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What Research Agencies Can Learn From Legal AI

Specialist AI arrived in law two years before it arrived in research. What happened there is a preview of what is now starting in our industry — and the findings are free to read.

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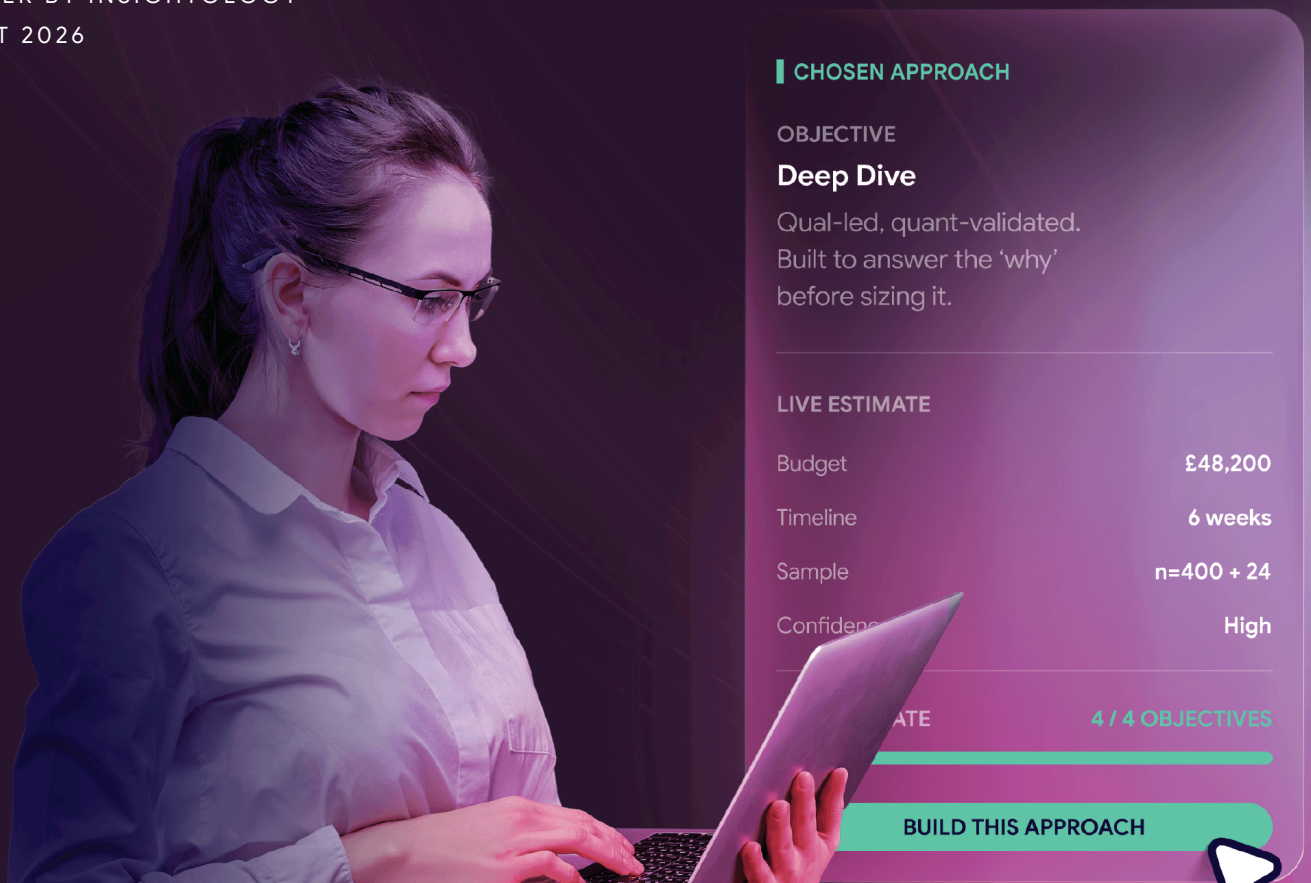

A profession two years ahead of market research

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Law started the move to specialist AI (built for their industry) two years before it arrived in market research. It is a useful mirror for strategic research, because it shares our stakes: both professions sell judgement under uncertainty, both are audited by their clients, and in both a subtly wrong answer looks identical to a correct one — right up until it costs the client millions.

When generic AI tools like ChatGPT arrived, every law firm faced the choice that market research agencies face today: use generic tools like Claude beneath a layer of legal prompts and agents, or adopt more advanced specialist AI systems — industry- and domain-specific — built for their profession. Many started with the generic tools, but they did not stay there. As of today, most of the world's top law firms have chosen to adopt a specialist AI platform, designed by a third-party SaaS vendor to meet the unique needs of their profession. Harvey alone, the best known of these, is now used by 75 of the Am Law 100 — America's hundred largest firms.

Two years, one experiment, run at full-scale with other people's reputations on the line.

The learnings are free for market research agencies to use!

The move to specialist platforms wasn't fashion, and it wasn't marketing. It happened because legal work depends on three things a generic chat window cannot supply.

Warranted outputs: answers you can stand behind

A subtly wrong clause reads exactly like a sound one — until it costs the client millions. Generic AI is confidently plausible whether or not it is right, and plausible is the one thing a law firm cannot sell. Worse, it fails silently: there is no point at which the tool knows, or shows, that its answer is wrong. Firms needed the profession's rulebook built into the tool, with outputs checkable against it — so that when a client, a court or a regulator asks "how do you know?", there is an answer better than a chat transcript.

Data security: confidentiality is non-negotiable

Client confidentiality in law is absolute, so privileged material could not sit in consumer tools. Firms needed enterprise-grade security, with contractual guarantees that their data trains nothing. Not a settings toggle — a contract.

Rigour: a process that enforces professional methods

Legal work has a shape — review, precedent, drafting, partner sign-off — and a chat window enforces none of it. Specialist platforms run the matter end to end, with the checks built in and a record of who approved what. The method is in the machine, not in the hope that everyone remembered to follow it.

Different profession, identical needs

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Now read those three again as a strategic researcher.

- A wrong finding looks right until a client bets a product launch on it. A subtly biased scale, or a methodology that can't fully answer the question, reads identically on the page to a sound one.

- Security of respondent and client data is non-negotiable — GDPR-compliant handling, vendor assessments and a guarantee the data trains nothing. If the tools can't prove the data is secure and won't be used to train your competitors, the audit fails before the work starts.

- A research project has a shape — methodology and logic, brief to debrief — that a chat window won't enforce. Validated workflows, checks at every stage, and a record of who approved what and when.

There is a name for what both professions are protecting. Warranted thinking is strategic output you can stand behind: the thinking — the insight, creativity, strategy and accountable judgement clients actually pay for — backed by a warrant that makes it provable. For a lawyer, the warrant is precedent, procedure and privilege. For a researcher, it is validated methodology, professional instruments, real respondents, secure data handling and governed use of AI, so that every finding can be traced, shown and defended. Our companion paper, The Future of Market Research is 'Warranted Thinking', makes the full case.

A law firm sells judgement a client relies on in court. A research agency sells judgement a client bets a launch on. Different courtroom — same product: warranted thinking.

Where the analogy breaks — in research's favour

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So far, so parallel. But there is one big difference between the two professions, and it cuts in an unexpected direction, which makes the case for specialist AI stronger in research than it ever was in law.

The internet understands surprisingly little about market research. Estimates put the share of recorded human knowledge available online at 10 to 20%; include lived experience, unwritten expertise and professional intuition, and the figure falls below 1%. Generic AI models can only train on public web data — and here the professions diverge sharply. In law and accountancy, vast bodies of professional know-how are publicly accessible: case law, statutes, judgments, financial filings, decades of published commentary. A generic model arrives already steeped in the raw material of the profession. There is no equivalent public corpus for market research. Deep research expertise stays off the public web for three structural reasons.

- Client and respondent confidentiality. Proprietary reports, methodologies, panel data and syndicated metrics sit behind enterprise firewalls and NDAs. Web scrapers cannot reach them.
- The tacit knowledge barrier. High-level research runs on intuition and hands-on project experience. That know-how lives in researchers' heads, not on indexed web pages.
- Unpublished fieldwork and raw data. Field observations, qualitative transcripts, data files and regional nuance stay locked inside private repositories.

The consequence is easy to test. Surface-web AI can define a TURF analysis, draft a basic discussion guide or summarise the public facts of a category. What it cannot replicate is what a seasoned practitioner brings: the agency's institutional memory — unwritten playbooks built across hundreds of client engagements; the contextual nuance of why audiences behave as they do, well beyond the surface stats; and the methodological craft that turns raw behaviour into commercial strategy. Law firms adopted specialist platforms even though the generic models had read most of their profession's library. Research agencies are working with models that have read almost none of ours.

Which points to the path forward: not replacing agencies with generic chatbots, but embedding agency-specific expertise into dedicated, governed AI workflows — raw AI speed running on the profession's real know-how, including the agency's own. In our platform this is the Agency Vault: a secure store of the firm's institutional knowledge that its private workflows draw on, and that trains nothing outside them.

Law went specialist even though generic AI had read and trained on the profession's library. Research's library was never on the web — which makes the case for specialist stronger here, not weaker.

The lawyers' decision to go specialist has been tested and proven

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Then the pattern was stress-tested, hard. Anthropic itself — the maker of the model — launched legal plugins for Claude, offering the profession a direct route. The specialist platforms didn't empty out. Within weeks, Harvey closed a $200m round at an $11bn valuation, co-led by GIC and Sequoia. The market settled into a telling shape: generic models underneath, specialist platforms as the professional layer on top. Even the maker of the model couldn't pull the profession off its specialist tools. The reason is simple once you see it: the model was never the product. The warrant is the product — the profession's rulebook, the enforced workflow, the audit trail, the security wrapper, the accountability. A raw model, however brilliant, supplies none of that on its own. That is why the specialist layer holds even as the models underneath it keep improving: every model upgrade makes the layer above it more valuable, not less.

Something else happened in law that agencies should note: being on the specialist platform became a quality signal. Clients read it as seriousness and reliability, not cost-cutting. When procurement asks "how do you use AI on our projects?", a governed platform with an audit trail beats a list of licences — and increasingly, the question is on the RFP. The signal matters more every month, because the proof burden is inverting. Your clients' own teams have the same generic assistants you do, and can generate the same plausible deck in an afternoon. If plausible interpretation is what an agency sells, it is competing with free. What the in-house deck cannot offer is the warrant: findings traceable to real respondents, produced by validated methods, chosen and defended by someone accountable. In law, the firms that could show their workings kept the work. The same sorting has started in research.

Both professions sell the same product: warranted thinking. Lawyers ran the experiment at scale, with their reputations on the line, and the results are in: generic tools for general tasks, a specialist professional layer for the work clients stake decisions on, and a quality signal for the firms that moved first. Research doesn't need to repeat the experiment — just read the findings. The practical translation is short. Treat generic AI as what it is: a brilliant assistant for general work, and no basis for professional output. Put the client-facing work on a specialist platform built for research, with the warrant built in. And test the claim the way the law firms did — a structured pilot on live projects, with the numbers measured.

About Insightology

Insightology.ai is the first AI platform built specifically for market research agencies, rather than generic AI with research prompts or agents bolted on. It's designed precisely to help agencies deliver the kind of warranted thinking described here. It is method-agnostic — qual, quant and mixed-method in one platform — rather than a point tool for a single technique, and it is built for the complex, multi-faceted programmes strategic agencies actually sell: multi-market, multi-stage work managed end to end in one place.

It covers the whole strategic project: decoding the brief, methodology design, proposal writing, survey and questionnaire design, discussion guides, fieldwork materials, analysis and reporting. Everything runs as a validated workflow with an audit trail, built to reproduce and warrant the quality of expert researchers consistently.

Agencies using it report time savings of up to 50% across proposals, fieldwork materials and analysis, which immediately frees up researchers' time to do more of the thinking that clients truly value. Pricing is per won project with unlimited users. Proposals are free and unlimited, and credits only apply once a project is won and reaches fieldwork, so your cost follows your revenue rather than your headcount.

The argument in this paper applies to agencies doing strategic work, for clients who audit them, where warranted thinking is the real product. If that describes you, the quickest way to test it is a structured pilot on live projects, with the numbers measured.

Book a demo at www.insightology.ai Bring a live project — we'll show you what the professional layer looks like for strategic research.