Anthropic's AI coding advances set to disrupt publishing, law and ad sectors

Fears rise that San Francisco-based start-up's cost-reducing tools will undermine traditional software development

Financial Times Europe
06 févr. 2026
MELISSA HEIKKILÄ, SUZI RING AND DANIEL THOMAS — LONDON

Anthropic's new AI coding tools have rattled markets this week, amid fears that the start-up is upending traditional software development in ways that will disrupt sectors, from publishing and advertising to law.
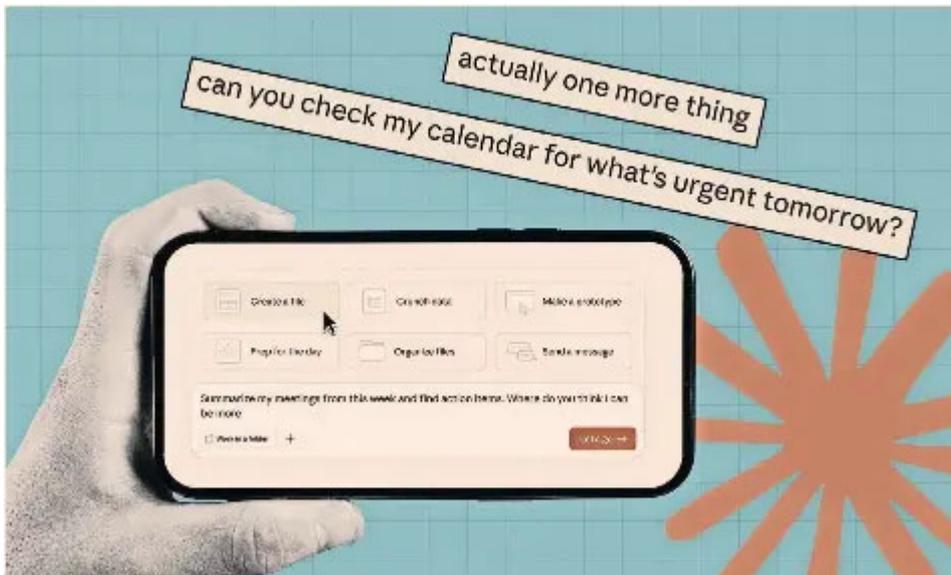
The San Francisco-based group has unveiled tools that allow users to generate, deploy and automate software using generative AI, sharply reducing the technical expertise tradition-ally required to write and maintain code.

Technologists suggest that Anthropic's advances will undermine the economics of software development and squeeze specialist providers of AI tools, such as in legal services. "It was very clear that we will never ever write code by hand again," said Aditya Agarwal, the former chief technology officer at Dropbox. "Something I was very good at is now free and abundant."

In 2025, Anthropic launched Claude Code, which uses large language models to generate lines of computer code. It quickly became the gold standard for AI-generated coding, and reached $1bn in revenue in only six months.

Claude helped to kick-start a "vibe coding" boom, letting users create software quickly. But the tool still required technical skills and experts to review the output. In January, Anthropic launched Cowork, which lets users take advantage of Claude to automate work tasks, such as summarising documents, using AI models without needing technical skills.

Last Friday, Anthropic went further, launching freely available "open source" plug-ins for Cowork. One included a tool for legal services, which lets users do tasks such as automating contract review. The group also rolled out tools tailored for sales, finance, marketing and customer support. And yesterday it unveiled Claude Opus 4.6, which it called its "most capable" model for businesses and knowledge work.

"The simplest way to think about Claude Code is that it is a chatbot that can do stuff," said Guillaume Princen, Anthropic's head of digital native businesses. "What Claude Code was for developers, Cowork is for knowledge workers," he added.

Despite billions of dollars spent by Silicon Valley groups such as OpenAI and Google on rival products, Anthropic has gained a strong lead in AI-assisted coding by pioneering several techniques.

A popular way that AI labs train their models is known as reinforcement learning from human feedback, where humans label whether or not the model's output is desirable.

The process is expensive and laborious. Some expert data labellers are paid thousands of dollars an hour.

Anthropic has pioneered a complementary technique called reinforcement learning from AI feedback. This works by letting the AI model rate and criticise the answers it generates, based on guidelines set by humans. If the model's response does not match its guiding principles, the AI model will correct its response.

While initially designed as a technique to make its AI models safer, the group has also inadvertently found a way to automate the improvement of its models, at a much larger scale. Its AI models, such as Claude 4.5 Opus, also top independent benchmarks that measure coding capabilities. It said about 90 per cent of the code behind Claude was generated using the tool itself, with 70-90 per cent of code across the company now written with the AI.

Unlike competitors such as OpenAI and Google, which are also trying to win over consumers, Anthropic has focused its efforts on enterprise uses such as software development. On Wednesday, the company pledged that it would not run advertising, even as competitors such as OpenAI embrace ads as a way of generating new revenues.

Anthropic's second breakthrough is an open-source tool called the model context protocol (MCP). It works as a bridge between AI models and applications and databases, and lets LLMs process information and take actions in real time in applications such as Slack.

MCP is the technology that allows Anthropic to create tools that organisations can adopt and plug into their computer systems and workflows. It has also made the technology open source, meaning anyone can adapt and use it.

Anthropic's new plug-ins include tools for the legal profession. These offered a much simpler and cheaper way for firms to access cutting-edge technologies, said Nick West, chief strategy officer and AI lead at law firm Mishcon de Reya. "If enterprises are already adopting Claude or are willing to do so . . . it could meaningfully compress pricing against, and reduce demand, for legal AI tools," he said.

Harvey and Legora, rival makers of AI legal tools, said that they used Claude too, but that they did not plan to include Anthropic's plug-in in their offerings as their tools performed better.

Winston Weinberg, Harvey's cofounder and chief executive, said that it had "always been super vocal that we believe our long-term largest competition will be the model providers" rather than other legal tech. Max Junestrand, Legora's CEO, said there remained a big distinction between Anthropic's plugins and its more dedicated platform trained to meet an individual law firm's specific needs.

A Barclays survey of buy-side investors published this week found that ad agencies were more exposed to AI developments, with WPP, Omnicom and Publicis ranked among the top "AI losers". Analysts said this was because sales and marketing departments could develop their own tools using Claude.

AI models still "hallucinate", or fabricate. Experts warned of a "comprehension debt", where junior coders became too reliant on AI tools. AI-generated errors could also have consequences in groups where accuracy is key, such as banking and law.

Mishcon de Reya's West said: "People will be testing to see whether the eyecatching demos turn out to be marketing fluff or evidence of high-quality repeatable outcomes when handling messy real-world contracts at scale."