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Thomson Reuters Brings Amazon Alexa to Timekeeping

"Alexa, make sure I'm actually documenting all my billable hours."

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Most iterations of the ["robot lawyer"](#) are housed inside a computer, performing some sort of automated task. [Thomson Reuters](#) tossed a slightly more anthropomorphic robot feature into the mix, launching a voice-enabled app to sync with its timekeeping software Workspace.

The Workspace Assistant, as the company has dubbed the product, is available through [Amazon's Alexa](#) system, meaning that users with an Alexa-enabled device can theoretically do their time tracking the way that attorneys with legal support staff did in the days before computers—by saying it out loud.

Here's a look at the new product:

What you'll need: Using the Workspace Assistant requires two things: being a Thomson Reuters Workspace and Elite 3E system user, and owning an Amazon Echo or other Alexa-enabled device.

What it does: To use the voice-activated timekeeper, users have to download the [Elite Workspace "skill,"](#) Alexa's version of "apps," from the Amazon Alexa store (it's free and easily found through a quick Amazon search). The app can then be synced to the Workspace software, enabling users to track their timekeeping by saying things like "Alexa, ask Workspace to create time," or "Alexa, ask Workspace how many hours I've recorded this week." The app allows users to add billable hours, calculate and post time to specific client matters, and ask Alexa for overview information.

Why it's trying to do: Timekeeping is one of those burdensome administrative tasks that causes attorneys frustration and headache no matter how it's approached. The Workspace Assistant is banking on the idea that substituting clicking with voice commands will help attorneys keep track of their time with less hassle.

What's the deal with voice tech? Some legal technologists have pointed to voice-enabling technology as one of the next potential game-changers in legal work. Eric Sugden, CTO of

Thomson Reuters Elite, and Mick Atton, Thomson Reuters Legal's chief architect, [previously told Legaltech News](#) that they saw potential for attorneys with voice-enabled "assistants" to connect to cloud-powered systems to do things like calendar scheduling or address book management. Eric Ruud, managing director of the company's Legal Enterprise Solutions, doubled down on this sentiment. "Voice commands are the next step in the evolution of how we interact with technology. We can easily see a future around the corner where there are no more keyboards or touchscreens—all your work can be done simply by speaking," he said.

Amazon's voice-enabled technology has [captured a pretty sizable market share](#), and the number of "skills" (Alexa's version of "apps") available for voice-enabled units has shot up over the last year. It's likely to increase in popularity among consumers over the next couple years, but there aren't yet a whole lot of indications that the same will happen in the legal market.

Cybersecurity concerns: Amazon's voice-enabled technology has been under fire in popular media this year for the company's retention of Alexa's interactions with users and other audio recordings made through its devices.

Because the device is programmed to respond any time a user says the word "Alexa" aloud, the device is [essentially always listening and often recording](#). This premise led Arkansas investigators to [hit Amazon with a search warrant](#) in a murder investigation.

Timekeeping data isn't usually highest on lists of attorneys' most valuable data, but introducing data into Amazon's system does introduce some red flags around third-party data retention and security. Ruud said that the bulk of sensitive data engaged introduced by the Workspace Assistant stays within either the law firm's or Thomson Reuters' Elite ecosystems. "All capture, analysis and use of the entered time and billing data is handled by Elite-hosted functions within the firm's security walls. The Amazon environment is accessed only so that the voice features of the Alexa-enabled device can capture the information and provide it to the Elite systems," he explained.

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