

# Working with A.I.

How Cia® is helping Next plc's legal team.

---

We caught up with Ian Blackwell, Legal & Compliance Director at Next plc. The company, now the UK's largest home and clothing retailer by sales, with just under 500 stores in the UK and Ireland, and around 190 stores through franchise partners in 36 countries around the globe. Its website (a key platform during the COVID-19 pandemic) serves over 8.4 million active customers.

Hundreds of stores and millions of customers means, inevitably, thousands of legal problems to solve—big and small. The result? Ian and his team have a lot to do. Often under tight deadlines. Cia® uses the power of AI to accelerate the review of many of Next's day-to-day contracts and put time back in their diaries.





### What's a typical week for you?

My team deal with a wide variety of matters: anything from small commercial agreements up to multimillion pound software contracts, and pretty much anything and everything in between. Then there's checking clothing designs for IP compliance, managing our trademark portfolio—with hundreds of trademarks in multiple jurisdictions—giving employment law advice, advising on data protection issues... You name it! Wider compliance is also an area where our team's expertise is sought. However, despite all these demands, we're a fairly lean team (three lawyers) so we have to focus on what's truly urgent.

### What made you start looking at AI?

Capacity! There's a significant demand on our time and only so much that the team can do. With lots of our contracts, we're pretty much doing the same thing over and over again, which common sense says should be automated in some way. Cia<sup>®</sup> does just that and means we can put many of our contracts through its smart technology to flag up key risks for our business. It helps us to spot any 'howlers', and saves us a huge amount of time.

### How did Cia<sup>®</sup> help?

Cia<sup>®</sup> has helped tremendously with our team's bandwidth. Pre-Cia<sup>®</sup>, we had to regularly manage expectations and tell the business that we might not be able to look at a contract within their deadline and ask if they were comfortable to incur external legal spend. Cia<sup>®</sup>, is very fast! The report that comes back gives me almost everything I need and, saves the team two to three hours, on average, per contract.

The ability to use Cia<sup>®</sup> to deal with contracts at times of peak demand has been a massive help. Longer term we're also looking to use Cia<sup>®</sup> with our business contacts so they can manage straightforward contracts themselves.

### Was Cia<sup>®</sup> easy to implement?

There was no noticeable "implementation". I send the contracts to Shoosmiths by email in the morning and I get them back in the afternoon, fully marked up.

### What advice would you give to other GCs looking at AI?

I want to apply my experience on the big issues. AI won't necessarily understand everything the business wants or needs or the nuances of a particular deal but it does allow me to take the initial 'grind' out of each job. The time savings and cost efficiencies cannot be ignored.

### Would you recommend Cia<sup>®</sup>?

Yes. Absolutely! If you're looking to save time and get the basics done in a timely and effective manner, leaving you to get on with the complex bits of your job, it does just that—no questions about it. My team try to add value wherever we can. Cia<sup>®</sup> means time is given back to us in the day, so we can do just that. For me, AI like Cia<sup>®</sup> is a 'no brainer'.



Cia<sup>®</sup> takes the 'grind' out of contract reviews. The time and cost savings cannot be ignored."