

Press Release

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

September 9, 2026

Appointment completes a deliberately structured AI leadership team spanning research, development, and governance

Akerman announced today that Charles Zerner has joined the firm as Director of AI Development, a newly created role responsible for building custom AI applications when commercial products cannot meet the firm's needs. Charles joins Akerman's Information Technology team under Chief Information Officer Azfar Shamsi.

A complex commercial litigator with more than 13 years of high-stakes, defense-side experience and more than 25 years working with artificial intelligence, Charles is that rare professional who can understand a legal problem from the lawyer's perspective, translate it into a technology problem, and then personally build the solution. He joins Akerman from Munck Wilson Mandala LLP in Dallas, where he designed and built production-scale AI systems for legal practice, including 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. He also served as chief

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Scott A. Meyers
Azfar Shamsi
Charles Zerner

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legal architect and primary drafter in *Vacker et al. v. ElevenLabs*, the first U.S. generative-AI copyright case to reach a settlement.

“This appointment is another deliberate step in building the premier AI capability among Am Law 100 firms. We are not simply adopting AI tools -- we are enhancing our internal expertise to manage our hybrid strategy: when to buy, when to build, when to combine the two. Charles gives us something very few firms have -- the ability to create our own AI solutions when the market does not offer what our lawyers and clients need,” said Scott Meyers, Chairman and CEO of Akerman.

Charles’ appointment completes an intentionally structured AI leadership team at Akerman. He joins Michael Adler, Director of AI Governance & Data Protection, and Tricia Thomas, Director of AI and Research Services, in a three-part structure that separates evaluating what exists, building what does not, and governing how it is deployed.

“Research identifies what exists; development builds what doesn’t; and governance ensures we deploy it responsibly,” said Azfar Shamsi, Chief Information Officer at Akerman. “Charles is a rare combination: a Harvard-educated litigator who writes production code, tunes open-weight models, and builds applications that run inside our own controlled environment. That skill set allows Akerman to develop purpose-built solutions for problems the commercial market has not yet solved.”

At Akerman, Charles will work directly with attorneys and practice groups to understand their workflows, determine whether commercial AI products such as Harvey, CoCounsel, and Microsoft Copilot can address a given need, and develop bespoke applications, running within Akerman’s private cloud and data centers, when they cannot.

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. He earned his J.D., *summa cum laude*, from Tulane University Law School, where he was Articles Editor of the *Tulane Law Review* and elected to the Order of the Coif, and his B.A. with honors from Harvard University.

About Akerman

Founded in 1920, Akerman is an Am Law 100 firm recognized by Vault among the nation's most prestigious law firms. The firm has more than 700 lawyers and business professionals throughout the United States.