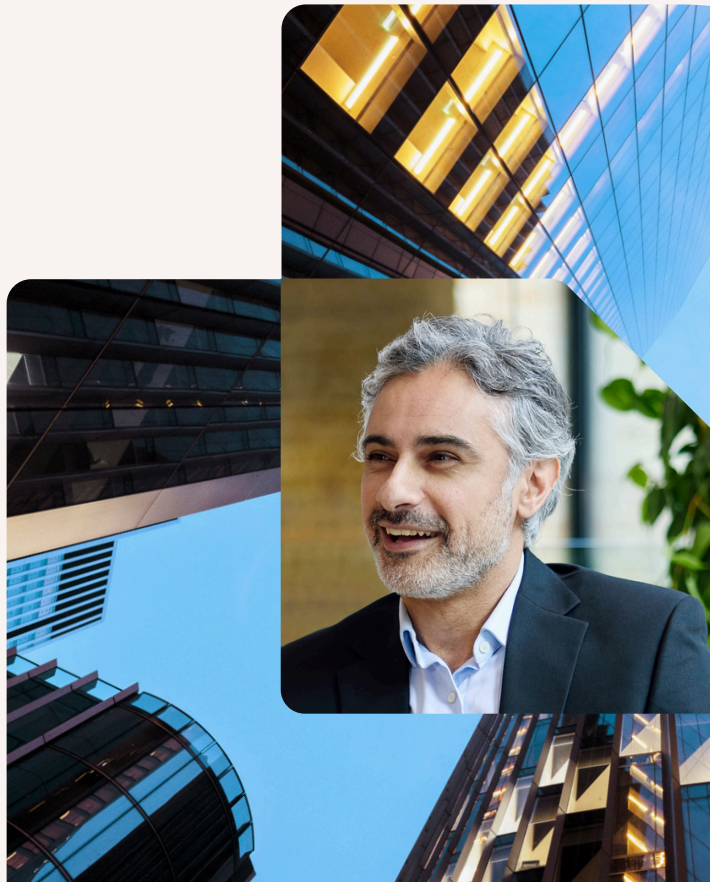


# The 2026 Playbook for Legal Contract AI

**eBook**

Real-world use cases to  
accelerate contract workflows



Manually managing the contract lifecycle is a slow, fragmented, and resource-intensive challenge for every function, but legal teams often bear the brunt of this exhausting process. Hindered by inconsistent clauses and language, scattered documents, and a rising volume of requests, it may feel like you're constantly playing catch-up.

All the while, you're receiving nudges from colleagues eager to get contracts over the finish line. You're expected to shorten timelines without increasing headcount, even as the volume and complexity of agreements continue to grow. The result is an ever-expanding backlog, limited visibility into obligations, and too little time for the strategic work legal is uniquely positioned to lead.

Relying on this manual approach is increasingly unsustainable, but that doesn't make the issue any less common. In fact, **50% of respondents** to a recent Deloitte report about the lost value of ineffective contract management said they face these tedious delays. In-house legal teams still spend hours hunting for precedent language, re-creating one-off edits, and trying to apply playbooks consistently across a mountain of agreements.

Contract AI changes that foundation, giving legal a way to centralize agreement data, standardize review, and surface the insights that matter most without sacrificing the control legal requires. Within an Intelligent Agreement Management platform, that AI foundation becomes even more powerful, connecting search and storage with request, review, negotiation, and post-signature obligations in a single system of action.

And as a new generation of legal-grade agreement agents builds on this foundation, legal teams will be able to delegate more of the repetitive intake, triage, and playbook checks to intelligent automation. Simultaneously, you can still remain firmly in the driver's seat, with every action logged, explainable, and audit-ready.

In this playbook, we'll explore how contract AI addresses the most pressing challenges across the contract lifecycle and provides the efficiency, visibility, and control necessary to drive better business outcomes in 2026 and beyond.



## Search and storage

Spend less time digging through contracts and more time acting on insights

### The challenge

Growing businesses have their hands full of contracts across multiple lines of business and geographies. Legal's most common challenge in managing this huge volume often stems from a commonly heard constraint: the lack of a centralized, searchable repository.

All too often, organizations have contracts scattered across systems—email, shared drives, local storage, and more. Without a cloud-based shared system and smart search capabilities, tracking down contract details is time-consuming, frustrating, and expensive. The consequences of this lack of immediate visibility bleed into the rest of the business:

- **Slow insights:** Siloed contracts and manual searches make it hard to find specific terms, answer questions, and access critical information. They also hide revenue opportunities like renewals and more attractive terms.
- **Extra costs:** If a regulatory or policy change applies to a set of company contracts, legal may even have to hire outside counsel or other resources to dig through files and pull out the affected agreements. The costs quickly add up, as does the pressure to meet the change deadline.
- **More interruptions:** Without a shared, up-to-date contract repository, legal teams become the default gatekeepers, fielding status requests that disrupt their workflows and pull them away from their core work.
- **Heightened risk:** Scattered contracts can increase compliance risks, as legal has limited visibility into active obligations. This can result in disputes, penalties of **around 14% of total contract value**, and outdated terms in future negotiations.

## The role of contract AI

An AI-powered repository stores all agreements in one place. More importantly, it intelligently organizes and tags them, so legal teams can:

- **Find contracts and terms in seconds:** No more manual hunts through shared folders or third-party tools to find a counterparty name, the latest data protection agreement (DPA), or an AI addendum. Contract AI lets legal use natural language queries to zero in on specific information in agreements.
- **Keep stakeholders informed at every stage:** No more duplicated files, version confusion, and unauthorized access. With a single, secure agreement repository, legal can quickly answer questions, stakeholders can find what they're looking for, and everyone can see data-backed reports.
- **Take proactive action:** To ensure that no contract milestone goes unnoticed, legal can set alerts and notifications for renewals and other key events, or trigger alerts based on key date searches. This automation and organization gives them the time to approach new opportunities fully prepared.

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"I save so much time. All our files are on one platform, and I'm no longer the keeper of it all. Anybody can go in and find a document as easily as I can."

Carmen Warfield,  
Deputy Clerk

San Miguel County Board

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## The Result?

A more efficient legal department, lower compliance risk, and actionable insights to inform future negotiations.

### Now legal can answer questions like:

- How many active MSAs does my organization have?
- Which customers have NDAs with us?
- Do we need a new DPA or can we amend an existing one?
- Which agreements contain language about limitation of liability?

Learn more about **DocuSign Navigator**, an AI-powered repository. Centralize executed agreements and transform them into structured, searchable data for quick audits, easy compliance, and powerful insights.



## Request, review, and redlining

Organize and accelerate contract requests—while keeping stakeholders in the loop

### The challenge

The road to signatures has many stops. When contract requests come in from stakeholders across the business—and legal's only tools are disparate and manual—the journey becomes longer, riskier, and less collaborative. Here's what that looks like:

- **Fragmented workflows:** Agreement requests enter inboxes, Slack, and shared drives. Drafts get started in Teams, emails, or legacy tools. To move contracts forward, legal teams have to toggle between fragmented documents and platforms, slowing progress, producing inconsistencies, and increasing the chances of lost requests and contracts.
- **Repetitive tasks:** Without automation, legal has to track versions, copy data, and chase approvals—draining resources and delaying deals. Already, attorneys spend **roughly 25% of their time** on administrative tasks.
- **Visibility gaps:** Scattered contract generation, redlining, routing, and approvals make it difficult for legal to ensure that all requests are fulfilled and stakeholders are kept involved and informed.

It's a process destined to be inefficient—lacking transparency, consistency, and accountability. Requests slip through the cracks. Stakeholders fall out of the loop. And legal teams are so consumed managing logistics that there's little time left for higher-impact work.

“We can move a document from generation to being fully executed and stored compliantly in our legal repository in under an hour. That’s critical for month-end closings, quarter-end deadlines, and helping customers get loans funded on time.”

Melissa Foster,  
Senior Vice President  
and Content Services  
Consultant

First Citizens Bank and  
Trust Company

## The role of contract AI

AI and workflow automation streamline the contract lifecycle, from the moment legal receives a new contract request to its final approval. By centralizing intake, standardizing generation, and speeding up reviews, an intelligent agreement platform replaces a fractured process with one that’s cohesive and smooth.

- **Provide self-serve contract generation to business teams:** To start, an AI-driven platform empowers business teams to fulfill new requests without involving legal. When provided with a few details from an email or other communication, AI can recommend the appropriate intake form, which then determines the correct contract template. Self-serve accelerates contract generation, saving the legal team’s time for the most nuanced, high-stakes cases.
- **Speed up negotiations with intelligent redlining:** Throughout drafting, AI makes agreements more efficient and consistent with preapproved language, automated data population, and built-in business rules. Once the contract is filled out, AI-powered review can highlight any third-party terms that don’t align with company playbooks. With automation and quick analysis, AI accelerates negotiations, cuts out back-and-forths, and speeds up signatures.
- **Make contract workflow oversight effortless:** With AI for routing workflows, the agreement generator can tag appropriate parties from the legal, business, finance, procurement, sales, and security sides for approval—instead of sending separate emails. Automatic status updates and version history keep stakeholders informed.

## The Result?

Fewer steps, faster cycles, consistent contracts, and scalable legal capabilities.

### Now legal can answer questions like:

- Which stakeholders need to review this contract?
- What contracts can be generated by other internal stakeholders using standardized templates?
- Does the contract comply with our approved playbooks? How can we revise outlier terms?
- How can internal stakeholders easily stay on top of statuses—without putting more work on legal?

Learn more about how DocuSign **Agreement Desk** and **AI-Assisted Review** are reducing cycle times and increasing efficiency with smart, automated approvals and clear audit trails.

# Tap into the full potential of contract AI with the Docusign IAM platform

Contract AI is changing the game for teams and functions throughout organizations and across the globe, from risk management to negotiations to sales momentum and beyond. And Docusign is leading the movement with Intelligent Agreement Management (IAM), an AI-powered approach to creating, committing to, and managing contracts.

The Docusign IAM platform cuts through outdated contract processes to turn static agreements into actionable intelligence. With centralized data, workflow automation, real-time insights, and full visibility, IAM puts AI at the core of your contract workflows. Teams get to leave manual tasks behind and spend more time on the work they were trained to do. Organizations get to unlock buried agreement value, minimize risk, and accelerate revenue.

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**Learn more about Docusign IAM** to see what your team can gain from centralizing and connecting your agreement work on an AI-powered agreement management platform.

Or, talk with someone from Docusign about how your team can use IAM. **Book time** with one of our experts today.



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## About DocuSign

DocuSign brings agreements to life. Over 1.8 million customers and more than a billion people in over 180 countries use DocuSign solutions to accelerate the process of doing business and simplify people's lives. With intelligent agreement management, DocuSign unleashes business-critical data that is trapped inside of documents. Until now, these were disconnected from business systems of record, costing businesses time, money, and opportunity. Using DocuSign IAM, companies can create, commit, and manage agreements with solutions created by the #1 company in e-signature and contract lifecycle management (CLM).

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