ACTIONABLE AI

presents

AI Playbook

Microsoft 365 Copilot for Small Law Firms

A Practical Guide to Deploying Copilot Across Word, Outlook, Teams, and Excel · Responsibly, Ethically, and Profitably

actionableai.net · Prepared by Greg Yates - Updated September 19, 2026

Important Notice

This playbook is educational and informational. It is not legal advice, ethics counsel, or a substitute for consultation with your state bar or qualified counsel on any specific matter or on your firm's own professional-responsibility obligations.

Nothing here creates an attorney-client relationship. Actionable AI is a consulting firm, not a law firm.

Microsoft 365 Copilot features, pricing, and terms of service change frequently. Licensing structures, per-user costs, and feature availability described in this playbook reflect conditions as of August 2026 and must be independently verified before any purchasing decision. Microsoft updates Copilot capabilities on a rolling basis; a feature described as in preview may have reached general availability, changed scope, or been discontinued by the time you read this.

All sample policies, disclosures, prompts, and governance documents are starting points. Have a licensed attorney review them before adoption or use in your firm.

Microsoft 365 Copilot and the other products named in these pages are named because small firms already own or evaluate them, not as endorsements. Actionable AI takes no fees from any vendor and recommends no product.

A note on numbers. Every figure here falls into one of three buckets, and you can tell which from the sentence around it. Statutory amounts, deadlines, and case outcomes carry their own citation and can be checked at the source. Third-party statistics name the body that produced them. Anything else is an Actionable AI working assumption, offered to be stress-tested against your firm's own rates, volumes, and

matter values rather than repeated as fact.

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The Problem With Generic AI Advice

Here is what the AI influencers will not tell you: the advice flooding your inbox was not written for law firms. It was written for the broadest possible audience, which means it was written for no one in particular. The same guide gets handed to a marketing agency, a dental practice, and a small law firm. It does not know the difference between those audiences, because it was never built to.

For Microsoft 365 Copilot specifically, generic advice tends to take one of two forms: breathless enthusiasm ('just turn it on and watch your productivity soar') or reflexive skepticism ('it is not ready for legal work'). Neither one helps you make a real decision. The enthusiasm crowd does not know that enabling Copilot without auditing your SharePoint permissions can surface one client's confidential documents to any attorney in the firm who thinks to ask. The skeptics do not know that Copilot operates entirely within your firm's Microsoft 365 tenant, under your existing data controls, with a data processing agreement already built into your commercial license.

Generic advice also does not know your economics. A solo or small firm cannot absorb a $500 per month legal AI subscription for every lawyer and every paralegal. It needs to know whether the Copilot license it is already paying for can cover the same use cases. In many firms, it can. But nobody in the generic-advice business is going to tell you to buy less software.

What This Playbook Does Differently

This playbook was built for the solo practitioner and the Florida firm with fewer than 25 lawyers that already uses Microsoft 365 and wants to know, specifically, whether and how to deploy Copilot. Every recommendation is pressure-tested against bar ethics guidance, the practical realities of small-firm operations, and the features as they actually exist in the June 2026 product.

It answers three questions that matter:

1. What are the real ethics risks of using Copilot, and how do you build guardrails that hold under bar scrutiny?
2. What specific tasks should you use Copilot for in each Microsoft 365 app, and which ones will get you in trouble?
3. How do you deploy Copilot without accidentally turning your SharePoint permissions problem into a confidentiality breach?

No evangelism. No vendor promotion. No predictions about the future of law. Just the specific analysis a small firm needs to make good decisions about a tool it may already be paying for.

The Actionable AI Philosophy

Tools serve lawyers. Not the other way around.

The small firm that benefits most from Copilot is not the one that turns it on everywhere at once. It is the one that deploys it deliberately: picks the right starting applications, locks down permissions first, trains the team on verification, and expands from there. Copilot can draft a client update email, summarize a hundred-page contract, transcribe a deposition prep meeting, and analyze a settlement spreadsheet. It can also surface a confidential document from the wrong matter, hallucinate a case citation, and produce a

contract clause that sounds authoritative and is completely wrong. The difference between the upside and the downside is whether a lawyer is driving or along for the ride.

THE ACTIONABLE AI TEST

Before you put Copilot near a client matter, answer four questions:

1. Does your Microsoft 365 plan include enterprise data protection and a Data Processing Agreement?

2. Have you audited your SharePoint permissions to confirm the right people see the right files?

3. Can a lawyer verify every Copilot output before it reaches a client or a court?

4. Would you be comfortable if your state bar, and the judge on your case, knew you used Copilot for this purpose?

If you cannot answer all four confidently, finish this playbook before you turn Copilot on.

Why Microsoft 365 Copilot Is Different From Other AI Options

Most conversations about AI in law firms treat every tool as if it works the same way: you type something in, the AI generates something back, you figure out what to do with it. Microsoft 365 Copilot is fundamentally different from that model, and the difference matters enormously for how a small firm evaluates, deploys, and governs it.

You Are Probably Already Paying for the Foundation

Microsoft 365 is the dominant productivity platform in small law firms. Word, Outlook, Teams, Excel, and SharePoint are already running in most firms, and the attorneys already know how to use them. That changes the adoption equation completely. Every other AI tool you evaluate asks the firm to adopt a new application, build new workflows, and train attorneys to use something they have never touched. Copilot asks them to use the applications they are already in, in the way they already work, with an AI assistant embedded directly in the toolbar.

The base Microsoft 365 Business Standard plan runs approximately $14 per user per month as of July 1, 2026 (previously $12.50). Business Premium, which adds advanced security features, runs approximately $22 per user per month. The Copilot Business add-on lists at $21 per user per month. Microsoft was promoting Copilot Business at $18 per user per month on an annual term; that promotion has since been extended through December 31, 2026. Microsoft also began selling permanent bundled SKUs on July 1, 2026 — Microsoft 365 Business Standard with Copilot ($23.50/user/month) and Business Premium with Copilot ($32/user/month), each capped at 300 licenses. Verify current pricing and promotion terms at microsoft.com before any purchasing decision. The true all-in cost runs from approximately $35 to $43 per user per month depending on the base plan selected. Verify current pricing and any promotional offers at microsoft.com before any purchasing decision.

> **IMPORTANT: PRICING CHANGES IN JULY 2026**
>
> Microsoft raised base Microsoft 365 license prices effective July 1, 2026. Business Standard went from $12.50 to $14. Business Premium did not change and remains about $22. The Copilot Business add-on lists at $21. Microsoft was promoting Copilot Business at $18 per user per month on an annual term; that promotion has since been extended through December 31, 2026. Microsoft also began selling permanent bundled SKUs on July 1, 2026 — Microsoft 365 Business Standard with Copilot ($23.50/user/month) and Business Premium with Copilot ($32/user/month), each capped at 300 licenses. Verify current pricing and promotion terms at microsoft.com before any purchasing decision.
>
> Verify current pricing at microsoft.com before any purchasing decision. Microsoft periodically offers promotional pricing; check microsoft.com for current offers before any purchasing decision.

It Reads Your Firm's Documents, Not Just the Internet

Every general-purpose AI tool you use through a browser is working from its training data: documents it ingested before it was released to the public. It does not know what is in your firm's files. It cannot search your SharePoint site, read your email threads, or analyze the contract draft sitting in your OneDrive. It gives

you good general answers. It cannot give you answers about your specific matter, your specific client, or your specific document.

Microsoft 365 Copilot is wired into Microsoft Graph, which indexes your firm's emails, calendar events, Teams conversations, SharePoint files, and OneDrive documents. When you ask Copilot to summarize the correspondence with a client, it searches your Outlook. When you ask it to identify the key obligations in the contract you are reviewing, it reads the actual document in front of you. When you ask it who in the firm has worked on matters involving a particular counterparty, it searches across your SharePoint. This is the capability that separates Copilot from browser-based AI tools, and it is also what makes the permissions question so important.

The Data Protection Agreement Is Already Included: But Read the Terms

One of the most consequential questions in the AI tool selection process for law firms is whether the vendor has signed a Data Processing Agreement committing them not to train their models on your data. With standalone AI tools, you often have to negotiate that agreement or pay for a tier that includes it. With Microsoft 365 Copilot on a commercial Business or Enterprise plan, the Microsoft Data Processing Agreement is included by default. Your prompts and the data Copilot accesses remain within your Microsoft 365 service boundary and are not used to train foundation AI models.

This matters for ethics compliance. Florida Bar Ethics Opinion 24-1, issued January 19, 2024, advises lawyers to understand how their AI tools handle client data before using those tools on client matters. The Microsoft commercial DPA provides a documented answer to that question, which is more than most consumer-tier tools can offer.

Two important caveats. First, this protection applies to commercial Microsoft 365 plans, not to personal Microsoft accounts. An attorney logging into Outlook or Word with a personal outlook.com account is using consumer-tier terms, which are different. Second, the DPA governs Microsoft's access to your data, not what happens inside your tenant. If your firm's SharePoint permissions allow the wrong people to see certain files, Copilot will surface those files to those people. Microsoft's data protection does not fix your permissions problem.

> **IMPORTANT: ENTERPRISE PROTECTION VS. CONSUMER TERMS**
>
> Microsoft 365 Business Standard and Business Premium plans: enterprise data protection and DPA included.
>
> Personal Microsoft accounts (outlook.com, hotmail.com, personal Office 365): consumer terms apply. Do not use these accounts for client matters with Copilot.
>
> Confirm your firm's plan type before enabling Copilot. If attorneys are logging in with personal accounts, that is a problem to fix before deployment.

What Copilot Does Not Do

Copilot is not a legal research tool in the traditional sense. It does not have access to Westlaw, Lexis, or official court databases. When you ask it a legal research question, it draws on its training data, which has a knowledge cutoff and does not include the full corpus of American case law. The hallucination risk is real: Copilot can cite cases that do not exist, misstate holdings, or describe statutes with outdated text. Any

Copilot output that includes a case citation, a statutory reference, or a legal standard must be verified against a primary source before it goes anywhere.

Copilot is also not a practice-specific legal AI tool. Products designed specifically for legal work, contract analysis platforms, legal research engines, e-discovery tools, are trained on legal documents and calibrated for legal accuracy in ways that Copilot is not. Copilot is a productivity tool that works well in legal environments when it is used for the right tasks: drafting, summarizing, organizing, communicating, and analyzing data. It is not a substitute for purpose-built legal AI when legal accuracy is the primary requirement.

> **IMPORTANT: THE LEGAL AGENT FOR WORD (STILL IN PREVIEW; GA NOW TARGETED FOR EARLY OCTOBER 2026)**
>
> On April 30, 2026, Microsoft launched the Legal Agent for Word in Frontier Public Preview for US users. Microsoft has since removed the geographic restriction: the agent is available to Frontier users worldwide. It remains in Frontier Public Preview; Microsoft's general-availability target has slipped from an original mid-August 2026 date, to early September, to its current target of early October 2026. Current requirements: Frontier enrollment, an assigned Microsoft 365 Copilot license, a supported version of Word, and Anthropic enabled as a subprocessor in the tenant, which has been on by default for US commercial tenants since January 7, 2026.
>
> The Legal Agent performs contract analysis, playbook-driven redlining, and version comparison inside Word. It is purpose-built for legal workflows in a way that standard Copilot is not. Important: the Playbook Review feature uses a skill derived from your playbook. It does not use the playbook document directly during contract analysis. Verify current feature mechanics at learn.microsoft.com.
>
> It runs on Anthropic models, which Microsoft has onboarded as a subprocessor. The Legal Agent remains in Frontier Public Preview as of this writing. Microsoft's general-availability target has slipped twice — from an original mid-August 2026 date, to early September, to its current target of early October 2026. Confirm current status at learn.microsoft.com before counting on it for a live workflow.

Why the Pricing Math Changed in December 2025

For most of 2024 and early 2025, Microsoft 365 Copilot was priced at $30 per user per month as an add-on license. At that price, a five-attorney firm adding Copilot for all attorneys was looking at $150 per month (approximately $1,800 per year) in additional cost on top of existing Microsoft 365 subscriptions. The economics were difficult for small firms to justify.

On December 1, 2025, Microsoft introduced Copilot Business, a new add-on tier for organizations up to 300 seats, at $21 per user per month. The uncapped enterprise Microsoft 365 Copilot add-on remains $30 per user per month on an annual term, so a firm already sitting on an enterprise agreement does not move to $21 automatically. For the same five-attorney firm, the cost drops to $105 per month (approximately $1,260 per year). The economics are still real, but they are meaningfully different, particularly when Copilot is being evaluated against standalone legal AI subscriptions that charge $50 to $150 per user per month or more for narrower functionality.

The Rest of Microsoft's AI Family: What Else Is Out There

Microsoft has built a broad portfolio of AI products across different market segments, and the naming can be confusing. This playbook covers Microsoft 365 Copilot, the productivity AI built into your firm's Microsoft 365 applications. The other products in the family are worth understanding so you know what you are not dealing with.

Microsoft Copilot (free/consumer version) is a web-based AI assistant available at copilot.microsoft.com. It is the successor to Bing Chat Enterprise and draws on public internet content. It is not connected to your firm's Microsoft 365 tenant, it does not read your files, and it operates under consumer terms of service. It is appropriate for general, public-information queries. It is not appropriate for anything involving client information.

Copilot Studio is Microsoft's low-code platform for building custom AI agents. It lets organizations create specialized automated agents that connect to external data sources, APIs, and business systems, Dynamics 365, Salesforce, SharePoint, custom databases. Copilot Studio is not a tool for individual attorney use; it is a development platform that requires IT involvement and organizational planning. A small firm is unlikely to need it in its early Copilot deployment.

Azure AI Foundry (formerly Azure AI Studio and Azure AI Services) is Microsoft's developer platform for organizations that want to build custom AI models, fine-tune foundation models, or deploy AI infrastructure. It requires software developers, technical architecture, and ongoing engineering resources. It is not relevant to the day-to-day operations of a small law firm.

The practical takeaway: if you are a small law firm using Microsoft 365, the AI product relevant to you is Microsoft 365 Copilot. The others exist at a different layer of the technology stack.

The Ethics Reality

The professional responsibility rules that govern your law practice were not written with AI in mind. They apply anyway, and in Florida they now say so: effective October 28, 2024, the Florida Supreme Court amended the Comments to Rules 4-1.1, 4-1.6, 4-5.1, and 4-5.3 to address generative artificial intelligence by name. In re Amendments to Rules Regulating The Florida Bar – Chapter 4, 393 So. 3d 137 (Fla. 2024). The comment to Rule 4-5.1 asks firms with managerial authority to consider safeguards for the firm's use of technologies such as generative AI, which is precisely what the pre-deployment audit in this playbook is. The framework is not complicated once you map it onto how Copilot actually works in a law firm. Ignoring it is the fastest way to turn a productivity upgrade into a bar complaint.

Florida Bar Ethics Opinion 24-1, issued January 19, 2024, addresses generative AI directly. It is required reading for any Florida lawyer using AI tools on client matters. Read the actual opinion at floridabar.org. If you are not in Florida, find the equivalent guidance from your state bar, the ABA's Formal Opinion 512, issued July 29, 2024, provides national ABA guidance on lawyers' use of generative AI; lawyers should check their own state bar's specific guidance as well.

The conclusions are not novel. These opinions apply existing competence, confidentiality, supervision, and candor rules to a new technology. The application is what matters. The summary below is not a replacement for either opinion.

The Five Rules That Matter Most

RULE 4-1.1: COMPETENCE (AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCE)

The comment to Florida Rule 4-1.1 requires keeping abreast of changes in the law and the benefits and risks of relevant technology. ABA Model Rule 1.1 contains identical language. In the Copilot context, competence means understanding what Copilot can and cannot do in each application, and knowing when a Copilot output needs to be verified before it is used.

Copilot competence has three dimensions. You must understand enough to make appropriate deployment decisions, which tasks to use it for and which to avoid. You must be able to supervise its use by staff and paralegals. And you must be able to verify its output: checking citations against primary sources, reviewing drafted language for accuracy, and catching the confident errors that language models produce.

> **ACTION ITEM**
>
> Every attorney who will use Copilot on client matters completes at least one CLE on AI in legal practice before they begin. Florida's CLE rules require three of the thirty hours per three-year cycle in approved technology programs. Bar-approved AI CLEs satisfy that requirement.
>
> Document it. One hour per attorney is the minimum investment before deployment.

RULE 4-1.6: CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION

Rule 4-1.6 prohibits revealing information relating to the representation without informed client consent. For Microsoft 365 Copilot on a commercial Business or Enterprise plan, the Microsoft Data Processing Agreement addresses the external confidentiality question: your data stays in your tenant and is not used for model training.

But Rule 4-1.6 does not only protect against external disclosure. It protects against internal disclosure too. In a law firm, information barriers exist for a reason, attorney A should not be able to access confidential files from attorney B's client matters, even if attorney A works at the same firm and is on the same Microsoft 365 tenant. Most small firms have never formally configured these barriers in SharePoint, because before Copilot, most attorneys did not think to navigate to folders they did not work in.

Copilot changes that. When attorney A asks Copilot 'what do we know about the Harrison estate?' and the firm's estate-practice SharePoint site has broad permissions, Copilot will surface everything it can find, including files from attorney B's Harrison matters that attorney A was never meant to see. That is a confidentiality issue, and it happens before anyone at Microsoft touches a single byte of your data.

> **HARD RULE**
>
> No Copilot deployment goes live until the firm has audited its SharePoint permissions.
>
> Use SharePoint Advanced Management reports, included in the Copilot license, to identify overshared sites and files before attorneys start prompting.
>
> The Permission Paradox chapter covers the full pre-deployment audit process.

RULE 4-5.3: RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING NONLAWYER ASSISTANCE

Florida Bar Ethics Opinion 24-1 treats AI output the way it treats work product from a nonlawyer assistant. The model is your junior associate. You are responsible for what it produces: oversight, review, verification, and documentation. When a paralegal or staff member uses Copilot, the supervising attorney is responsible for the result, just as they would be for any other delegated work.

Small firms face a particular risk here: the paralegal who starts using Copilot for everything without the attorney knowing, or the associate who uses Copilot to draft briefs without disclosing it. Written policies that cover who can use Copilot, on what tasks, and with what verification requirements are not optional governance overhead. They are how you fulfill the supervision duty.

> **THE SUPERVISION TEST**
>
> If a bar grievance arrived tomorrow about a Copilot-generated document in a current client matter, what could you show the bar?
>
> If the honest answer is nothing in writing, your supervision program needs work before deployment.

RULE 4-3.3: CANDOR TOWARD THE TRIBUNAL

Copilot can hallucinate. This is not a feature gap awaiting a future update. It is how large language models work. They predict plausible text, not necessarily accurate text. A confident summary of case law from Copilot may cite cases that do not exist, misstate holdings from cases that do, or describe statutory provisions with outdated or incorrect text.

Florida has its own cautionary tale. In Capital Standard, LLC v. U.S. Bank National Association, No. 2D2024-1392, 2026 WL 2450571 (Fla. 2d DCA Aug. 21, 2026), the court found at least 31 fabricated or unsupported citations in counsel's amended brief, growing to 46 after opposing counsel flagged the problem and his reply brief added more. The court struck both briefs, fined him $1,500, made him personally liable for the

opposing party's appellate fees, and referred him to The Florida Bar. The lesson is direct: 'the AI made it up' is not a defense to a Rule 4-3.3 violation.

Florida Supreme Court Opinion SC2026-0673, effective June 15, 2026, reinforces this. It amended Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.515(d)(2) to require that the signing attorney represent that all cited legal authorities exist and are accurately cited. Authorized sanctions include reprimand, contempt, stricken filings, dismissal, costs, and attorney's fees. This rule applies to Florida state courts. Federal courts, including federal bankruptcy courts and federal district courts, are governed by their own rules and individual judge standing orders, which vary and must be checked before every federal filing.

> **THE RULE**
>
> No Copilot-generated citation, case, statute, regulation, or quotation, appears in any filing, memo, letter, or client communication until a real lawyer has verified it against Westlaw, Lexis, or an official court or government database.
>
> Copilot in Word is a drafting assistant, not a Westlaw replacement. Use it accordingly.

RULE 4-1.5: FEES AND THE BILLING TRANSPARENCY OBLIGATION

Florida Bar Ethics Opinion 24-1 is explicit: AI efficiency cannot be used to inflate time. If Copilot compresses a four-hour contract review into ninety minutes, the bill reflects ninety minutes. This is a straightforward application of the prohibition against charging more than a reasonable fee for work done.

For hourly billing, the mechanics are clear: bill the actual time spent, including time reviewing and verifying Copilot's output. For flat-fee matters, Copilot creates margin. For contingency practices, the question of fees rarely arises directly, but Copilot's effect on lodestar fee petitions does: if AI compresses the hours it takes to do work, the lodestar starts from the actual time spent, not the time it would have taken without AI.

The engagement letter disclosure question is separate. Some firms are disclosing AI use proactively. Others wait for clients to ask. At minimum, your engagement letter should be able to accommodate an honest answer to a client who asks whether AI was used on their matter.

Other Rules That Touch This Work

— **Rule 4-1.4, Communication:** Copilot-drafted client communications still require attorney review. A Copilot-generated email that misstates the status of a matter, omits a deadline, or gives incorrect legal information is a communication failure that lands on the attorney.

— **Rule 4-1.18, Prospective Clients:** Information from a prospective client who does not become a client is still confidential. Do not paste prospective-client inquiries into Copilot on a free or uncontrolled account to screen them. Use an enterprise-controlled workflow.

— **Rule 4-5.5, Unauthorized Practice:** Copilot prompts must be designed to keep the legal judgment in the hands of the lawyer. A prompt that asks Copilot to 'advise the client whether to accept the settlement' has crossed from drafting into legal advice territory. Design prompts so they produce information and drafts, not conclusions.

The Courts Are Writing Their Own Rules: Right Now

Florida Supreme Court Opinion SC2026-0673, effective June 15, 2026, established a statewide AI citation-verification rule for Florida state courts. The signing attorney must represent that all cited legal authorities exist and are accurately cited. This applies to attorneys and self-represented parties. It applies to Florida state courts only. Federal courts, district courts, circuit courts of appeals, bankruptcy courts, are governed by their own rules and individual judge standing orders.

Several Florida circuit courts had earlier administrative orders requiring AI disclosure. SC2026-0673, together with companion administrative order AOSC26-12, preempts those local circuit orders and establishes a uniform statewide standard for Florida state courts. The Eleventh Judicial Circuit (Miami-Dade) and Seventeenth Judicial Circuit (Broward) had orders (AO 26-15, which vacated and superseded AO 26-04 on May 19, 2026, and AO 2026-03-Gen Amendment 2, respectively) that are superseded by the statewide rule.

BEFORE EVERY FILING

Florida state court: confirm every cited authority exists and is accurately cited per Rule 2.515(d)(2) / SC2026-0673.

Federal court: check the assigned judge's current standing orders on AI. No uniform district-wide rule exists in the Northern, Middle, or Southern Districts of Florida as of June 2026.

If you use Copilot to assist with research for any filing, the verification step is not optional. It is the rule.

The Emerging Issue Most Microsoft 365 Firms Are Missing: The Permission Paradox

Walk into almost any small law firm that has been on Microsoft 365 for more than three years, and you will find the same thing: a SharePoint environment built by people who were solving access problems, not confidentiality problems. The estate-planning practice SharePoint site has fifty people with read access because it was easier than managing a list. The litigation team's OneDrive folders are shared with the whole firm because the managing partner wanted to be able to find documents. The client-intake templates are stored on a site that is set to 'Everyone except external users' because nobody remembers changing the default.

Before Copilot, this was a latent problem. The files were accessible to people who should not have had access, but those people did not think to navigate to folders they had no reason to open. The misconfiguration sat quietly, doing nothing.

After Copilot, the same misconfiguration is an active risk. Copilot enables any attorney or staff member in your firm to query all the content they have permission to access, in plain English, from anywhere in Microsoft 365. The question 'what do we know about the Henderson matter?' takes Copilot thirty seconds to answer, pulling from every email, Teams message, Word document, and SharePoint file that the prompting user's permission level allows. If the Henderson matter files were in a broadly shared SharePoint site, Copilot surfaces them regardless of whether the prompting attorney has any business seeing them.

The Numbers Behind the Problem

Pre-Copilot readiness assessments routinely surface a substantial number of overshared documents in Microsoft 365 environments. The specific share varies by organization; assessments frequently find that a significant portion of business-critical files are accessible beyond what the document owner intended. The mechanism is almost always the same: SharePoint sites with broad default permissions, OneDrive links shared with 'anyone in the organization,' and distribution lists that expanded over time without corresponding access reviews.

In a law firm, broadly accessible documents are not just a data management inconvenience. They are a potential confidentiality violation. One 400-attorney firm that documented its pre-Copilot audit found dozens of SharePoint sites set to 'Everyone except external users.' That firm locked them down and applied Microsoft Purview sensitivity labels before enabling Copilot. The result, in their own reporting, was that unusual Copilot results, responses surfacing documents from unexpected matters or clients, essentially disappeared. The permissions fix solved the Copilot problem because the permissions were the problem.

What the Permission Paradox Means for Small Firms

Small firms are, if anything, more exposed than large ones. Large firms have IT departments that run periodic access reviews. Small firms typically have an IT vendor who handles patches and passwords, and a managing partner who has never been asked to sign off on a SharePoint permissions audit. The default Microsoft 365 sharing settings for new SharePoint sites allow sharing with anyone in the organization. Most small firms have never changed that default.

The good news is that the tools to fix this are included in the Copilot license. SharePoint Advanced Management, available to qualifying Microsoft 365 Copilot licensees (core features; confirm your specific requirements at learn.microsoft.com), includes site access review reports, oversharing alerts, and the ability to run an inventory of every document in your tenant with its current permission set. Microsoft has since added a Content Management Assessment hub in the SharePoint admin center that runs the readiness reports as one guided assessment, which is the easiest place for a firm without IT staff to start. Microsoft Purview sensitivity labels can be applied to client matter folders to restrict access to the attorneys assigned to that matter. Check your licensing before you plan on this: manual sensitivity labeling requires Microsoft 365 Business Premium or E3, not Business Standard, and automatic labeling requires E5 or Purview Information Protection P2. A firm on Business Standard that wants matter-level labeling is looking at a Business Premium upgrade, which moves the base plan from about $14 to about $22 per user per month. These are not technical tools that require a developer. A managing partner with IT vendor support can run the SharePoint Advanced Management report, review the results, and implement a remediation plan in a few focused sessions.

The Pre-Deployment Audit: What to Do Before You Enable Copilot

The audit is not optional. Enabling Copilot without completing it is not a calculated risk. It is an uninformed one. The process has five components:

1. Run the SharePoint Advanced Management oversharing report. It shows every site and every file with permissions that exceed what the site owner intended. Focus first on sites that contain client matter files.
2. Inventory ‘broadly shared’ sites. Any site with permissions set to ‘Everyone,’ ‘Everyone except external users,’ or a large distribution list needs a permissions correction before Copilot is enabled.
3. Apply sensitivity labels to client matter libraries. Use Microsoft Purview to create a label hierarchy, at minimum, one label for active client matters with restricted access. Apply these labels to existing libraries before deployment, not after.
4. Review OneDrive sharing links across the firm. ‘Anyone with the link’ sharing is a common legacy issue. Run the sharing report and revoke broad links from active client matter documents.
5. Set Copilot to restricted search scope for the initial rollout. Microsoft allows administrators to limit Copilot’s search scope to specific SharePoint sites and content types during a pilot phase. Use this feature to validate behavior in a controlled environment before opening Copilot to the full tenant.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

The goal is not perfection before deployment. The goal is a documented, reasonable audit that you can show to a bar examiner if asked.

If Copilot surfaces an unexpected document during the pilot, that is the audit working, you found a permissions error before it affected a client matter.

Document every step: what you reviewed, what you changed, and when. The audit log is your compliance record.

The Upside of Fixing Permissions First

There is a counterintuitive benefit to the pre-deployment audit: it forces the permissions conversation that most small firms have been deferring for years. Firms that audit before Copilot deployment end up with a more secure Microsoft 365 environment than they had before the AI question arose, regardless of what they decide about Copilot. The permission audit is worthwhile on its own merits. Copilot is just the forcing function that finally makes it happen.

Ethics Risks and Governance Framework

Knowing the rules is the beginning. Knowing how they fail in practice is what keeps you out of trouble. These are the failure modes that trip real firms, not hypothetical scenarios, but patterns that bar complaints and sanctions decisions document.

High-Risk Failure Modes

THE PERMISSIONS BREACH

As described in the prior section: Copilot surfaces confidential documents from the wrong client matter because SharePoint permissions were never audited. The Copilot output is accurate. It correctly found the document. The failure is the permission configuration that let it. Fix: complete the pre-deployment audit before enabling Copilot.

THE HALLUCINATED CITATION

Copilot summarizes case law and includes citations to cases that do not exist. The attorney does not verify. The brief goes out. In Capital Standard, LLC v. U.S. Bank National Association, No. 2D2024-1392, 2026 WL 2450571 (Fla. 2d DCA Aug. 21, 2026), the court found that generative AI had functioned as counsel's primary research tool, producing at least 31 fabricated or unsupported citations that grew to 46 after opposing counsel flagged the problem. The court did not identify the specific tool. The pattern applies with equal force to Copilot: every citation requires independent verification against a primary source before any use.

CONSUMER ACCOUNT CONFUSION

An attorney works from home and signs into Microsoft 365 using their personal outlook.com account instead of the firm's commercial account. They use Copilot, believing they are in the secure firm environment. They are not. Personal Microsoft accounts run under consumer terms, not the commercial Data Processing Agreement. Information shared in that session is governed by different retention and use terms. Fix: require attorneys and staff to use only firm-provisioned Microsoft 365 accounts for any work that touches client information.

UNSUPERVISED STAFF USE

A paralegal discovers Copilot and starts using it independently, drafting client-facing documents without attorney review. The attorney does not know this is happening until a client notices an error in a Copilot-generated letter. Fix: written policies specifying who uses Copilot on what tasks, with mandatory attorney review before any Copilot-generated content goes outside the firm.

THE AI-SET DEADLINE

An attorney asks Copilot to help analyze a new matter and asks it to identify the applicable limitations period. Copilot gives a confident answer based on its training data, which may be out of date, may reflect the law of a different jurisdiction, or may simply be wrong. The attorney dockets the deadline without verifying it. The claim is barred. Fix: any deadline, statute of limitations, or procedural deadline generated by Copilot must be verified against the current primary source before it goes on the calendar. Every time.

Data Classification Framework

Not all firm data belongs in Copilot queries. Use this four-tier framework to govern what information goes where:

Tier	What it is	Where it may go
Tier 1	Public information: statutes, public case law, court rules, publicly filed documents	Any approved tool, including general Copilot
Tier 2	Anonymized matter facts: legal questions, issue spotting, general research without identifying details	Enterprise Microsoft 365 Copilot (commercial plan, DPA in place)
Tier 3	Client identifiers and specific matter facts: names, matters, case specifics, correspondence	Microsoft 365 Copilot on commercial plan only, never consumer tier or unapproved tools
Tier 4	Highly sensitive: medical records, financial account details, SSNs, personnel files, sealed records, investigation materials	Handle with maximum caution; limit Copilot queries to documents already classified and permission-restricted; attorney review required before any Copilot output is used

Approved Tool Policy

Microsoft 365 Copilot on a commercial Business or Enterprise plan is appropriate for Tier 1 through Tier 3 work when the firm has completed the pre-deployment audit described in the Permission Paradox chapter. Tier 4 data requires additional caution: Copilot may be used to work within documents that are already properly restricted and labeled, but outputs involving Tier 4 information require mandatory attorney review before any use or distribution.

Microsoft Copilot on a personal account (consumer tier) is approved for Tier 1 work only. It is not approved for anything involving client information.

Staff Training Requirements

— **Before deployment:** Every attorney and paralegal who will use Copilot receives training on: what Copilot can and cannot do in each M365 app, the tier framework, the verification requirement for citations, and the firm's approved-use policy.

— **Annual requirement:** Training refreshed annually, and documented. Microsoft updates Copilot capabilities frequently; the training should reflect the current feature set.

— **New staff:** Training before first use on client matters, not after.

— **AI Policy Supervisor:** Designate one attorney as the firm's AI Policy Supervisor, responsible for maintaining the approved-use policy, handling questions, and conducting the annual review.

Best Use Cases by Workflow Stage

Copilot is not equally useful in every Microsoft 365 application, and it is not equally safe in every task within each application. The following breakdown maps the seven core workflow stages of small-firm legal practice onto the Copilot features that genuinely help and the tasks where AI assistance creates more risk than value.

Stage 1: Intake and Matter Setup

First contact through matter opening: evaluating the potential client, gathering initial facts, running a conflict check, and setting up the matter in Microsoft 365.

— **Copilot in Outlook, summarize inquiry threads:** A prospective client emails three times over two days with background on their situation. Copilot in Outlook can summarize the thread, extract the key facts, and identify what information is still needed. This turns a twenty-minute reading task into a two-minute one.

— **Copilot in Teams, intake call summary:** Record the intake call in Teams with attorney consent obtained in advance. After the call, Copilot generates a summary with action items and open questions. Verify accuracy before treating it as the matter record.

— **Copilot Chat, conflict check support:** Ask Copilot to search firm emails, Teams messages, and SharePoint files for references to a prospective client's name, related parties, or opposing parties. This is faster than manual searching but does not replace a formal conflict-check system. The result is a starting point for attorney review, not a conflict clearance.

— **OneNote + Copilot, matter setup notebook:** Use Copilot to populate a new matter notebook with the relevant facts extracted from the intake summary, draft initial questions for the client, and create a checklist of documents needed.

— **AI does not:** Decide whether to take the case. Assess the strength of the claim. Verify that the conflict check is complete. Confirm that the prospective client's limitations period has not run. These are lawyer judgments that belong on a lawyer's desk.

> **IMPORTANT**
>
> If your firm uses a practice management system (Clio, MyCase, PracticePanther), the conflict-check function in that system is your primary tool. Copilot's search of Microsoft 365 content supplements it. It does not replace it.
>
> Copilot cannot search outside your Microsoft 365 tenant. If prior matter files for an entity are in a system outside M365, those do not appear in a Copilot conflict search.

Stage 2: Legal Research and Analysis

Identifying the applicable legal framework, researching statutes and case law, and building the legal analysis that drives strategy. This is the stage where Copilot's limitations matter most.

— **Copilot in Word, analyze uploaded documents:** For statutes, regulations, and cases you have downloaded from official sources and saved to your OneDrive or SharePoint, Copilot in Word can

summarize the document, extract key holdings or provisions, and compare two versions. The document stays in your tenant; Copilot works with what you give it.

— **Copilot Chat, research memo outline:** Ask Copilot to help organize your research by generating an outline of the legal issues, the elements of a claim, or the structure of an argument. Use this as a scaffold for your own research, not a substitute for it.

— **Copilot in SharePoint, search prior work product:** Ask Copilot to find prior memos, briefs, or research files on a legal question from your firm's SharePoint library. This surfaces institutional knowledge faster than folder browsing.

— **AI does not:** Replace Westlaw or Lexis. Copilot does not have access to a primary-source legal database. Its training data has a knowledge cutoff. It will hallucinate cases. Every citation it generates must be verified against a primary source before it is used anywhere.

> **CAREER-ENDING TRAP**
>
> Asking Copilot for the current law on a specific legal question and using the answer without verification is not research. It is a guess dressed up as research.
>
> Use Copilot to help structure your research process, organize materials you have verified, and draft summaries of documents you have read. Use Westlaw or Lexis to find the actual law.
>
> Capital Standard v. U.S. Bank is the Florida cautionary tale. It will not be the last one.

Stage 3: Document Drafting

This is where Copilot in Word earns its keep in a law firm. Drafting from templates, revising existing documents, summarizing long agreements, and, for preview users, using the Legal Agent for contract analysis.

— **Copilot in Word, draft from template or outline:** Provide Copilot with a template or an outline and specific facts. Ask it to draft a first-pass engagement letter, demand letter, settlement agreement, or client memo. The output is a starting point for attorney review and revision, not a finished product.

— **Copilot in Word, summarize and extract:** Paste a long contract or agreement into Word. Ask Copilot to identify the key obligations, payment terms, termination triggers, and unusual provisions. This compresses the initial contract review step significantly. Verify the extraction against the original document before you rely on it.

— **Copilot in Word, compare document versions:** Open two versions of a contract. Ask Copilot to identify the material differences. This is faster than tracking changes manually for complex redlines.

— **Legal Agent for Word (preview), contract analysis and redlining:** For preview users with a full Copilot license: the Legal Agent performs playbook-driven contract analysis, flags non-conforming provisions against your firm's standard language, and generates tracked-change redlines. This is purpose-built legal workflow AI, not general-purpose drafting assistance. Verify all outputs against your playbook and the original document.

— **AI does not:** Review its own output for legal accuracy. A Copilot-drafted engagement letter needs attorney review for completeness, jurisdiction-specific requirements, and accuracy. The draft compresses time; it does not replace judgment.

Stage 4: Email and Client Communications

Outlook is where attorneys spend a disproportionate share of their day. Copilot in Outlook compresses the email burden without replacing attorney judgment about what to say.

— **Summarize long threads:** A client emails back and forth for three weeks. Copilot in Outlook can summarize the entire thread, what was asked, what was answered, what is unresolved, in thirty seconds. Particularly useful when returning from time away or picking up someone else's matter.

— **Draft routine correspondence:** Copilot can draft acknowledgment emails, scheduling messages, document requests, and follow-up reminders based on a brief prompt. The attorney reviews and sends. Time savings, our estimate: 5-10 minutes per email, multiplied across a busy docket.

— **Prepare for important emails:** Before writing a significant email to opposing counsel or a difficult client, ask Copilot to summarize the thread, identify the open issues, and suggest what the key points of the response should be. Copilot structures your thinking; you write the email.

— **AI does not:** Write emails that convey legal advice, deliver bad news to a client, or communicate litigation strategy to opposing counsel without mandatory attorney review and revision. The drafts are starting points.

> **IMPORTANT**
>
> Never send a Copilot-generated email without reading it. Copilot does not know the relationship, the tone, or the history in the way a lawyer managing the matter does.
>
> Copilot in Outlook can suggest replies that are technically accurate and completely wrong in context. The attorney is the one who decides what the email says.

Stage 5: Meeting Management and Collaboration

Teams Copilot is one of the most immediately useful Copilot features in a law firm and one of the least ethically complicated, as long as consent and confidentiality protocols are followed.

— **Teams meeting transcription and summary:** Enable Copilot transcription at the start of any meeting where all participants consent. After the meeting, Copilot generates a summary: what was discussed, decisions made, and action items. For deposition prep sessions, client strategy meetings, and team case discussions, this replaces manual note-taking.

— **Post-meeting action items:** Ask Copilot to extract the action items from the meeting summary and assign them by name. This takes less than a minute and produces a documented record of who committed to what.

— **Teams chat summary:** Catch up on a Teams channel you have been away from. Ask Copilot to summarize the last week of messages in a specific channel. Particularly useful for managing-partner oversight of multiple ongoing matters.

— **AI does not, transcription accuracy:** Accurately transcribe everything in noisy or multi-speaker environments without error. Review Copilot meeting summaries for accuracy before they are treated as the official record.

— **AI does not, attendance:** Attend a meeting on your behalf or participate in conversations you were not present for.

IMPORTANT: CONSENT FIRST

Teams Copilot meeting transcription requires that all participants know the meeting is being recorded and summarized by AI. Obtain consent at the start of every recorded meeting, and do not enable transcription on calls where a participant has not been told.

For client calls: confirm in advance that the client consents to AI transcription as part of the meeting. Some clients will not, and their position is reasonable. Have a non-AI alternative for those calls.

Stage 6: Spreadsheet and Financial Analysis

Excel Copilot works on data already in the spreadsheet. For small firms managing settlement scenarios, billing analysis, or case economics, this compresses what used to be multi-step manual work.

— **Settlement scenario analysis:** Build a simple settlement-value model in Excel: judgment value, probability of success, costs through trial, net present value of settlement. Ask Copilot to run variations on the key assumptions and generate a comparison table. The model is yours; Copilot speeds up the scenario-building.

— **Billing and time analysis:** For firms with time entries in Excel or exported from billing software: ask Copilot to identify billing patterns, flag outliers, and summarize time by task category. Useful for lodestar preparation and internal billing reviews.

— **Data from structured documents:** For matters involving financial data, wage-and-hour calculations, damages modeling, estate inventories, paste structured data into Excel and ask Copilot to summarize, calculate, or identify patterns.

— **AI does not:** Verify its own arithmetic reliably. Always check Copilot-generated calculations against manual verification or a separate formula check before using them in a client document or court filing.

Stage 7: Firm Administration and Business Development

Copilot earns its keep beyond client matters too. Internal firm management, training, and business development are lower-stakes environments where Copilot can take on drafting tasks with less oversight burden.

— **PowerPoint, CLE and presentation creation:** Open a Word document, a research memo, a playbook, an outline, and ask Copilot to create a PowerPoint presentation from it. Copilot generates slides with titles, bullet points, and a basic structure. The attorney reviews and refines. Cuts the deck-creation time by 60 to 80 percent for presentations based on written materials.

— **Word, firm policies and procedures:** Ask Copilot to draft an AI use policy, a client intake procedure, a staff handbook section, or a training document based on your inputs. These are internal documents with lower stakes than client-facing work, and they are good places to start building Copilot proficiency.

— **Outlook and Teams, prospect follow-up:** For business development: ask Copilot to summarize a prospect conversation from Teams, draft a follow-up email referencing what was discussed, or identify open items from a new business meeting.

— **AI does not:** Replace the managing partner's judgment about the firm's business. Copilot can draft the client newsletter; it cannot decide which clients to target, what services to emphasize, or how to price the work.

Prompts Library

BEFORE YOU USE THESE PROMPTS

Strip all client identifiers before pasting any client information into any Copilot prompt. Use placeholder names or Tier 2 anonymization for testing.

Verify every citation, statutory reference, and legal standard against a primary source before any use in a client matter.

These prompts are calibrated for Microsoft 365 Copilot on a commercial Business or Enterprise plan. They treat all outputs as first drafts requiring attorney review.

Document AI use in the matter file: what tool, what prompt, what output, who reviewed.

Stage 1: Intake and Matter Setup

PROMPT 01: INTAKE THREAD SUMMARY AND GAP ANALYSIS · Stage 1: Intake & Matter Setup

```
You are a legal assistant helping a small law firm attorney prepare for an initial client consultation. Review the email thread below and produce:
1. A three-to-five sentence summary of the prospective client's situation as described.
2. The key facts already established (bullet list).
3. The critical facts that are missing or unclear and must be clarified in the consultation (bullet list).
4. Any apparent time-sensitive issues, including potential deadlines, that the attorney should be aware of.
Do not give legal advice or assess the merits of any potential claim. Identify what is known and what needs to be established.
[PASTE ANONYMIZED EMAIL THREAD HERE]
```

PROMPT 02: NEW MATTER SETUP SUMMARY · Stage 1: Intake & Matter Setup

```
You are a legal assistant helping a small law firm create an opening matter summary. Using the intake notes below, draft a structured matter-opening summary that includes:
1. Matter type and description (one sentence).
2. Key parties: client, opposing party, counsel (if known), relevant third parties.
3. Core facts as currently understood (bullet list, numbered).
4. Open issues and outstanding information needed.
5. Preliminary timeline based on stated facts.
6. Next steps assigned to: attorney / paralegal / client.
Mark any item where the information is uncertain or incomplete with [VERIFY].
Do not include the client's name or identifying details in this draft.
```

```
[PASTE ANONYMIZED INTAKE NOTES HERE]
```

Stage 2: Legal Research and Analysis

PROMPT 03: CASE LAW SUMMARY AND KEY HOLDING EXTRACTION · Stage 2: Legal Research & Analysis

```
You are a legal research assistant. I have provided a court opinion below.
Produce:
1. A one-paragraph summary of the factual background.
2. The legal question(s) the court addressed.
3. The court's holding(s), stated precisely (bullet list).
4. The key reasoning in two to four sentences.
5. Any significant limitations on the holding (procedural posture, jurisdiction,
fact-specific findings).
6. Flag any language that may be dicta rather than holding.
Do not cite any authority that is not present in the document I have provided. Do
not generate citations to other cases.
[PASTE VERIFIED CASE DOCUMENT HERE]
```

PROMPT 04: STATUTE ANALYSIS AND PLAIN-LANGUAGE SUMMARY · Stage 2: Legal Research & Analysis

```
You are a legal assistant helping me analyze a statute for a client matter. Review
the statutory text below and produce:
1. A plain-language summary of what the statute requires or prohibits (three to
five sentences).
2. Who the statute applies to: scope of coverage.
3. Key defined terms (if definitions are in the text provided).
4. Key obligations, prohibitions, or rights created.
5. Any exceptions or carve-outs.
6. Any elements that appear ambiguous or would require further legal analysis.
Do not state what the statute means beyond what the text itself supports. Flag any
gaps where the text is silent.
[PASTE VERIFIED STATUTORY TEXT FROM OFFICIAL SOURCE HERE]
```

PROMPT 05: MULTI-DOCUMENT RESEARCH MEMO OUTLINE · Stage 2: Legal Research & Analysis

```
You are a legal research assistant helping me organize research on a legal
question. I have provided excerpts from verified sources below. Based only on the
materials I have provided:
1. State the legal question.
2. Identify the rule or standard that applies.
3. Outline the key authorities and what each establishes (one to two sentences per
authority, with citation to the source I provided).
```

```
4. Identify gaps in the research, what additional sources or analysis are needed.
5. Draft a one-page issue-rule-analysis structure I can use as a research memo outline.
Do not generate citations to any authority not present in the materials I have provided. If you do not have enough information to address a point, say so.
[PASTE VERIFIED RESEARCH MATERIALS HERE, WITH CITATIONS TO THEIR SOURCES]
```

Stage 3: Document Drafting

PROMPT 06: FIRST-DRAFT CORRESPONDENCE FROM KEY FACTS · Stage 3: Document Drafting

```
You are a legal writing assistant for a small law firm. Using the facts and purpose described below, draft a first-pass [letter / email / memo] that:
1. Opens by stating the purpose clearly.
2. Sets out the relevant facts or background accurately.
3. States the key points or requests.
4. Closes with a clear next step or deadline.
Write in a direct, professional tone. Do not use legal jargon that a non-lawyer would not understand where plain language will do. Flag any item in the draft where you have made an assumption that the attorney should verify.
Purpose of the document: [DESCRIBE PURPOSE]
Key facts and points to include: [LIST FACTS AND POINTS]
Recipient: [DESCRIBE RECIPIENT WITHOUT IDENTIFYING DETAILS]
```

PROMPT 07: CONTRACT PROVISION EXTRACTION AND SUMMARY · Stage 3: Document Drafting

```
You are a legal assistant helping me conduct an initial review of a contract. Review the contract below and extract:
1. The parties and their roles.
2. The core obligations of each party (bullet list by party).
3. Payment terms, amounts, and timing.
4. Term and termination provisions, including notice requirements.
5. Indemnification and limitation of liability provisions (quote the key language).
6. Governing law and dispute resolution.
7. Any provision that is unusual, one-sided, or that I should flag for attorney attention.
Do not give legal advice about whether any provision is enforceable or advisable. Identify what is there; flag what is notable.
[PASTE ANONYMIZED CONTRACT TEXT HERE]
```

PROMPT 08: DOCUMENT REDRAFT BASED ON SPECIFIC CHANGES · Stage 3: Document Drafting

```
You are a legal drafting assistant. The original document section is provided
below, followed by the specific changes I need to make. Redraft the section
incorporating those changes. Then provide:
1. A redlined comparison identifying every change you made (old language / new
language).
2. Any place where your changes created an inconsistency with language I did not
ask you to change (flag these for attorney review).
3. Any assumption you made in drafting that the attorney should confirm.
Do not make any change beyond what I have specified without flagging it
explicitly.
Original section: [PASTE ORIGINAL]
Changes to make: [DESCRIBE CHANGES SPECIFICALLY]
```

Stage 4: Email and Client Communications

PROMPT 09: CLIENT UPDATE EMAIL FROM MATTER NOTES · Stage 4: Email & Client Communications

```
You are a legal communications assistant. Using the matter notes below, draft a
client update email that:
1. Opens by acknowledging the time since the last update.
2. Summarizes what has happened in the matter since the last communication
(factual, not evaluative).
3. Identifies the next steps and what, if anything, is needed from the client.
4. States the expected timeline for those next steps.
5. Closes with a clear invitation for questions.
Write in plain language appropriate for a non-lawyer. Do not use the client's real
name. Use [CLIENT]. Flag any place where you have had to make an assumption about
tone or content that the attorney should confirm.
Matter notes: [PASTE ANONYMIZED NOTES HERE]
```

PROMPT 10: RESPONSIVE EMAIL OUTLINE FOR COMPLEX CORRESPONDENCE · Stage 4: Email & Client Communications

```
You are a legal communications assistant. Review the email below and produce:
1. A one-paragraph summary of what the sender is asking or asserting.
2. The three to five key points that a response should address.
3. A suggested outline for the response (not the response itself).
4. Any factual assertions in the email that should be confirmed or corrected
before the attorney responds.
5. Any time-sensitive elements in the email (deadlines, requests for immediate
action).
Do not draft the full response. Provide the structure and the issues so the
attorney can draft with full context.
```

```
[PASTE EMAIL TO BE ANALYZED]
```

Stage 5: Meeting Management

PROMPT 11: MEETING SUMMARY AND ACTION ITEM EXTRACTION · Stage 5: Meeting Management

```
You are a meeting assistant. Review the meeting transcript or notes below and produce:
1. A two-to-three sentence summary of the meeting's purpose and outcome.
2. Key discussion points and decisions made (bullet list).
3. Action items, formatted as: WHO will do WHAT by WHEN.
4. Open questions or issues that were raised but not resolved.
5. Any follow-up meetings or calls discussed.
Flag any action item where the assignment or deadline was unclear in the transcript. Do not include identifying client information in the summary.
[PASTE ANONYMIZED MEETING TRANSCRIPT OR NOTES HERE]
```

PROMPT 12: DEPOSITION PREPARATION SESSION SUMMARY · Stage 5: Meeting Management

```
You are a litigation support assistant. Review the deposition preparation session notes or transcript below and produce:
1. The witness and the matter context (without client identifying details).
2. Key themes and topics covered in preparation.
3. Areas identified where the witness needs additional preparation.
4. Topics or anticipated questions the witness found difficult.
5. Action items before the deposition: documents to review, areas for additional preparation, logistics.
Do not include legal strategy or privileged communications in the written summary. Flag any item where the transcript was unclear or where an assumption was made.
[PASTE ANONYMIZED PREP SESSION NOTES OR TRANSCRIPT HERE]
```

Stage 6: Data and Financial Analysis

PROMPT 13: SETTLEMENT SCENARIO ANALYSIS FROM CASE DATA · Stage 6: Data & Financial Analysis

```
You are a financial analysis assistant working on a legal matter. Using the data below, build a settlement scenario comparison that shows:
1. Three scenarios: conservative, moderate, and aggressive case valuation.
2. For each scenario: estimated damages range, probability weighting, and expected value.
3. Estimated litigation costs to trial and cost-benefit comparison against settlement.
4. Net expected value after estimated attorney fees and costs for each scenario.
```

```
5. A one-paragraph plain-language summary of what the numbers suggest.
Flag any assumption you have made that changes the analysis materially if adjusted. Do not give a recommendation about whether to settle.
Case data: [PASTE ANONYMIZED DATA HERE]
```

Stage 7: Firm Administration

PROMPT 14: CLE PRESENTATION OUTLINE FROM WRITTEN MATERIALS · Stage 7: Firm Administration

```
You are a presentation design assistant. Review the written materials below and produce an 11-slide presentation outline for a 60-minute CLE program. For each slide provide:
1. Slide title.
2. Three to five bullet points of content for that slide.
3. One discussion question or audience interaction point per section.
The program should follow this structure: Opening / Problem Statement / Legal Framework / Practical Application (three slides) / Failure Modes / Best Practices / Case Study / Q&A and Close. Adapt the content from the materials I have provided. Do not invent content not present in the source materials.
[PASTE WRITTEN MATERIALS HERE]
```

PROMPT 15: AI USE POLICY FIRST DRAFT · Stage 7: Firm Administration

```
You are a policy drafting assistant for a small law firm. Using the parameters below, draft a first-pass AI Use Policy for the firm that includes:
1. Purpose and scope.
2. Definitions (AI tool, approved tool, client information, sensitive data).
3. Approved uses by tool category.
4. Prohibited uses.
5. Confidentiality and data handling requirements.
6. Supervision and verification requirements.
7. Court filing requirements.
8. Training requirements.
9. Incident response procedure.
10. Policy review schedule (annual minimum).
Adapt the policy to the firm parameters below. Flag any item where the attorney should consult state bar guidance before finalizing.
Firm parameters: [DESCRIBE SIZE, PRACTICE AREAS, TOOLS IN USE]
```

Appendix A: Sample AI Governance Policy

Adapt this policy to your firm's size, practice areas, and current tool stack. Have it reviewed by a licensed attorney before adoption.

Purpose

This policy governs the use of artificial intelligence tools, including Microsoft 365 Copilot and any other AI-assisted applications, by [FIRM NAME] attorneys, paralegals, and staff. Its purpose is to enable productive AI use while maintaining compliance with applicable rules of professional conduct, protecting client confidentiality, and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of AI-assisted work product.

General Principles

— AI tools assist lawyers. They do not replace lawyer judgment, review, or responsibility.

— Every AI-generated output used in a client matter requires attorney review before use.

— Client confidentiality applies to AI use. The same standards that govern who sees a file govern what information goes into an AI prompt.

— AI efficiency does not inflate time. If AI compresses work that used to take four hours into one hour, the bill reflects one hour.

Definitions

— **Approved AI Tool:** A tool that meets all five criteria in Appendix D of this policy and has been authorized by the AI Policy Supervisor.

— **Client Information:** Any information relating to the representation of a client, including identifying details, matter facts, correspondence, and documents.

— **Sensitive Data (Tier 4):** Medical records, financial account numbers, Social Security numbers, personnel records, sealed documents, and any other highly sensitive client or matter information.

Permitted Uses

— Drafting and revising documents using Microsoft 365 Copilot in Word, with attorney review before any use.

— Summarizing email threads and drafting routine correspondence in Outlook Copilot, with attorney review before sending.

— Generating meeting summaries and action items using Teams Copilot, with participant consent and attorney review.

— Analyzing data and modeling scenarios in Excel Copilot, with attorney verification of calculations.

— Supporting legal research organization and document analysis using verified, attorney-provided materials.

— Drafting firm administrative and business development content.

Prohibited Uses

— Pasting client-identifying information or Tier 4 sensitive data into any consumer-tier AI tool or any tool not on the approved list.

— Using AI-generated case citations, statutory references, or quotations in any filing, memo, or client communication without independent verification against a primary legal source.

— Billing a client for time that was not actually spent on the matter, regardless of what the work used to take without AI assistance.

— Using personal Microsoft accounts (outlook.com, hotmail.com) for client matters or Copilot queries involving client information.

— Enabling Copilot or AI features in any Microsoft 365 application before the firm's SharePoint permission audit has been completed and documented.

— Delegating AI use to staff without a supervision protocol in place.

Confidentiality and Data Handling

Microsoft 365 Copilot on the firm's commercial Business or Enterprise plan operates under Microsoft's Data Processing Agreement. Client data is processed within Microsoft's 365 service boundary and is not used to train Microsoft's foundation AI models. Copilot only surfaces organizational data the user already has permission to access. This protection does not extend to personal Microsoft accounts or to consumer-tier tools.

Before any Copilot deployment, the AI Policy Supervisor must complete the SharePoint Advanced Management oversharing audit and implement appropriate sensitivity labels for client matter libraries. The audit results must be documented and retained.

Court and Tribunal Filings

Any filing in a Florida state court must comply with Rule 2.515(d)(2) / SC2026-0673 (effective June 15, 2026). The signing attorney represents that all cited legal authorities exist and are accurately cited. AI-generated research must be verified against a primary source before any citation is included in a state court filing.

For federal court filings, check the assigned judge's current standing orders. No uniform AI rule exists across the Northern, Middle, or Southern Districts of Florida as of June 2026. When in doubt, verify and disclose.

Incident Response

If an AI tool produces output that was or may have been used in a client matter in a way that violated this policy, including a hallucinated citation that reached a court or a confidentiality breach, the matter is escalated immediately to the AI Policy Supervisor and the managing partner. The firm assesses whether bar notification, client notification, or corrective action is required.

Acknowledgment

Each attorney, paralegal, and staff member who uses AI tools on firm matters must sign an acknowledgment that they have read, understood, and agree to comply with this policy. The acknowledgment is retained in the firm's human resources file.

Appendix B: Client AI Disclosure Statement

This language is appropriate for inclusion in your engagement letter. Adapt to your firm's practice and the specific tools you use.

SUGGESTED ENGAGEMENT LETTER LANGUAGE

Artificial Intelligence Tools. This firm uses AI-assisted software tools, including Microsoft 365 Copilot, to assist with certain tasks such as drafting documents, summarizing correspondence, organizing research materials, and managing meeting notes. All AI-generated work product is reviewed by a licensed attorney before use.

Your information is handled in accordance with our confidentiality obligations under the applicable Rules of Professional Conduct. Microsoft 365 Copilot, the AI tool we use, operates within our firm's Microsoft 365 environment under a Data Processing Agreement that prevents your information from being used to train AI models or accessed by Microsoft for purposes other than delivering the service.

If you have questions about how AI tools are used in your matter, or if you prefer that we not use AI tools on your matter, please let us know.

This disclosure does not modify any other term of our engagement.

Implementation notes:

— Review this language with a licensed attorney before adding it to your engagement letter.

— If your firm uses AI tools other than Microsoft 365 Copilot, the disclosure should identify those tools or describe the category of tools used.

— If a client affirmatively opts out of AI use on their matter, document that election and follow it.

Appendix C: Court and Filing AI Disclosure and Certification

Microsoft 365 Copilot may be used to assist with research organization, drafting, and analysis for court filings. Before using any AI-assisted output in a court filing, the signing attorney must satisfy the applicable court requirement.

FLORIDA STATE COURT CERTIFICATION (SC2026-0673)

Rule 2.515(d)(2), effective June 15, 2026, requires that the signing attorney represent that all cited legal authorities exist and are accurately cited.

This is a citation-verification certification, not a general AI-use disclosure requirement.

Verify every case citation, statutory reference, and quotation against a primary source before signing any Florida state court filing.

Implementation: your firm's verification log should document who verified what authority, against which source, and when.

FEDERAL COURT (CHECK ASSIGNED JUDGE)

Federal courts in the Northern, Middle, and Southern Districts of Florida do not have a uniform district-wide AI rule as of June 2026.

Individual judges have standing orders that vary, some require AI disclosure, some require certification, some are silent.

Check the assigned judge's current procedures at flnd.uscourts.gov, flmd.uscourts.gov, or flsd.uscourts.gov before every federal filing.

When in doubt, disclose. A voluntary disclosure is always safer than an omission discovered later.

Appendix D: Vendor Evaluation Worksheet: Microsoft 365 Copilot and AI Add-Ons

Use this worksheet to evaluate Microsoft 365 Copilot and any additional AI tools or add-ons under consideration.

Evaluation Criterion	Yes / No / Partial	Notes
Contractual no-training-on-data clause		Microsoft commercial DPA: yes. Verify for any third-party add-on.
Data is processed within the Microsoft 365 service boundary		Microsoft 365 commercial: yes. Verify for any connector or integration.
Data Processing Agreement available and signed		Microsoft commercial: included. Obtain and retain a copy.
Deletion on demand / data portability		Verify Microsoft 365 data governance settings.
Breach notification commitment		Microsoft DPA: yes. Verify SLA terms.
Sensitivity label and permission controls available		Core Microsoft Purview and SAM features included with Copilot license; confirm specific feature requirements at learn.microsoft.com.
No personal account required, firm-provisioned login only		Confirm all attorneys use commercial accounts.
SharePoint permission audit completed pre-deployment		Required before any Copilot activation.
Output verification protocol in place for citations		Required by SC2026-0673 for state filings.
Staff training completed before live use		Document by name and date.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS FOR ANY AI TOOL ADD-ON

1. Where does the data go, inside the Microsoft 365 tenant or outside it?
2. Does the add-on have its own Data Processing Agreement, or does it rely on Microsoft's?
3. Does the add-on require attorney permission review before it can access SharePoint or other firm content?
4. Is the add-on approved by the AI Policy Supervisor before any attorney uses it on a client matter?

Appendix E: 90-Day Implementation Roadmap

This roadmap assumes the firm has an active eligible Microsoft 365 Business plan (Business Basic, Standard, or Premium) and is starting from zero Copilot deployment. Adjust the timeline to your firm's size and pace.

Days 1–30: Foundation

— **Designate an AI Policy Supervisor:** One attorney who owns the policy, the audit, and the training process.

— **Run the SharePoint permission audit:** Use SharePoint Advanced Management reports to identify overshared sites, broad permission assignments, and legacy sharing links. Document the results.

— **Remediate permissions:** Close the most significant oversharing issues identified in the audit. Apply Microsoft Purview sensitivity labels to active client matter libraries.

— **Confirm all attorneys are using commercial accounts:** Identify any personal-account usage and migrate it to the firm's commercial tenant.

— **Obtain Copilot licenses for a pilot group:** Start with two to three attorneys who will drive the initial use cases. Do not deploy firm-wide until the pilot is evaluated.

— **Complete CLE on AI in legal practice:** Firm policy should require each pilot attorney to complete AI-focused training before using Copilot on client matters; a bar-approved AI CLE satisfies Florida's technology-credit requirement if the program is approved for that credit.

Days 31–60: Pilot and Proficiency

— **Enable Copilot for the pilot group with restricted search scope:** Limit Copilot's SharePoint search to designated matter libraries during the pilot.

— **Run the verification protocol:** Establish the firm's citation-verification log and require its use for every Copilot-generated citation, even in internal documents.

— **Begin using Copilot in Outlook and Teams:** These are lower-risk, high-return applications. Build comfort and proficiency before moving to document drafting.

— **Evaluate pilot results:** At Day 60: what worked, what did not, any unexpected permission issues, attorney feedback on usefulness and trust.

— **Draft the AI Use Policy:** Use the Appendix A template and the prompt in Stage 7 of the Prompts Library to produce a first draft. Have it reviewed by a licensed attorney.

Days 61–90: Expand and Optimize

— **Expand Copilot to the full firm:** Based on pilot results and with the policy in place, extend licenses to all attorneys and trained paralegals.

— **Document drafting rollout:** Train attorneys on Copilot in Word and the Prompts Library. Reinforce the verification requirement for any legal content.

— **Check Legal Agent for Word availability:** If your firm is US-based on Windows with a full Copilot license, determine whether the Legal Agent for Word preview is available and assess its fit for contract-heavy workflows.

— **Schedule the annual review:** Set the AI Policy Supervisor's annual review date for the policy, the tool list, and the training requirements.

— **Update SharePoint audit:** Permissions drift. Schedule a quarterly check-in on the oversharing report to catch new issues before they become Copilot problems.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE AT DAY 90

Every attorney in the firm uses Copilot in at least two Microsoft 365 applications on client matters, with a verified citation log.

The SharePoint permission audit is documented and the most significant oversharing issues are resolved.

Every attorney has completed a CLE on AI in legal practice.

The AI Use Policy is signed by all attorneys and staff, reviewed by outside counsel, and stored in the firm's records.

The AI Policy Supervisor has a calendar reminder for the annual review.

Sources and Ethics Anchors

— Florida Bar Ethics Opinion 24-1, Lawyers' Use of Generative AI (January 19, 2024): https://www.floridabar.org/etopinions/opinion-24-1/

— ABA Formal Opinion 512, Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools (July 29, 2024): https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/professional_responsibility/aba-formal-opinion-512.pdf

— In re Amendments to Rules Regulating The Florida Bar – Chapter 4, 393 So. 3d 137 (Fla. 2024) (SC2024-0032, decided August 29, 2024, effective October 28, 2024): amending the Comments to Rules 4-1.1, 4-1.6, 4-5.1, and 4-5.3 to address generative artificial intelligence

— Florida Supreme Court Opinion SC2026-0673 (May 28, 2026, eff. June 15, 2026): amending Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.515(d)(2). Comments were accepted through August 11, 2026

— In re Representations by Signers of Filings, No. AOSC26-12 (Fla. May 28, 2026): preempting circuit court AI disclosure and certification orders

— Capital Standard, LLC v. U.S. Bank National Association, No. 2D2024-1392, 2026 WL 2450571 (Fla. 2d DCA Aug. 21, 2026): referral of counsel to The Florida Bar after 46 fabricated or unsupported citations appeared across two briefs

— Rules Regulating The Florida Bar: 4-1.1, 4-1.4, 4-1.5, 4-1.6, 4-1.18, 4-3.3, 4-5.1, 4-5.3, 4-5.5, and 6-10.3

— Microsoft 365 Copilot plans and pricing: https://www.microsoft.com/microsoft-365-copilot/pricing

— Microsoft Learn, Get ready for Microsoft 365 Copilot with SharePoint Advanced Management: https://learn.microsoft.com/sharepoint/get-ready-copilot-sharepoint-advanced-management

— Microsoft Purview sensitivity label licensing requirements: https://learn.microsoft.com/purview/sensitivity-labels. Verify plan-level entitlement before relying on any licensing statement in this playbook

About Actionable AI

Greg Yates is a former Big Law corporate equity partner at Steptoe (NYC Managing Partner) and Seyfarth Shaw and the founder of Actionable AI, a solo AI consulting practice based in Daytona Beach, Florida. He works exclusively with small law firms, solos and firms with fewer than 25 lawyers, helping them evaluate, adopt, and implement practical AI tools they can actually use.

Greg's approach is peer-to-peer: he has practiced law, he understands the business of running a small firm, and he does not condescend to experienced attorneys about technology. The goal of every engagement is a specific, implementable recommendation, not a technology presentation.

What We Do

— **AI Readiness Assessments:** A structured conversation about your current tool stack, workflow, pain points, and risk tolerance, followed by a written findings report with specific recommendations. Flat fee.

— **Implementation and Training:** Hands-on deployment of the tools that make sense for your firm, with training calibrated for non-technical attorneys and staff.

— **Governance Policy Development:** An AI Use Policy and governance framework built for your firm's size, practice areas, and tool stack, not a generic template.

— **Workshop Programs:** Half-day and full-day workshops for law firm teams on AI adoption, Copilot deployment, ethics compliance, and practical prompt use.

Who This Playbook Is For

This playbook was written for the solo practitioner and the small firm that is already on Microsoft 365 and wants to know whether Copilot is worth deploying, and how to do it without creating more problems than it solves. If you have already deployed Copilot and are looking to tighten your governance and expand your use cases, the workflow stages and the prompts library are where to start.

READY TO DEPLOY COPILOT? LET'S TALK FIRST.

Book a free 15-minute assessment call to discuss (https://actionableai.s.gy/9Ei2uw):

Which Microsoft 365 plan your firm is on and whether the Copilot add-on is already included or needs to be purchased.

Whether your SharePoint permissions are ready for Copilot or need an audit first.

Which two or three workflow stages to start with for your specific practice mix.

How to build a governance policy your attorneys and staff will actually follow.

What the Legal Agent for Word preview means for contract-heavy practices.

No pitch. No deck. No obligation.

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Actionable AI

Download the free Florida AI Starter Playbook.

Eight practical resources for managing partners and firm administrators: a readiness checklist, five pilot workflows, a tool-approval scorecard, a lawyer verification checklist, and a 90-day plan. It is free, and the button below downloads it directly.

Scan to download the Starter Playbook

Download the Starter Playbook (PDF)

Direct download: Florida AI Starter Playbook (PDF)

Want a second set of eyes on which workflow to pick?

I take 15-minute calls with managing partners and administrators. I will tell you whether there is a fit. No deck.

Book a 15-minute introductory call

Book a 15-minute introductory call