zeynep, thank you so much for being here. You talked about you've been in different places geographically. I know you've been in different industries as well in different organizations. As you look back, what is it that drew you to the legal tech space where you sit now?

Greg Dickason: Couple of things. I think for a while, the legal industry was not moving as fast as anywhere else, but I felt that the time was coming, particularly with AI and because AI was so language focused, I felt that this is definitely the time for me to pivot. So previous to this, I was running the Asia Pacific business for LexisNexis, and I made a

conscious decision that I thought, this is the time to get back into technology, this is the time to really understand where models are taking us, where AI is taking us, because I can see this as quite transformative. And I think legal in particular is the industry that's most impacted early on with AI, with all the language models and everything else. It was almost inevitable that this was where we were going to see huge innovation rapidly.

I also think that lawyers are really interesting people that normally have diverse interests. They often have, and I've met so many lawyers who have got like, you know, they do all sorts of other things like classical music or they get into deep technology. And I love that. It's like that whole, you're not just meeting somebody who just focuses on the law and is quite specialized. You're meeting somebody who's got a rich set of interests. And I think that really helps with innovation when those kinds of people start to think about how different things impact their industry. So that's why I'm loving the space, 'cause I feel like it's almost like we're reinventing who we are and we're doing it very, very quickly.

Zeynep Ersin: Great. I think in your experience working with attorneys in particular over your career trajectory, how have you seen the evolution of their willingness to want to embrace emerging technology, more recently generative AI? What seems to be, have you noticed any patterns amongst the attorney population about leaning into innovation?

Greg Dickason: Yeah, completely. And I'd say that's really shifted with generative AI because before that, you'd heard of other technologies which were going to revolutionize the legal industry. And I think a lot of lawyers thought, well, whatever, I've heard this before, you know, blockchain and before that, search engines and before that, you know, different things. And I think for a period of time, there was that skepticism when AI first came out, but then you almost saw the realization, you know, when they'd used the ChatGPT or they'd used an actual product. And that's like, actually, this could really change things. And that for me was probably the last couple of years where you really saw that light bulb come on.

There's a lot of lawyers we've worked with, they're very curious, creative people, but they also can be quite risk averse. They also want to make sure that they manage their risks. And so I think to start with, they were skeptical about technology change actually impacting the work that they did. But I think that's really changed in the last two years. They now recognize it's going to, and it comes down to how do you embrace it? How do you make sure it's safe? How do you get the most out of it while also still delivering that extra value you can provide as a lawyer? Because AI can't do everything. It can maybe get you to 80%, but that last 20% is the most valuable 20%.

Zeynep Ersin: Is there anything you might be able to point to that led to that mindset shift, you think in the last couple years in particular?

Greg Dickason: Yeah, I would say probably drafting. It's probably that I ask the AI prompted appropriately and I get something out, which I think actually is pretty good. It's not perfect. And it might've hallucinated a bit, but it might've taken me two or three hours

to get to this point. Now AI's given it to me in five minutes and now I can iterate and make it good. So I'd say it's probably drafting. There are other parts of it. But I think for me, a lot of the light bulb moment was when the first time a lawyer used it to draft something and then they said, okay, this has changed the way I'm gonna work.

Kevin Young: I would totally agree. I think that was probably my moment as well. I think that's true for a lot of people. A question I have, I've heard you talk, I forget which podcast it was on, but just about the move we've seen from, you know, those initial uses that spread quickly where AI is used to answer questions like essentially chatbot style to more do the work, you know, whether it's agentic or otherwise. Can you talk a little bit about the shift that you've seen either at the individual level, just across the lawyers you've spoken to and worked with, or even just organizationally, what you've seen firms and other legal organizations adopt and embrace.

Greg Dickason: Yeah, I think it's probably, it's that second phase. That first phase was using the chatbot and you got good outputs and lawyers are quite amazed by that and that included the draft we're talking about. But I think probably around November last year, agents started to get real and started to really be able to do work. And that started in the software industry and it then quite quickly bled into law probably around February this timeframe. I'd say one of the definitive points there was when Claude Legal and the Claude Cowork plugin came out. And I think it really just activated in lawyers' minds and a lot of the people I was talking to that now you cannot just ask the question, you get the agent to start to think and loop, and do work and do more research and evaluate itself and say, have I done a good enough job? Can I go and refresh? Do I need to use a tool? Do I need to call the web? Do I need to write a Word doc?

And I think that's, for me, it's another one of those step changes in how you think in your brain. It's like, I'm not just asking a chatbot to give me an answer. I'm now getting an agent to give me a work product that is also at 80%, but now it's formatted for me, it's in the format that I like, it's in Word, it's already close to the final output I wanna give. Maybe it's correlated, maybe it's a Word doc and a PowerPoint and a spreadsheet that are all correlated across them. And I think that's huge.

And to your question around like solos versus individual lawyers versus firms, I think a couple of individual lawyers jumped in that first, as you'd expect, they're already, you know, technically savvy. They've been working with tools like ours or Claude or other tools. And they've rapidly worked out that this is actually going to make them potentially 10 times more productive. I think firms have realized that if they start to roll this out, start to build their own platforms or use platforms like our Protégé, they can then plug in their own content and they can start to put in skills and other frameworks. And not only do you have this great loop, but you can start to ground it in very good content, very good reasoning, both yours and providers like ours.

And I think that sort of realization is only coming to bear now because really what you're doing is you're creating an intelligence layer inside your firm, which is starting to pull together how you do things and how you think about things. And hopefully over time, it's going to start to distill the knowledge from different lawyers in your firm about how this is

our approach, this is our expertise, which I think is going to make a huge difference to things like how junior lawyers ramp up. They don't have to always go back to a partner now. They're going to be able to actually interact with the agent and say, how do we approach this? And they can ask the dumb question of the agent.

Zeynep Ersin: I mean, to kind of dovetail on that a little bit, Greg, in that regard, how do you see AI changing the roles of junior lawyers, legal researchers, and knowledge professionals over the next several years?

Greg Dickason: I think it's going to increase the number of people who can go from junior to senior quickly, but it's going to put a lot of stress on us in the sense of how much work you've got to do. I think AI, like anything, every new technology comes along and you think, oh great, this is gonna make my life easier. And then you discover actually it's just gonna load you up more. And I think that's what's gonna happen is that you can go from junior to senior very quickly, but you're gonna have a lot of volume to consume and to be able to understand and grow up.

And the same with researchers. I think researchers will be super effective now because they'll be able to work out their structured way of thinking and being able to give that to the AI, but you still need, and I've been doing a lot of programming with AI, you still need that discernment to really ask it, have you thought about everything you should have thought of? AI tends to get stuck in a certain zone. If you think about AI, really what it is is an enormous vector space in multi-dimensional space. And when it starts to think, it gets stuck in a certain area of that vector space. So when you ask it a follow-up question, its thinking's almost stuck somewhere. And so sometimes you need to think, hang on, is it stuck? Do I need to ask it something? Do I need to challenge it? Do I need to make it think in a different way? So it branches out of the area in which it's stuck and thinks more widely. I mean, we as humans do the same thing, right? You can get really stuck and sometimes getting into debate really helps you. And I think that's where researchers can really help. They can help to say, okay, you've done some good work, but I need to challenge you a bit here and then it'll open up.

Zeynep Ersin: Yeah, the discernment piece, there's so many things that you've said, Greg, that I want to unpack, but the discernment piece is the piece that I think makes it so exciting for experienced lawyers, especially when we're talking just about, you know, legal applications, because it really, it's the supercharged companion, you know, sitting right there able to take commands. And, you know, when you're working in a space that you know well, you're able to come in and say, look, you're too focused here, broaden, or this doesn't sound quite right. I need you to look in this direction.

Greg Dickason: Yeah, I agree entirely. I think for me, there's two ways I do that when I'm in an area that I'm not sure that I can actually have that discernment. The one is to get another model to critique, to say, critique what this guy's done, what this model's output, and tell me where there could be gaps. And I think that's good. And the other one is just to ask literally the model you are working with the same thing. So where are you thinking incorrectly, take a step back, tell me what your thought processes could be and maybe challenge it multiple times, but you've almost gotta, although you might not

know, you've gotta force it to reevaluate its thinking pattern. And I think that using a separate model is often the best way.

Kevin Young: As you say that in a way, it's not so much different than the way that we've always thought as teams, when you bring people in who have different areas of expertise and you don't, on very tough problems, need everybody to know everything, but you just need to have the right people in the room. And I'm curious, I don't want to jump ahead too far, but I know about the launch of the Customer Innovation Lab and I'd be curious to hear a little bit about that because when I think about bringing different people into the room to really create solutions together, that sounds like something that'd be right in line.

Greg Dickason: Yeah, that's exactly it. So we've launched the lab, we announced it today. So I know this podcast is coming out a couple of weeks time, so it'll be nicely live then. But the whole idea is exactly that. We bring in customers, we've got engineers, we've got data scientists, we've got product people. We've sometimes got partners from the AI labs and the technology groups, for exactly that reason, lots of different ideas coming in. And then you're using models. So you're having to use the models to tune or to test or to build new product. A lot of it's about building new product and showing it to the customer live. The customers in the room, they're giving you feedback, and then you show them what you've done. And they can say, oh, wow, that's true. Or actually, no, I think you should tweak that. Or no, you completely misunderstood me. This is what I meant. And because we can do that live, we can get really good feedback from them.

Zeynep Ersin: I think too, and I'd love Greg in a little bit if you could actually give us more information and detail about the lab, but in particular, to me, all of this reiterates the importance of experimentation and a willingness to try. So it's not only iterating with the technology and trying different models, similar to bringing in different perspectives and ideas, which is exactly what you were talking about when we started our conversation. But I think it's also too the experimentation of use cases and being willing to try different things to know what the appropriate applications are based on the tool and based on what the task might be that you're trying to accomplish and the need in that moment. So I think it all continues to emphasize that we are in this very much this R&D moment and how can we leverage this moment in a way to collaborate more across some of these channels through researchers, through AI experts, through corporate legal departments and law firms to kind of move the needle progressively forward.

You know, obviously I would be remiss to not talk about legal research given that you're with Lexis. So I wanted to touch on that in terms of, you know, when you think about the evolution of legal research over the last decade, what changes do you think have been the most significant from your perspective and how has that gotten us to where we are today?

Greg Dickason: Well, that's a big question over the decade. I would say a lot of it is we've moved increasingly to making search so much more effective and therefore, rather than using those big Boolean search strings that people are very proud of, we've

moved far more to what we call semantic search, where you can type in the right keywords and you get the right answers back, and you know that they're rated pretty much in the order. Like Lexis, we spent a lot of time on that, learning to rank, making sure that the best results are at the top, and then giving you quite quick insights as to does this fit my use case or is the second or the third answer better? So I think there's that, which I think also made search and legal research more available to everybody. It wasn't as specialized anymore. You could at least start your research without having to go to somebody who had specialized.

And now that really got supercharged with AI, with the ability to do ask and just ask a question in an AI sense and find out things that I think previously you would've needed to do multiple semantic searches. And before that, huge number of Boolean searches, so I think it's just become easier for different users to approach it. That doesn't mean, again, to the discernment question, I think you can get to 80 or 90%, but I still think there's a case for the knowledge manager and that specialist part of the law firm, which really gets where the law is going and can help you on those edge cases, on those really special places where you need their discernment as well. So I don't think we're losing the knowledge manager, I just think it's like AI, it's democratizing a lot of it and making those roles more specialized in some ways.

But I'd say as Lexis, we're seeing ourselves in not just the research enabler, we also want to make sure we're giving grounded authoritative content wherever you're working as a lawyer. So if you're doing a draft, our content is grounded and authoritative and helps you to do that. It's not just about finding the answer and then using that.

Zeynep Ersin: You might have just answered the question I had, which is, I think a lot of the conversations, rightly so, in this space and in other industries as well, when you bring AI into the fold is how are we going to do what we've been doing better or faster? How am I going to do the research quicker, more efficiently? How am I going to draft a brief in a more efficient manner? But I think also one of the really exciting things to think about is what are we going to do that we just couldn't do before? What's a new task or a new work stream? And I'm curious for Lexis, I know 'cause I use it, there's been a lot new that's been coming out, but I'm curious for you kind of what examples come to mind or what are you most proud of that just feels like new terrain entirely, like beyond just like enhancing the search, but just things that wouldn't have been in the mindset within the thought process five, six, seven years ago. Maybe it was on your radar then, but you know what I mean.

Greg Dickason: I know exactly what you mean. I mean, for me, I think it's about our platform becoming what I call hackable. And I don't mean bad actors can get in. What I mean is that you as a user can turn it into doing some things that you want to do by creating the right skills. And so for what I'm really excited about is we now have an agentic platform with vaults, ability to have really deep content, video, audio, documents, the ability to create skills, which is really your idea about how things should work. So it's telling the agent how to think, then be able to connect different underlying systems, and ultimately creating and mashing up your own workflows that ground in what you need. It's your content, it's our content, it's telling the agent how to think, it's

pulling in plugins from other places and ending up with this sort of configurable sort of hackable system, which you can turn into being perfect for you.

And I think we weren't there a couple of years ago. Lexis was a place you came, you did some searching, you got some great results, and then you moved on. This is a place in which you can actually hack it to your needs. And so it's a lot more like an Excel that you've already spent time building and now it does exactly what you need or something like that. And that's what I'm excited about. I think a hackable product—and I'm using hackable in the sense of product you can configure and to your needs. I think that's exciting for me 'cause it means we're letting lawyers become more creative in our platform.

Zeynep Ersin: So speaking of the lab, Greg, I think that's a great segue to hear more about it. Could you share with us some more detail about what it is, how it came to fruition?

Greg Dickason: Sure, absolutely. So I think for us, what it is, is that we recognize that we're building faster than we ever have before. We'd build product, take a couple of years ago, now it was taking a couple of months, maybe three to six months to get a product out. We still didn't feel like we were going fast enough. We needed to have real live feedback from customers, from users, and be able to show them changes in real time. So the whole idea with the lab was let's get engineers in the room with customers and let them hear what the customer's problems are, and build solutions immediately.

And so like last week, for example, we showed a customer a particular plug-in into Outlook and asked them what they thought. They gave us feedback. We changed it in 10 minutes. We showed them the update. They said, that looks great, but I would change this here. And so within an hour, we had iterated three times and not just showed them things, actually built something that they could click through and work on. And so for me, that's what the lab's about. It's about moving at—I mean, it sounds like a slogany comment, but moving at the speed of AI. You can use AI to code and you can use AI to change your platform. And so that's what we're trying to do is to do that, to get feedback from live customers so we can get better product out faster. So that's the primary purpose.

But there's a lot of education there as well. What's great is that people come in and they learn about AI and how it can work. So we're having a lot of fun there with that whole creative space in which we're learning from them, they're learning from us, and that's helping us think about what's next and how we build next. And the other side of the lab is an environment in which law firms can come and say they're envisaging this kind of platform or they've already built this kind of platform, and then we co-build together. And that's really where it's focused for them. So it's where we're actually understanding that there's some big changes in how law firms think about AI and how they're building their own solutions, particularly like AmLaw 50 scale firms. And so we recognize that that's another place in which we can help with their thought patterns and what they're building.

Kevin Young: So on that latter side, Greg, on the law firm side, is the output of the product from a firm that comes through the lab, is it something that's owned or unique to the firm or is it something that's instead kind of improving the Lexis platform overall?

Greg Dickason: No, the former is improving the Lexis platform, but the latter is absolutely, it's about, that's owned by the firm. It's us working with them on potentially how our products can surface inside their environment or just even some sessions are just on how do you create an MCP or MCP gateway? How do you think about integrations? It's not necessarily even Lexis orientated, it's more just helping from a technology leadership perspective. 'Cause we learn anyway in those sessions.

Kevin Young: Do you think, Greg, I mean, I'm curious about this, is the future, if you focus on big firms, one thing you talked about before was the knowledge layer that underpins a lot of what firms are trying to do. And that's something that it's interesting to me 'cause I think it's one of the first things that anyone who has a eureka moment with AI thinks about within a law firm of like, oh my gosh, if I could find a way to take the collective wisdom for us of a firm with a long history of doing really great work and to kind of supercharge that into everyone's hands and have it be available instantaneously at all times. That's like a dream state, right? I'm curious if you think the future for firms, is it mainly about having the best knowledge base, the best kind of practical, here's how we do the work? Or do you think the tech side of it is as important? And the only reason I think it could not be is if we think that the tech look, kind of who moves fastest, maybe that differentiates firms in the short run. But do we get to a point where everyone kind of has the same level of tech, 15, 20 years from now, everyone's kind of using the same sort of stuff in the same way that everyone has access to Westlaw and Lexis now or did previously? Does that make sense?

Greg Dickason: That absolutely makes sense. I think tech is very good at commoditizing itself. And therefore, the enduring mode is the intelligence you've built up. In our case, it's the content, it's the authoritative content and how we worked on that. And that's not something that's gonna be easily taken away by any startup. And I think it's the same with firms. I think firms, it's an intelligence layer of how do we do things, really understanding practice that you operate in. But what I think the tech can do and the agents can do is help to is to make that more accessible to more of the lawyers so that that context you've got, you can share with other parts of your firm quite quickly. So if I'm a lawyer working in a particular matter, I don't have to go and try and find the lawyer who worked on a similar thing three months ago and try to work out who that is, which I know can be quite a burden inside a law firm. But now you get that from this intelligence layer, which is mediated by the agents.

I think the technology with that will be relatively straightforward. With the building up of the firm intelligence, the partners spending time coaching the models, telling the models how to think and keeping the models up to date. I think that's going to be a new dynamic in a law firm. You can almost imagine you get in your car and you're driving home and you have a half hour coaching session with your agent where you're telling the agent, this is what I've done today. This is what I think. This is how I approach something. And

then when you need the agent, it's up to date. Or when somebody else needs an agent, it's up to date with your thinking.

And we've been trying to build that in the lab. So we call it the digital twin, and we're trying to keep everybody in sync and understanding what we're doing. And it works pretty well, but it decays very quickly. So I don't think this is something you can set up and it goes. You've almost got to constantly like that, as you said, that really clever junior, but you've got to keep that junior up to date. You got to keep telling the junior what you're doing. Yeah, it's an exciting space, but I do think it's still early days to get a model that can sort of keep context for a long period of time and doesn't decay without a lot of effort.

Zeynep Ersin: Greg, before we switch gears a little bit to some rapid fire questions, anything else that you want to share about the lab in particular? Anything that you're really excited about that you'd like our listeners to know?

Greg Dickason: First off, if you want to get involved, please just jump in. I'd love you to come in and get involved. So it's open to anybody. We've had judges in there. We've had people from solo and small law. We've had large law. We've had in-house counsel. We're starting to get other professionals in. So it's an environment for learning and it's open. It's in New York at the moment and we'll be rolling out to other parts of the country and the world. And we'll also have a pop-up lab at Iltacon. So very excited about that as well.

Kevin Young: Greg, we really appreciate your time. We're gonna go to a few very hard hitting rapid fire questions. What was your AI Eureka moment? What was your moment when you had an experience with AI either interacting or reading about that you were just like, just light bulb went off, eyes open.

Greg Dickason: I think two, the first one was pre-ChatGPT. I was playing with the GPT-2 and I asked it to write a poem where the first letter was each letter of the alphabet and it did that straight up. I was like, wow, now this is early days, but I was like, wow, there's something here, some intelligence here. But I'd say my biggest eureka moment was January this year when I was coding and I got an agent to go end to end and write a whole solution for my daughter. My daughter's a speech therapist and had wrote an entire solution that she could take out to her patients. And that included a mobile app, a backend system and everything. And I was just, completely blown away that I could ask an agent and I could write all this code and never had to look at the code again. And that for me told me that we'd reached this level of intelligence that is, in this case, a little bit superhuman when it comes to coding. So I was like, wow.

Kevin Young: Greg, what's something that lawyers, law firms, and/or legal departments do today that will seem badly outdated in five, ten years?

Greg Dickason: Can I go with one year? Because I think things happen very quickly. I think the whole idea of copy paste, I think the whole idea of having to go from one system to another, I think agents will start to talk to each other and so you'll do some

work somewhere and it'll just move to the next. I think that's going to feel badly outdated. I do think even that the way in which we interact with AI is going to move much more to the voice. We're going to start talking to you and it's really going to get us. And so I think increasingly, we're going to almost go back to the old days where you dictated things because AI is going to be live with you. So maybe not in a year, but I think by five years, most of us will be talking more than we are writing.

Kevin Young: This is our hardest hitting question we got. You can pick up to two. Some people have a hard time choosing one, but so two will be accepted as well.

Greg Dickason: Probably two. The one would be the Dark Side of the Moon, Pink Floyd.

Kevin Young: I love it.

Greg Dickason: The other one is probably Graceland from Paul Simon. That album has just got so much memory for me in terms of where I was at the time. I love the song. It's one of those things I can just put up loud and just sing loudly in the car. Those would be my two.

Kevin Young: I have to admit, I love hearing responses to this question because it often will trigger me to go listen to a number of these albums that I know and I love and appreciate, but I just haven't listened to. So it's now I'm going to go listen to some Paul Simon without fail.

Zeynep Ersin: What's your favorite album? I've never heard this one. Well, so my favorite band of all time is Depeche Mode, so choosing one of their albums is hard, maybe Violator, but I don't know, most anything they've pushed out I could listen to indefinitely.

Greg Dickason: That's cool.

Zeynep Ersin: Yeah. And you, Kevin?

Kevin Young: I can pick one. Mine's Pearl Jam 10. It was like the first album I remember being able to listen to all the way through and just loved every song equally. Didn't want to fast forward any of them.

Greg Dickason: That is so cool. I love it.

Zeynep Ersin: All right, well, Greg, thank you so much again for joining us. It was an absolute pleasure to get to hear from you and hear about all of the exciting things happening now at Lexis and certainly through the Innovation Lab. We very much look forward to following along and learning alongside of you and being in touch. So thank you so much for today.

Greg Dickason: Thank you so much, and thank you very much, Kevin. It's great to be here.

Kevin Young: Thanks for spending time with us today on Pioneers and Pathfinders. I'm Kevin Young.

Zeynep Ersin: And I'm Zeynep Ersin. We'll see you next time.