Africa leads the way for Artificial Intelligence in legal practice

**30 March 2023 – Working in the African legal context comes with its challenges, but it is exactly these challenges that have created fertile ground for building one of the world’s most innovative legal-tech platforms: Afriwise. Today, Afriwise is set to leapfrog as a global leader after acquiring leading AI-based legal software developer Pythagoria and unleashing its** **AI on Afriwise’s unmatched database of African legal information.**

## Artificial intelligence you can trust

Unlike any other offering globally, Afriwise has pioneered a model that combines legal-tech, AI and the deep legal intelligence of top African lawyers. Unlike other AI offerings (think ChatGPT), Afriwise can guarantee the integrity of its underlying information.

*“Afriwise’s collaborative ecosystem affirms that the best solutions for Africa come from Africa and how, once again, Africa is leading the way globally, not in spite of but exactly because of its unique challenges and versatile dynamics.”*

*– Afriwise CEO Steven De Backer*

## Africa: the perfect innovation incubator

Any company active in Africa knows all too well how the lack of up-to-date and quality legal information can stymie business. While even basic laws can be difficult to find, there are other distinctive African legal challenges such as unusual concepts, incomplete and incoherent legal frameworks, lack of transparency and, critically, established practices that differ from written laws. In the past, solutions failed to meet needs, with providers not focused on Africa and information patchy, inconsistent, unstructured and not properly updated.

Embracing the African mentality of “every challenge is an opportunity”, Afriwise launched in 2018 by conceiving of an innovative approach to building and maintaining a cross-border legal-intelligence database in Africa.

To secure the integrity of this database, Afriwise teams up with 130+ law firms across the continent and, in an unusual move, shares the benefits with them. This has made Afriwise the largest truly collaborative effort ever undertaken in the legal sphere on the African continent. Today, leading organisations rely on Afriwise to find answers to their day-to-day legal questions for any African country. Having achieved this, the next step was to elevate the Afriwise platform by integrating AI.

## Why Pythagoria?

Pythagoria is an AI-based legal software developer with a deep understanding of the legal world. Having already proven its value in developing cutting-edge AI solutions for global companies and European public entities like the Court of Justice of the European Union, the collaboration with Afriwise is expected to benefit not only companies active in Africa, but the African continent as a whole.

*“The combination of Afriwise, its partnerships with leading African law firms and Pythagoria’s AI will match legal information and legal brains with incredible tech muscle power.”*

 *– Pythagoria founder and MD Pierre-Yves Thomas*

Pythagoria develops software solutions for knowledge management, natural-language processing, semantic analysis, keyword and concept extraction, automatic classification, and information extraction. It applies AI on legal data: a crawling and content-harvesting engine pulls in legal documents of any type, format, language, and size; a text-mining engine extracts the legal concepts and provides analysis and cross-linking; and a semantic search engine suggests queries and evaluates answers.

## Data integrity at its core

Afriwise is already harnessing the power of Pythagoria’s AI by creating solutions to make it easier to manage the increasing complexity of compliance, automate processes and improve efficiency, such as AI-driven regulatory monitoring, real-time legal analysis based on (draft) legislation, case law and lawyers’ input and AI-based APIs for developing super smart applications.

Imagine you can monitor the general concept of “bribe”, across the entire African continent, regardless of the language. Imagine you also have instant access to related guidance on the topic from the leading lawyers in each country, as well as summaries of the laws and the obligations. This is no longer a daydream.

The acquisition will allow Afriwise to offer even more features and build increasingly advanced legal-technology solutions, intertwined with the unique content maintained on its databases. Combining unstructured legal data, AI and analysis from top lawyers makes for a unique offering. The lawyers in Afriwise’s ecosystem know the legal problems in their own countries better than anyone else. Pythagoria’s AI will also be used by Afriwise to build local solutions together with in-country legal experts, which in turn creates a flywheel effect for learnings for the AI.

## AI kept in check by human expertise

As both a legal-tech company and an editor with its own proprietary-information databases, the integrity of the data is guaranteed. Afriwise’s unique way of producing and maintaining legal intelligence in collaboration with law firms offers significant benefits for the use of AI. Afriwise does not need to build in the necessary guardrails that other AI-powered legal-tech companies need to prevent AI “hallucinating” and going off-track. No guardrails are necessary, as Afriwise’s AI benefits from legal information that has been prepared, fact-checked and updated by leading lawyers.

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## About Afriwise

Legal-tech company Afriwise was founded in 2018 with a firm belief that companies doing business in Africa deserve easy access to accurate legal intelligence.

Afriwise enables businesses to break free of the chaos of finding and complying with African laws and regulations. At the heart of Afriwise is top-notch legal information on all areas of business law. Working together with the best African in-country law firms ensures that information is reliable, trustworthy, and up to date.

The platform’s AI-powered user interface makes it easy for legal and compliance teams to find, monitor and understand all the legal requirements their business faces across the continent. Using Afriwise, busy corporate counsel are relieved from tediously gathering and double-checking legal intelligence and have time to spend on those high-value tasks that really make a difference to their business.

Afriwise currently has 30+ team members and is active in 25 African jurisdictions, covering more than 80% of the African economy. Afriwise is trusted by and relied on by top companies such as IBM, CBRE, MTN, ExxonMobil and DHL. Afriwise has repeatedly been awarded the Innovation Award at the Africa Legal Awards and included in Stanford’s Code X and Deloitte’s RegTech universes.

## About Pythagoria

Pythagoria is a provider of AI-enhanced legal software, founded in 2011 by a team of big data scientists and coders. It is the company’s mission to help legal professionals make sense of the vast amount of laws and regulations out there.

Its founder, Pierre-Yves Thomas, has been breaking ground in using artificial intelligence for legal software for over 25 years. The company has developed a unique, open-source legal language model based on BERT, RoBERTa, GPT-2 and GPT-J models. The proprietary Pythagoria software makes it easy to publish, index, parse and interpret legal documents. This way, legal teams can see the forest for the trees and get quickly to the legal information that is relevant to them.

Pythagoria applies artificial intelligence on legal information and combines the force of three engines. A crawling and content harvesting engine pulls in legal documents of any type, language, and size. A text-mining engine extracts legal concepts, summaries and generates cross-links. A semantic search engine suggests queries and evaluates answers. Pythagoria’s language model, uniquely trained for the legal domain, has helped many legal teams and legal publishers.

The Pythagoria team have earned a reputation for delivering cutting-edge AI solutions to private companies and institutional bodies alike. Pythagoria’s clientele spans the globe and includes the United Nation’s OPCW and the Federal Chancellery of Switzerland.

## About Steven De Backer

Steven is the founder and CEO of Afriwise. Having been active in the legal space in Africa for decades, he has first-hand experience of how difficult it is to find trustworthy information on local laws, regulations, and practices — and how this can frustrate plans and significantly increase the cost of doing business in Africa.

Afriwise was born out of Steven’s vision to make legal intelligence accessible for all organisations developing their activities on the African continent. His main goal has always been to help businesses work smarter and more effectively in Africa.

At the heart of Steven’s career is an interest in both the rule of law and technology.

Early on in his career, Steven was part of the team that launched Belgium’s leading online trading platform. After a stint at magic-circle firm Freshfields, he returned to Africa, where he grew up, to practise as a lawyer. He took on high-ranked roles at leading African and international law firms. Steven was at the forefront of establishing and deepening a network of associated firms in Africa. In 2014, Steven founded an innovative interdisciplinary advisory firm.

A seasoned lawyer in his own right, Steven is considered one of the leading multidisciplinary lawyers in Africa by the prestigious research firm Chambers and Partners. Chambers stated that “there’s not much he doesn’t know about sub-Saharan Africa”.

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[Steven’s profile picture](https://8209137.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/8209137/Steven%20De%20Backer-2.jpg)

## About Pierre-Yves Thomas

Pierre-Yves Thomas, founder of Pythagoria and Chief Technology Officer at Afriwise, has been a pioneer in the use of artificial intelligence for legal applications for over 25 years.

Pierre-Yves is driven by his two passions: linguistics and algorithms, which he can combine into natural language processing, and in AI at large.

His first implementation of AI in the legal domain was at the Publications Office of the European Union, where he set up a team of 50 professionals that was capable of modelling and structuring legislative texts at scale.

Ever since, Pierre-Yves has been deploying AI in multilingual legal contexts – first based on statistical models, then on neural models with deep learning, and now on a transformative and generative architecture. Pythagoria’s AI revolutionises how legal researchers monitor, review, and interpret large volumes of legal source documents.

Pierre-Yves wants to make life easier for legal teams by changing the way they conduct research – a mission he shares with Afriwise.

Going forward, Pierre-Yves combines his role at the helm of Pythagoria with the role of Chief Technology Officer at Afriwise.

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[Pierre-Yves’ profile picture](https://8209137.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/8209137/Pierre-Yves%20Thomas.jpg)