

Legal Informatics

By Daniel Martin Katz, Ron Dolin, & Michael J. Bommarito (eds.). (2021), 600 pages, ISBN: 978-1107142725. \$125.36

Subject: Subject-specific legal research (Legal Technology)

Useful for: Useful for those involved in training or teaching law students, as well as those working in large law firms

Format: Collection of standalone articles grouped by theme, with tables and figures throughout

Reviewer's Comments:

As a service industry that monetizes human expertise, legal practice has a long history of adapting to any new devices or systems that facilitate the application of specialized labor. But that track record doesn't make the newest legal technologies any less revolutionary, and *Legal Informatics* amply demonstrates the myriad ways that these emerging tools could radically alter the role of humans within legal systems.

This somewhat intimidating tome is not a beach read, nor is it a collection of aimless futurist speculation about the changing nature of legal work. It is a serious scholastic exploration of the practical application of technology to a data-rich professional industry. The editors sincerely view this work as the first comprehensive reference text for a new academic discipline, in the model of health informatics and related areas. While the book is a collection of individual articles rather than a traditional textbook, the editors' goal was to thoughtfully and wholistically sketch the parameters of this new field.

Accordingly, the book begins by establishing the historical relationship between law and technology before delving into the building blocks of modern legal informatics, many of which will be familiar buzzwords to any law librarian. Do not be deterred by the article titles, which include terms like artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, automation, gamification, and design thinking. While we have all been presented with abstracted versions of these concepts and their promised benefits, these essays are not marketing copy for a legal tech product. They are realistic and grounded discussions of the opportunities (and limits) of these technologies from established legal thinkers and engineers.

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That groundwork is important for contextualizing the following chapters detailing in-depth use cases, from contract analysis, to e-discovery, to legal research and access to justice initiatives. The book concludes with a more focused section discussing the practical realities of applying legal tech in the context of “Big Law” practice, where the capital and scale necessary to implement these technologies is currently concentrated.

It bears mentioning what this work is not. It is not a practice manual or a how-to guide for implementing these technologies to every context. It does not contain exercises or instructional guidance that could help educators incorporate this material into an Advanced Legal Research or Legal Technology class. Also, while the book’s organization and topics create some structure, there is no overarching editorial distillation of complex concepts, nor running commentary to guide the reader along.

What it does provide (in spades) is a one-stop-shop for excellent scholarship in a very important area. I would recommend this work for every academic law library, as well as for knowledge managers and librarians with any large legal employer.

Reviewed by: Daniel Radthorne, University of Virginia School of Law, in 2022.