

People



Charles Zerner

Director of AI Development

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vCard

Charles Zerner is Akerman's Director of AI Development, responsible for building custom AI applications when commercial products cannot meet the needs of the firm's lawyers and clients. A member of the firm's Information Technology team, Charles works directly with attorneys and practice groups to understand their workflows, determine whether commercial AI platforms can address a given need, and develop bespoke applications -- running within Akerman's private cloud and data centers -- when they cannot.

Charles brings a rare combination of experience to the role. A complex commercial litigator with more than 13 years of high-stakes, defense-side experience and more than 25 years working with artificial intelligence, he understands legal problems from the lawyer's perspective, translates them into technology problems, and personally builds the solutions.

Before joining Akerman, Charles was a principal attorney at a Dallas-based law firm, where he designed and built production-scale AI systems for legal practice. These included a document review platform, built on open-source models running entirely within the firm's control, that automated the review of more than 100 million documents in a major intellectual property dispute -- saving the client millions and allowing an otherwise non-viable case to proceed. He also developed agentic AI pipelines for expert report analysis, citation verification, privilege review, and patent prosecution, and built attorney-facing applications used by active case teams.

Charles served as chief legal architect and primary drafter in *Vacker et al. v. ElevenLabs*, the first U.S. generative-AI copyright case to reach a settlement, and the first to ground alleged DMCA violations in the technical realities of AI model training. His litigation practice spanned trade secrets, patent, copyright, antitrust, and unfair competition disputes for clients in the electric vehicle, aviation, pharmaceutical, and software industries.

Education

J.D., Tulane University Law School, *summa cum laude*; Order of the Coif; *Tulane Law Review*, Articles Editor
B.A., Harvard University, With Honors; David McCord Prize for Musical Achievement

Admissions

Bars

Texas
Louisiana

Related Content

Akerman Appoints Charles Zerner as Director of AI Development, Bringing Software Engineering Capability Inside the Firm
September 09, 2026

Charles co-founded a neural-network startup in 2000 and has deployed machine learning in legal practice since 2012. He has taught continuing legal education programs on AI in legal practice since 2017, including ethics programming for the Texas Center for Legal Ethics.

AI Workflow and Tooling Experience

- **AI System Architecture:** Multiagent architectures in linear pipelines, hierarchical delegation (parent/subagent), and peer-to-peer team architectures; prompt engineering, context engineering, working and persistent memory systems for long-running agents; retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) and hybrid retrieval over vector databases (Milvus, pgvector, Chroma, FAISS); version-controlled prompt iteration with structured testing and validation; reasoning trace analysis for failure identification and iterative development; MCP (Model Context Protocol) server development to expose tools and data to agents; developing and integrating tools to access external APIs and data sources (e.g., USPTO, CourtListener, Google Patents, Perplexity, etc.) and email; firsthand understanding of model and harness capabilities, function-calling and tool-use protocols, inference economics, deployment considerations, and data preservation and provenance.
- **Agentic AI Harnesses:** Claude Code (since release), Anthropic Agent SDK; Cursor, OpenAI Codex, LangChain, Llama Index, previously CrewAI, Autogen, Agent Zero.
- **Programming & Infrastructure:** Python, FastAPI, React, SQL (SQLite in production; Postgres-compatible schema design), Docker, GitHub; early experience with LoRA PEFT workflows (LLaMA-Factory; Unsloth).
- **AI Inference:** Anthropic API (Claude), OpenAI API (GPT), Mistral, Google Gemini; open-source model deployment from Hugging Face via llama.cpp, vLLM, and SGLang on local and remote GPU hardware, including parallelized high-throughput batch inference at production scale.
- **AI Security & Data Protection:** Structural data-leakage prevention via sensitivity-tiered inference routing (local, privately provisioned, and zero-data-retention frontier APIs); local-model PII detection and de-identification (e.g., OpenMed privacy-filter) before data leaves firm control; least-privilege tool access through workspace isolation, scoped permissions, and tool-call screening; user authentication, audit logging, and encryption in transit and at rest.
- **Data Visualization & Clustering:** AI-driven document clustering and data visualization via embeddings and dimensionality reduction; deep visualization workflows in eDiscovery platforms (Intella, Relativity).
- **Legal AI & Research Platforms:** Harvey, CoCounsel; beta-tested numerous emerging legal AI tools.

Honors and Distinctions

- Litigation Counsel of America, Associate Fellow
- *Best Lawyers in America*, 2019–2023, Listed in Dallas for Commercial Litigation
- *New Orleans Magazine*, 2016, Named a Best Antitrust Lawyer
- *SuperLawyers Magazine*, 2016-2020, Listed in Texas as a Rising Star

Published Work and Lectures

Charles speaks regularly on machine learning and AI in legal practice. Recent presentations include:

- Ethics To Go Video Series: AI Use in Legal Practice (Texas Center for Legal Ethics, Sept. 2025)
- Convergence AI™ Conference (Dallas): Featured Speaker 2024; AI Roundtable Leader 2025