



The 2025 Legal Marketing Decision-Makers Survey

Executive Summary

In a time of upheaval in the legal industry, major challenges continue to emerge for chief marketing officers.

In early 2025, the Legal Marketing Association and Above the Law set out to provide benchmarking insights CMOs could rely on to guide their decision-making.

We surveyed nearly 100 marketing and business development decision-makers, who shared their insights on AI, law firm management, winning new clients, and a number of other topics.

The questions themselves were developed with input from Above the Law, the Legal Marketing Association, and several CMOs from law firms of varied sizes.

The survey responses indicate the growing importance of the law firm marketing and business development function in numerous areas of the industry.

Strong majorities of respondents at firms of all sizes are involved in firmwide strategic planning.

A majority of our respondents also report budget increases that outpace inflation, while far fewer report budget cuts.

As new technology makes inroads in marketing and business development functions, 70% of our respondents report taking on greater roles in legal tech — a top strategic priority at just about every firm.

The data in this report demonstrates that the marketing and business development roles are integral to the ongoing success of law firms of any size.

We'd like to thank all of our respondents for providing their insights and making this report possible, and we're pleased to share their responses here.

Key Findings

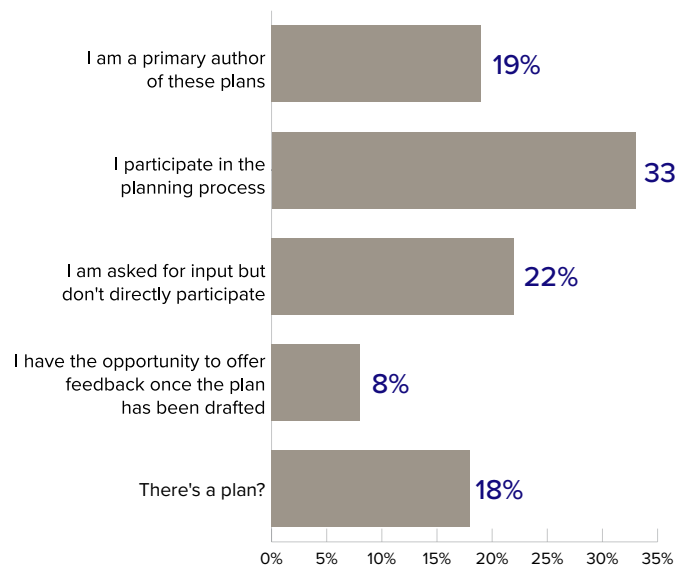
- More than half of the marketing leaders surveyed are directly involved in their firm's strategic planning process, with almost 20% reporting that they are a primary author of these plans.
- Law firm leaders value these contributions, with the majority of our respondents reporting they feel highly valued as strategic thinkers by law firm leaders. (60% scored this a 4 or 5 on a scale from 1 to 5, with the highest ratings concentrated at larger law firms.)
- A majority of respondents say their department's budget has increased in recent years relative to inflation. Respondents at firms with 51-100 attorneys were most likely to report that their budgets had grown.
- Technology has become essential to the marketing function, with 70% of respondents saying they are taking on increasing responsibilities in technology adoption at their firm.
- Most law firms are in the early stages of AI adoption, with just over a third of our respondents reporting regular or widespread use at their organization. All respondents who report wide use of AI are at firms with at least 100 lawyers, while the highest proportion of respondents whose firms have made little to no investment in AI tools are at firms with 50 or fewer attorneys.
- Technology adoption leads the list of law firm strategic priorities, followed by actively building out key practice areas.
- Our respondents told us the most effective ways to attract and retain business include written content development, branding and profile building, in-person speaking engagements, and coaching lawyers on business development, according to our respondents.
- Some of the least effective activities identified by our respondents include directory and award submissions and arranging secondments.

CMOs' STRATEGIC PLANNING

For insight into the workings of law firms, we asked our respondents to share their involvement in firmwide strategic planning.

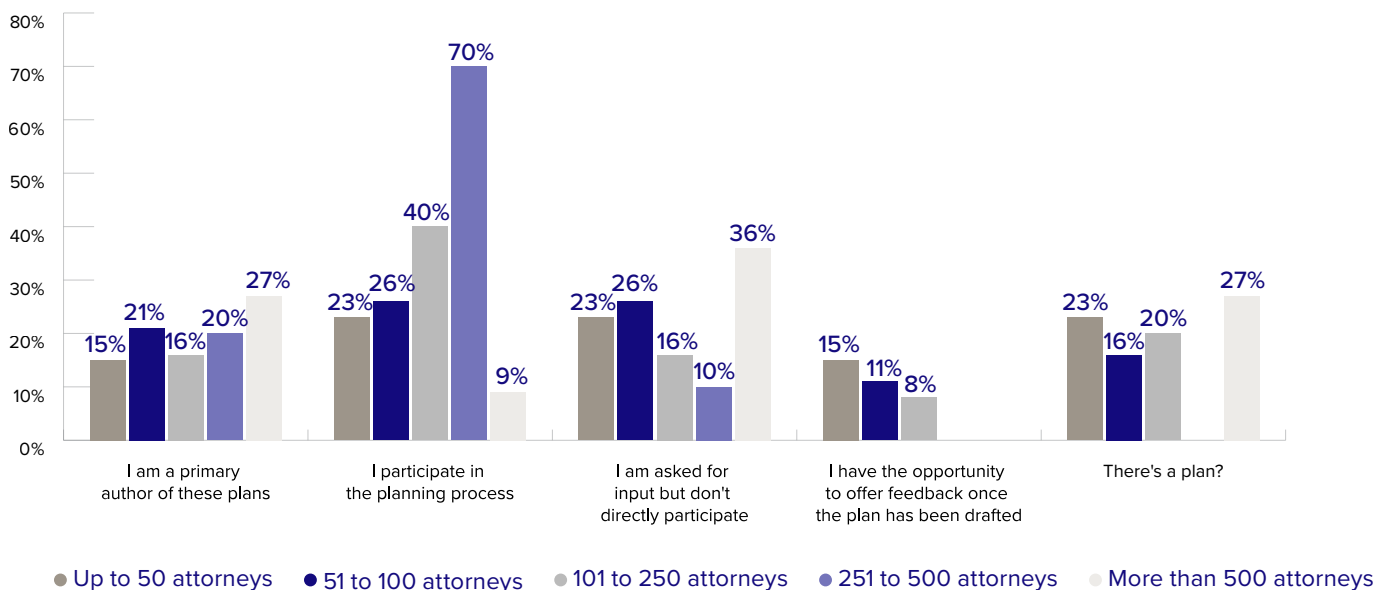
Our results indicate that more than half of our respondents have a seat at the table when it comes to setting the direction of the firm.

How involved are you in the strategic planning process at your firm?



Marketing leaders at small firms are slightly less likely to participate in the planning process than their peers at larger firms.

How involved are you in the strategic planning process at your firm?

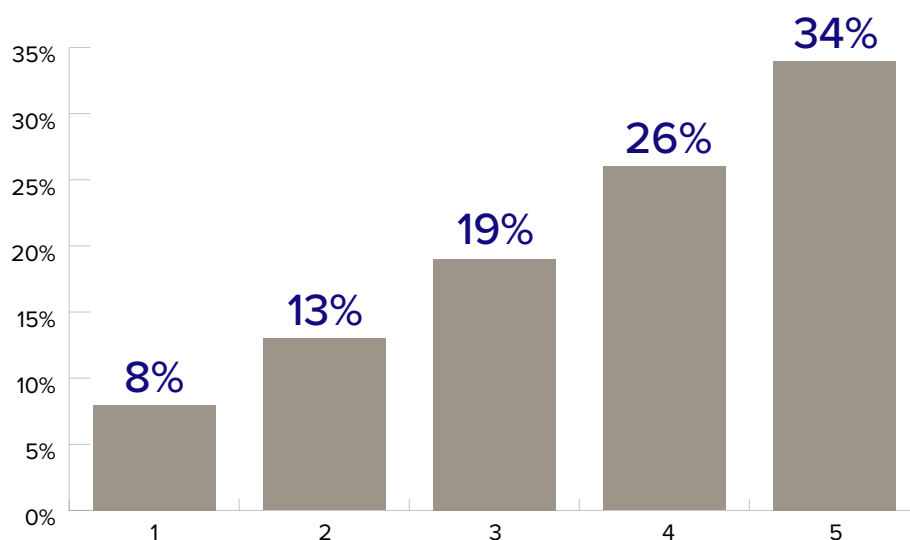


These results are generally in line with how firm leadership perceives the contributions of marketing chiefs and their departments.

Asked to rate leadership's awareness of their value to strategic planning on a 5-point scale, 34% of respondents rated it a 5, indicating that they feel highly valued as strategic thinkers, and another 26% gave the next-highest rating.

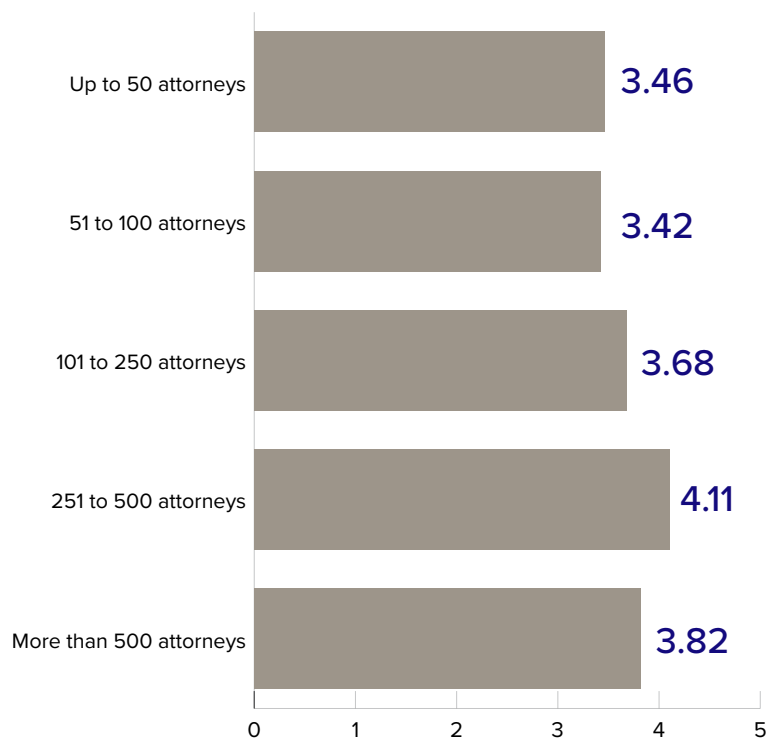
Meanwhile, far fewer respondents rated this a 1 or 2, indicating their role is seen as more narrowly focused on marketing and business development initiatives.

Do you feel your firm's leadership is aware of the value you and your department are contributing?
Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 means you feel highly valued as a strategic thinker and participant in firm decisions, and 1 means that your role is more narrowly focused on marketing and business development initiatives, with limited involvement in broader firm strategy.

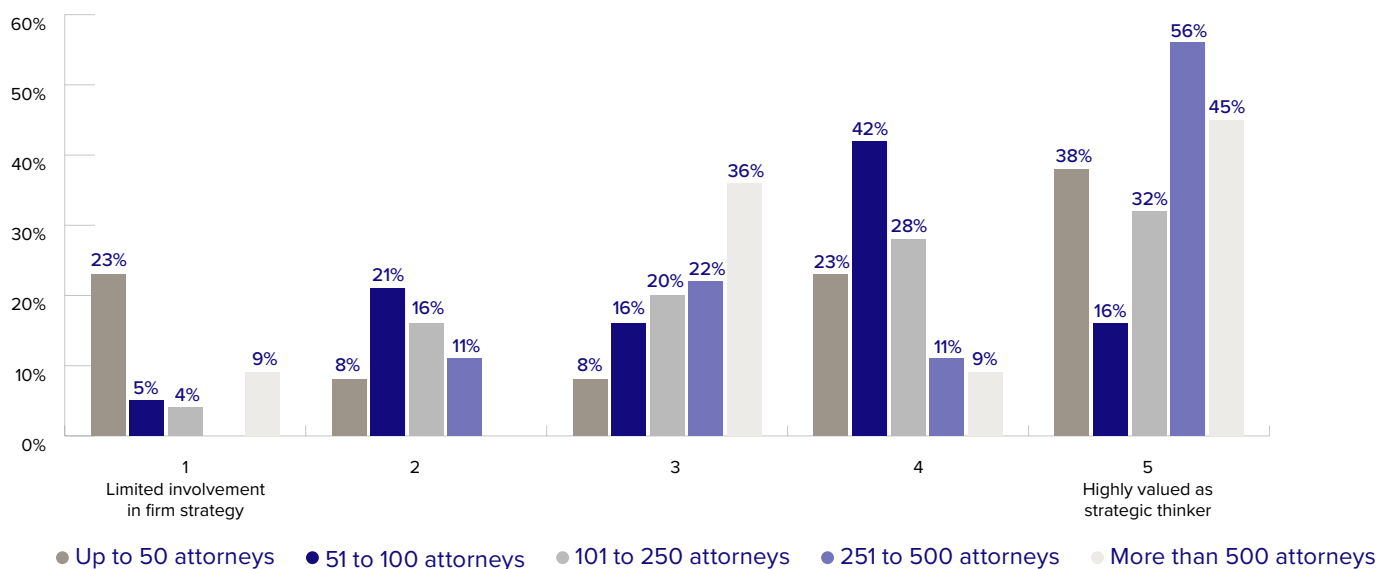


Marketing leaders at larger firms are a little more likely to feel that their strategic contributions are recognized, with the highest ratings from those at firms with 251 to 500 attorneys.

Value of contribution to firm strategy, by firm size



Market leaders' value to strategic planning, by firm size

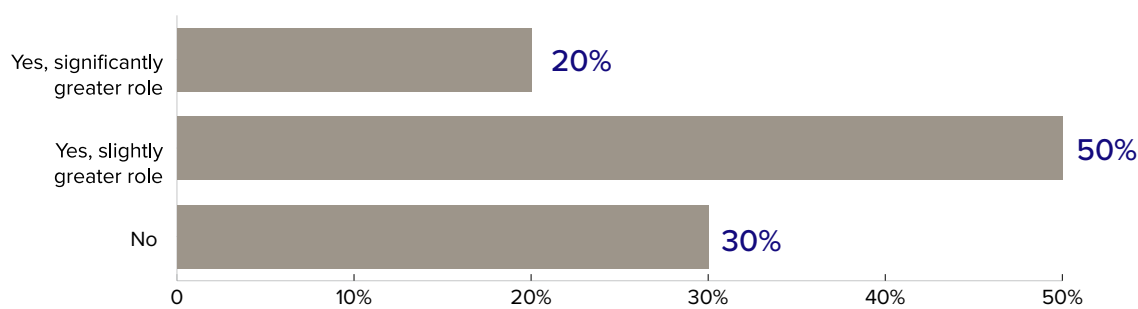


CMOs' TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

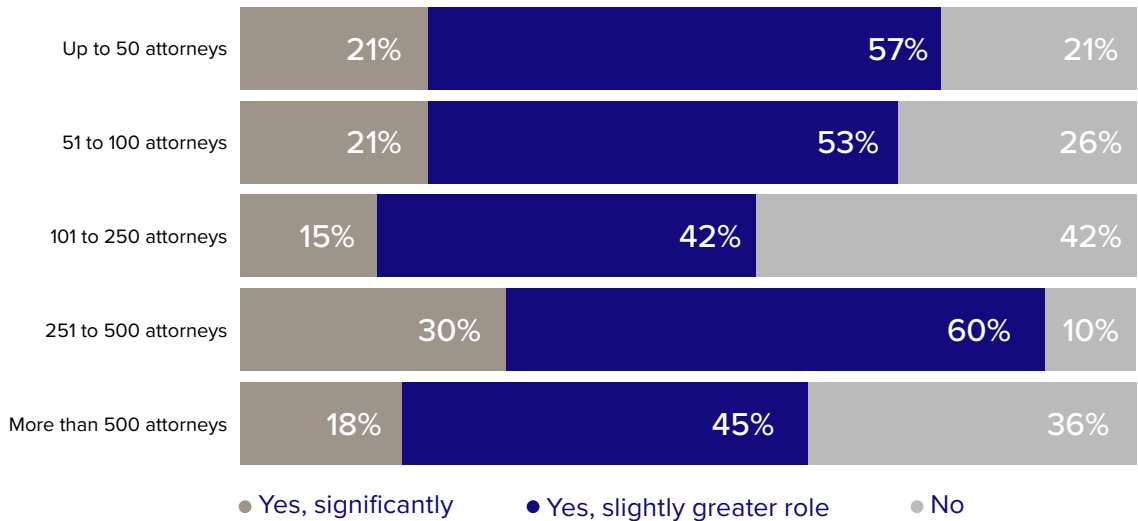
In the age of generative AI, it's hard to overstate the strategic focus on technology adoption in the legal industry.

Among our respondents, a strong majority say their department has taken on a greater role in guiding the firm's use of technology in recent years.

Has your firm's marketing department taken on a greater role in guiding your firm's use of technology, particularly AI, in recent years?



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BRINGING IN THE TECH

A number of respondents noted that their marketing department is often at the “forefront of new technology and innovation that impact the legal industry,” since “they’re able to identify the technologies that will best work to make their firm successful.”

As one marketer explained, their team serves as the “bridge between client needs and firm developments.”

Another marketing leader highlights the importance of technology: “The need for internal business intelligence is enormous for the BD/marketing team, and having access to tech that allows for better self service and greater insights is critical.”

Toward that end, some marketing teams are “involved in the process of scoping and testing new products.”

And while many firms have yet to fully embrace AI technology, the marketing department is often helping lead those efforts.

“We are part of firmwide task forces evaluating how AI should be integrated into our practice,” explains one respondent, “and we use the tools ourselves to make us better and more efficient.”

Another reports, “We were one of the first adopters of the technology in our work and constantly brought it to the forefront for discussion.”

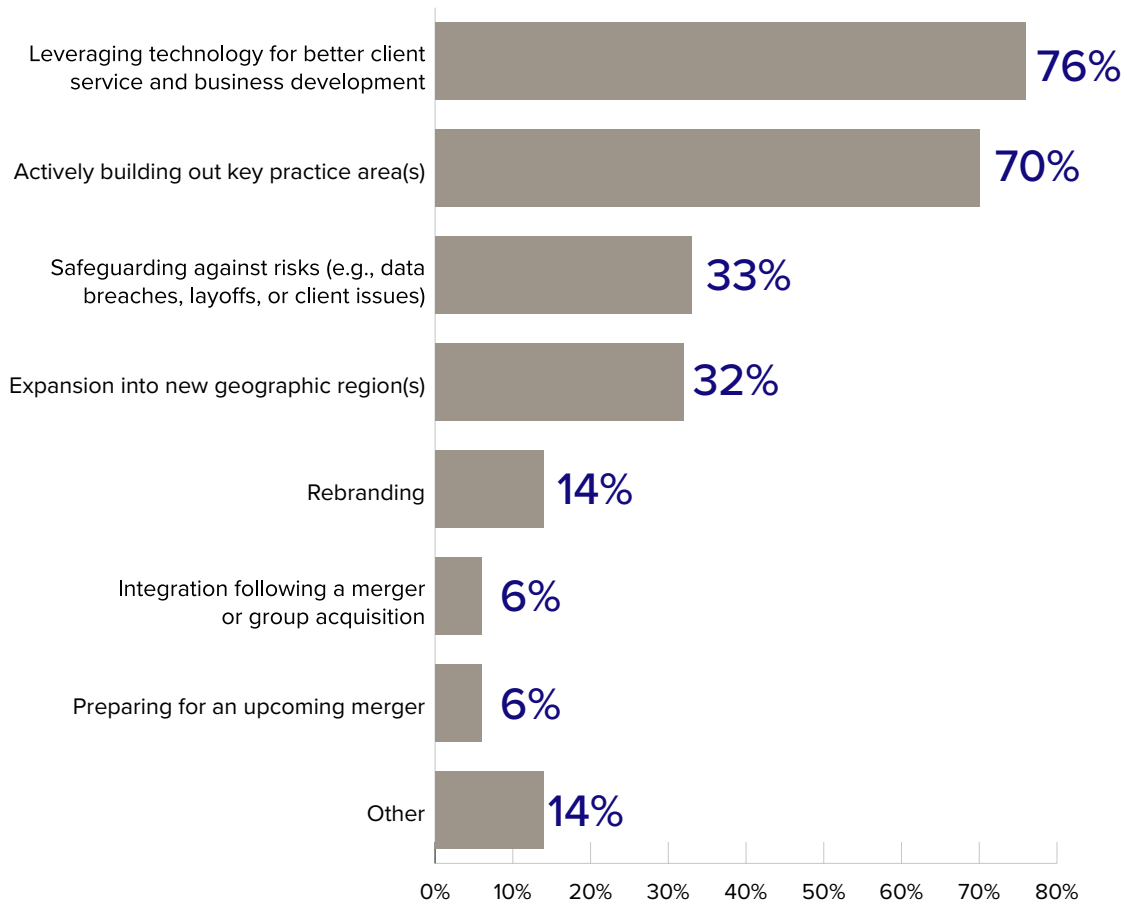
Others share similar perspectives: “We were among the first departments to embrace and utilize AI on a consistent basis”; “Our team was the first to be able to use an AI tool, which is used for content generation”; and “[We are] actively involved in the development of evolving AI policies.”

LAW FIRMS' STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

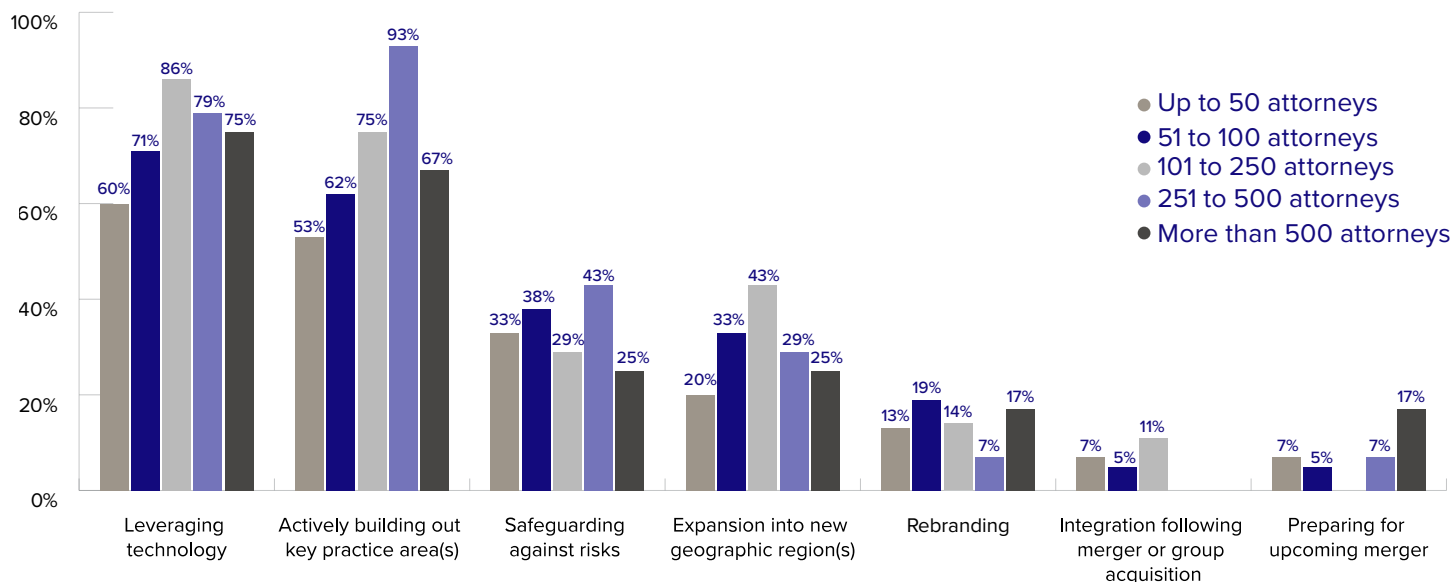
To add further context, we asked marketing leaders to identify the key strategic priorities of their firms, since they often drive the goals of the marketing department.

What we found is that technology is a primary focus for a majority of firms, regardless of size.

Which, if any, of the following are among the firm's key strategic priorities at this time? (select all that apply)



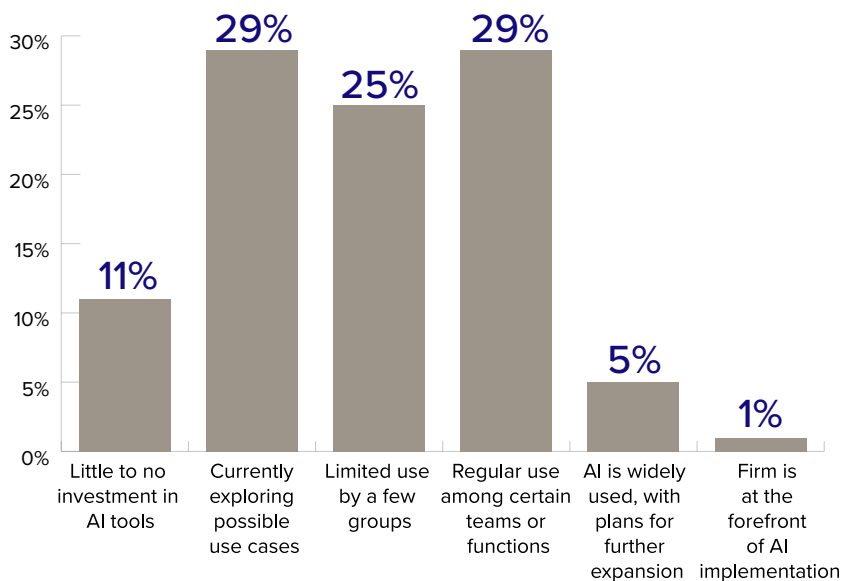
Which, if any, of the following are among the firm's key strategic priorities at this time? (select all that apply)



CMOs' USE OF AI

Additionally, most law firms are in the early stages of AI adoption, with just over a third of our respondents reporting regular or widespread use at their organization.

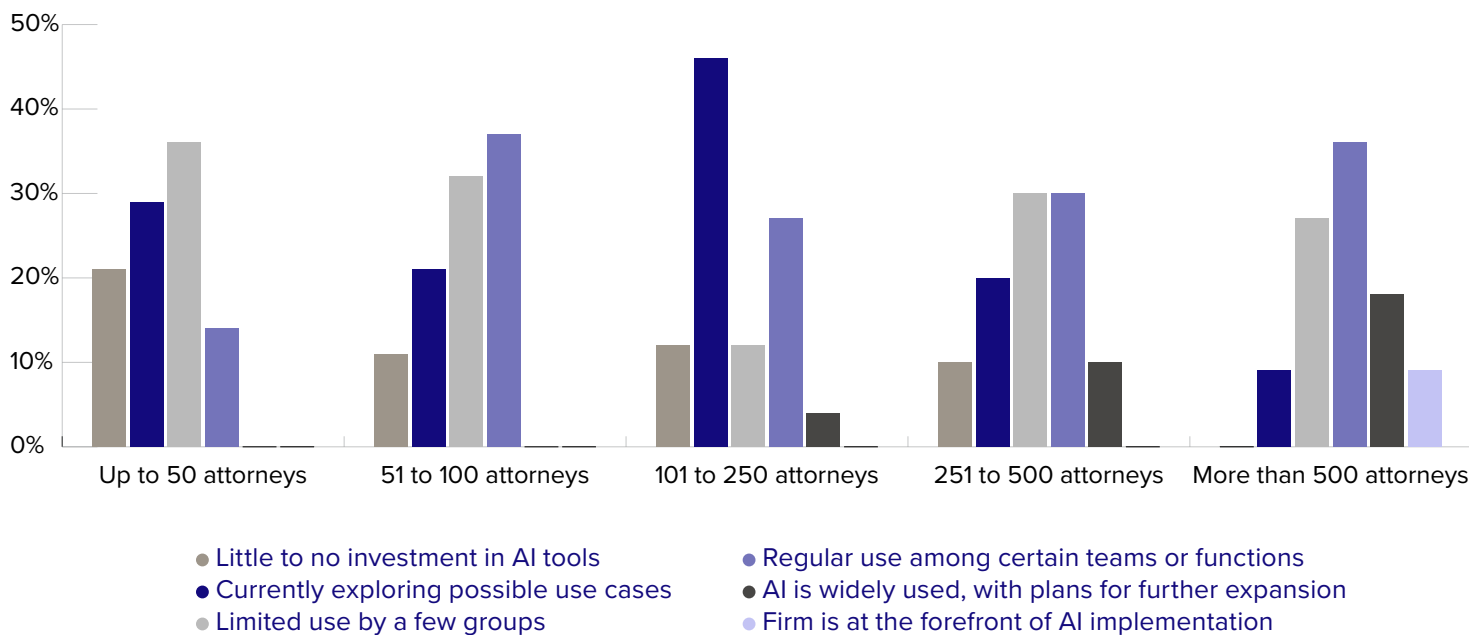
How would you describe your firm's AI adoption level?



Larger firms are more likely to be further along in the AI adoption process.

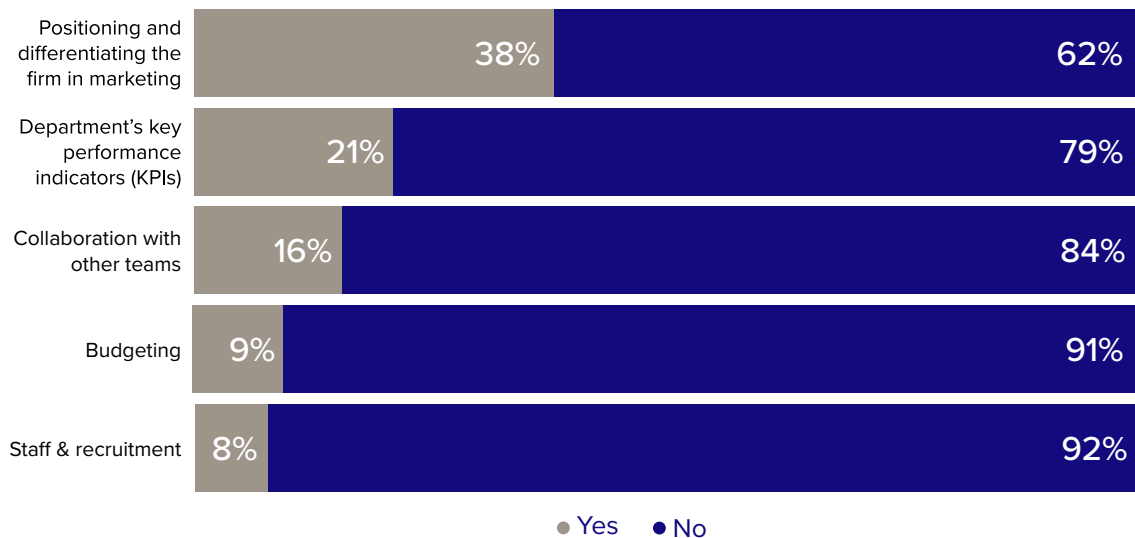
Among the respondents who report that AI is in wide use, all are at firms with at least 100 lawyers, while the highest proportion of respondents whose firms have made little to no investment in AI tools are at firms with 50 or fewer attorneys.

How would you describe your firm's AI adoption level?



Within the marketing department, the area in which AI has made the most inroads is positioning and differentiating the firm.

Has AI adoption affected the following areas of your department?



UTILIZING AI

Some of the ways in which marketers are currently using AI include making initial drafts of website content as well as refining that content, using AI for client pitches and RFP responses, and identifying thought leadership opportunities.

Some marketing teams are also using AI to collect “hard data, helpful metrics, and applicable tracking” for key performance indicators.

Collaboration is another area in which AI comes into play.

Some respondents’ firms have established committees or working groups where marketing professionals collaborate with colleagues on other teams to evaluate AI tools and compare usage.

A few marketers noted ways in which AI has affected their department’s budgeting and staffing as well.

AI tools have been used to rework job descriptions and, according to one respondent, saved expenses by replacing the work of paid vendors and streamlining processes.

Many marketing leaders also say that AI tools have made marketing teams more efficient.

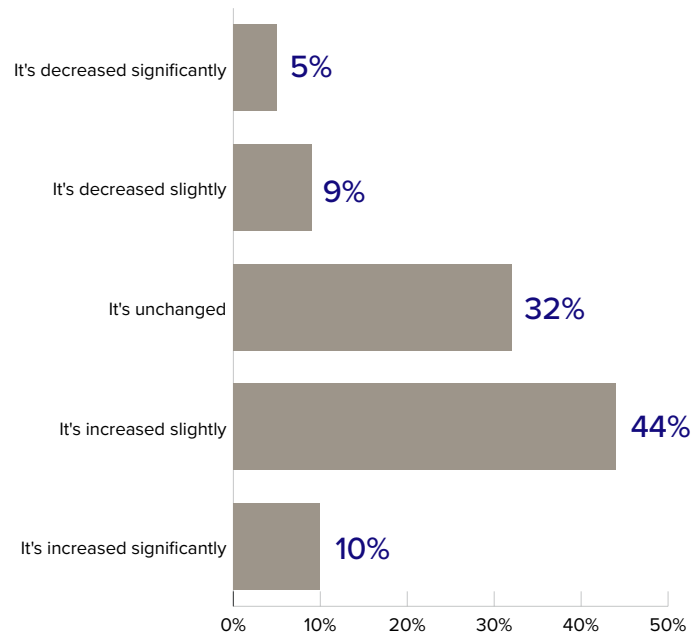
“It has helped power our services internally to our teams, as well as to our clients,” according to one respondent.

“We’re able to get more accomplished in the same amount of time,” reported another.

MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BUDGETS

As CMOs and the departments they lead frequently develop firmwide strategic initiatives, marketing budgets are also increasing for most respondents.

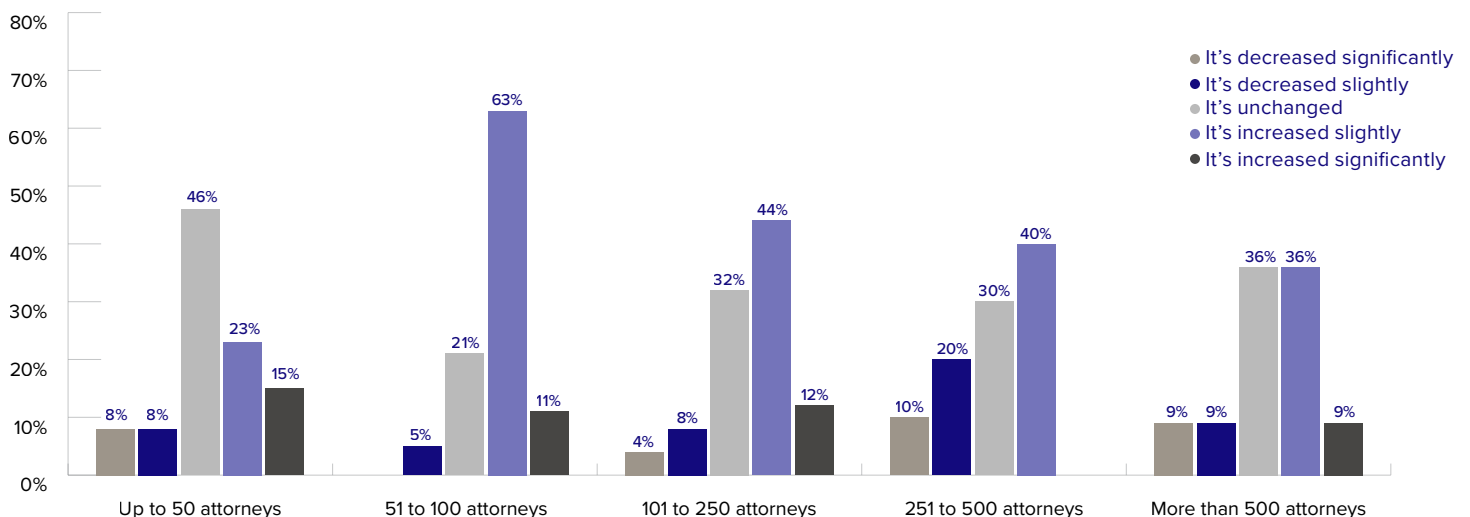
Adjusted for inflation, how has your budget changed in recent years?



Although nearly half of respondents at small firms said their budgets had not changed in recent years, increases are not limited to large law firms.

In fact, it is marketers at firms with 251 to 500 attorneys who were most likely to report smaller budgets. Meanwhile, 74% of those at firms with 51 to 100 attorneys said their budgets had increased — compared, for example, to just 44% of those at firms with more than 500 attorneys.

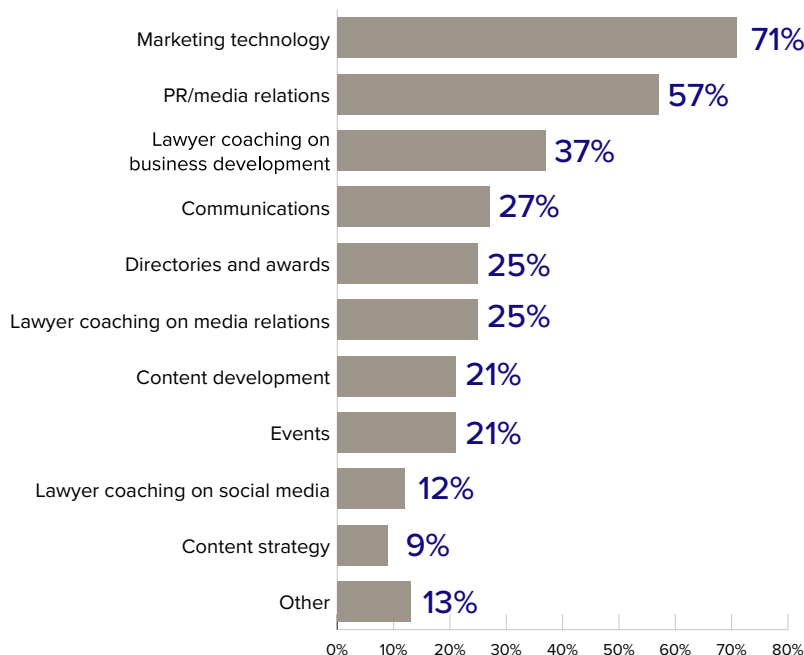
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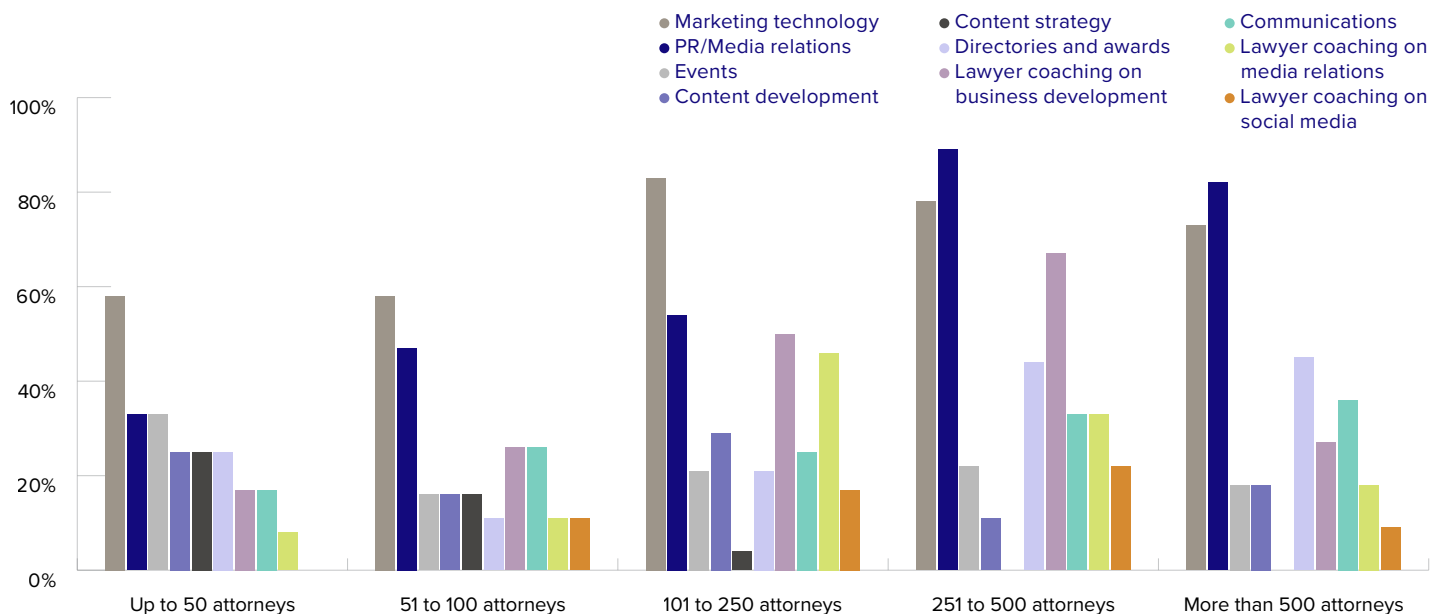
Many firms work with outside vendors for certain aspects of marketing and business development.

A majority of those surveyed said their firms engage with outside vendors for marketing technology, and most use outside vendors for media relations.

In which of the following areas do you engage with outside vendors? (select all that apply)



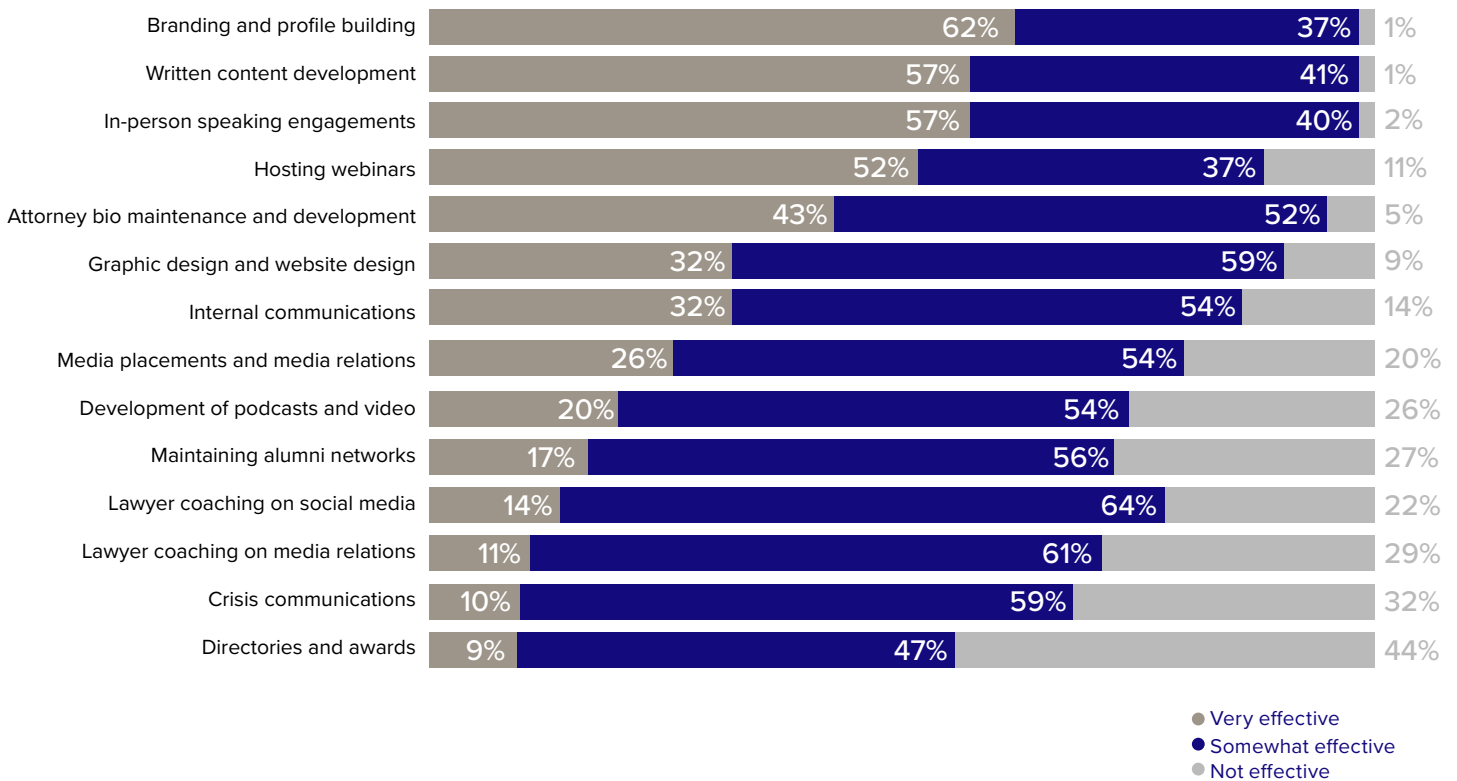
In which of the following areas do you engage with outside vendors? (select all that apply)



THE MOST (AND LEAST) EFFECTIVE MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

We also asked respondents to identify the activities traditionally associated with marketing and communications that are most — and least — effective in terms of actually helping firms attract and retain business.

Please rate the effectiveness of the following Marketing and Communications activities in helping the law firm attract and retain business.



Of those activities considered very effective, respondents were asked to rank them in terms of their relative importance. The single most important activity, according to a majority of marketing leaders, is written content development, followed by branding and profile building.

Overall Rank	Mean Rank	Most important marketing & communications activities
1	2.3	Written content development
2	2.5	Branding and profile building
3	2.9	In-person speaking engagements
4	3.0	Hosting webinars
5	3.4	Attorney bio maintenance and development

We also asked marketers to rank the activities they'd designated "not effective" in order of their lack of efficacy. The least useful activity for a majority of respondents is directories and awards; more than half of those who view it as ineffective said it is the number one least useful activity.

Overall Rank	Mean Rank	Least useful marketing & communications activities
1	2.3	Directories and awards
2	2.7	Maintaining alumni networks
3	2.7	Development of podcasts and video
4	2.7	Lawyer coaching on media relations
5	3.0	Lawyer coaching on social media

Below are the activities considered "very effective" in helping the firm attract and retain business by at least half of marketing leaders at firms in each size category.

Smallest firms (up to 50 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Branding and profile building	63%
In-person speaking engagements	50%

Small firms (51 to 100 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Branding and profile building	75%
Written content development	75%
In-person speaking engagements	55%

Midsize firms (101 to 250 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Written content development	70%
In-person speaking engagements	63%
Branding and profile building	59%
Hosting webinars	52%

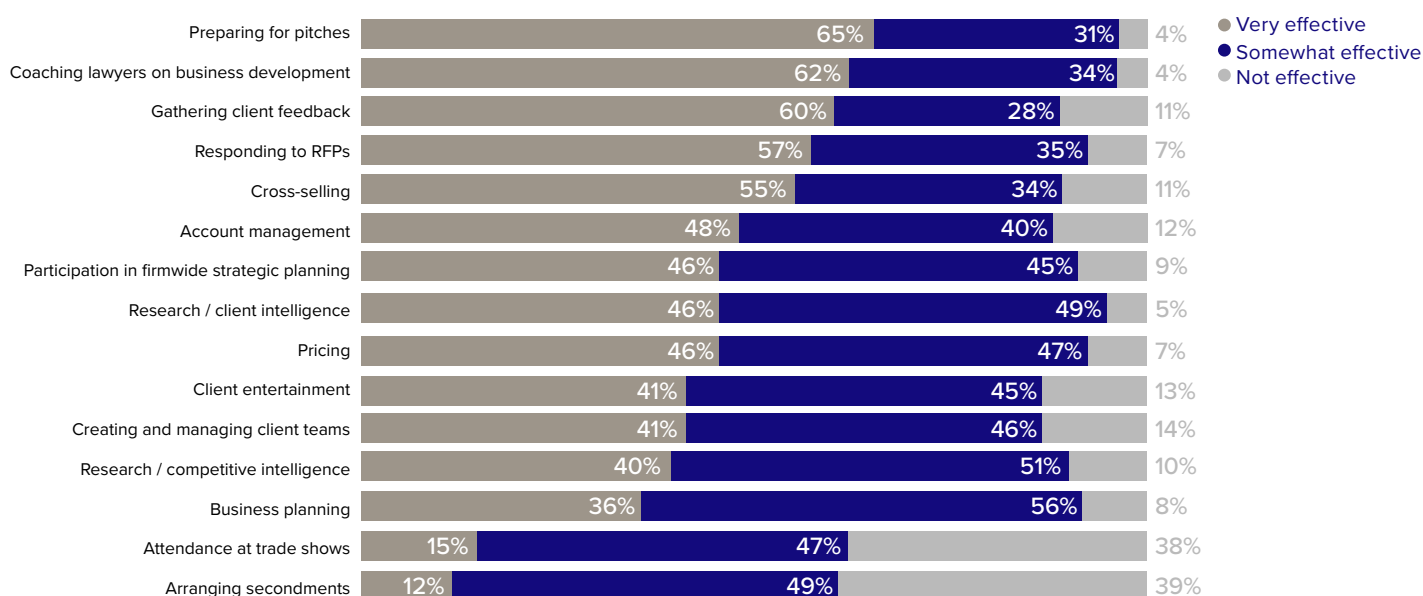
Large firms (251 to 500 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Hosting webinars	69%
In-person speaking engagements	62%
Branding and profile building	54%

Largest firms (more than 500 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Hosting webinars	64%
Written content development	64%
In-person speaking engagements	55%
Branding and profile building	55%
Media placements and media relations	55%

THE MOST (AND LEAST) EFFECTIVE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND CLIENT RETENTION TOOLS

In addition to rating the effectiveness of traditional marketing and communications activities, respondents were asked to rate those aspects of their work that focus more on business development or client relations, an area of growing emphasis for many marketing teams.

Please rate the effectiveness of the following Business Development and Retention tactics in helping the law firm attract and retain business.



Of those activities considered very effective, respondents were asked to rank them in terms of their relative importance. The two most important activities, according to a majority of marketing leaders, are coaching lawyers on business development and gathering client feedback.

Overall Rank	Mean Rank	Most important business development tactics
1	2.9	Coaching lawyers on business development
2	3.4	Gathering client feedback
3	3.6	Cross-selling
4	3.7	Preparing for pitches
5	3.9	Responding to RFPs

We also asked marketers to rank the activities they'd designated "not effective" in order of their lack of efficacy. Of the tactics considered ineffective by respondents, arranging secondments and attendance at trade shows took the two top spots as the least useful activities.

Overall Rank	Mean Rank	Least useful business development tactics
1	1.9	Arranging secondments
2	2.1	Attendance at trade shows
3	3.9	Cross-selling
4	3.9	Gathering client feedback
5	4.5	Client entertainment

Here are the tactics considered "very effective" in helping the firm attract and retain business by at least half of marketing leaders at firms in each size category.

Smallest firms (up to 50 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Coaching lawyers on business development	57%
Responding to RFPs	50%
Gathering client feedback	50%
Account management	50%

Small firms (51 to 100 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Responding to RFPs	68%
Cross-selling	68%
Coaching lawyers on business development	58%
Preparing for pitches	55%
Participation in firmwide strategic planning	53%

Midsize firms (101 to 250 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Gathering client feedback	69%
Preparing for pitches	67%
Cross-selling	63%
Coaching lawyers on business development	62%
Account management	56%

Large firms (251 to 500 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Gathering client feedback	92%
Preparing for pitches	92%
Coaching lawyers on business development	75%
Responding to RFPs	75%
Creating and managing client teams	75%

Largest firms (more than 500 attorneys)	Considered very effective
Preparing for pitches	82%
Gathering client feedback	64%
Coaching lawyers on business development	64%
Research / client intelligence	64%
Research / competitive intelligence	64%
Pricing	64%

THE NOT-TO-DO LIST

What activities do legal marketing leaders find least worthwhile?

We offered respondents the chance to sound off by asking: “If you could stop doing two things that are among your current responsibilities but that you think have no merit, what would they be?”

By far, the most common activity, included in at least half of responses, was dealing with award submissions and directories.

Other responses included purchasing promotional products, coordinating sponsorships and industry events, preparing internal communications (“feel this should be an HR function”), and helping attorneys with administrative tasks.

“Social media without strategy” is one respondent’s primary frustration, while others wish they could offload the responsibility for handling bio updates or job openings for the website.

CMOs' ADVICE FOR ATTORNEYS

What guidance do our respondents have for attorneys looking to grow their practice? To close, here's a sampling of responses from our respondents.

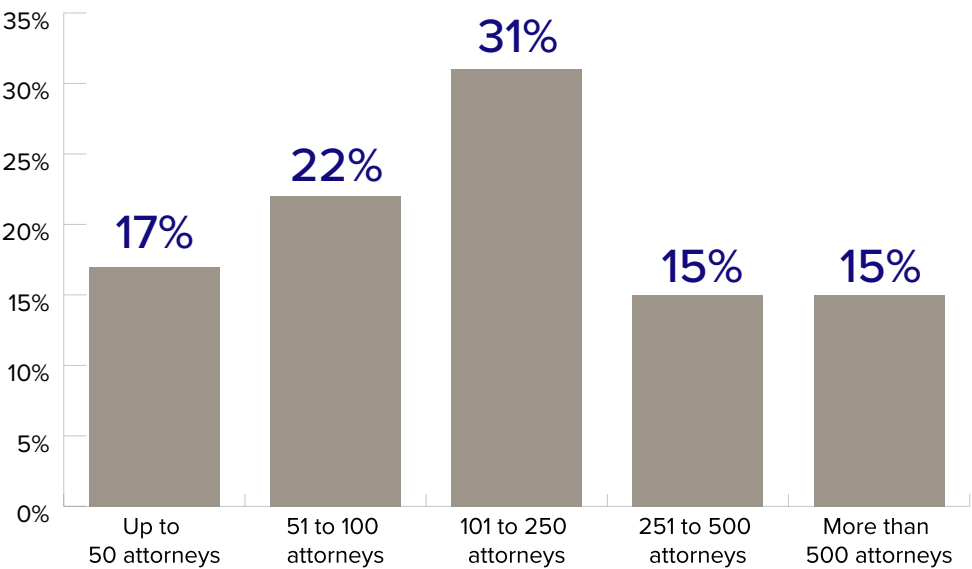


- Have “more interaction with clients, more client dinners, lunches, reaching out to connect.”
- “Keep in contact with clients outside the actual matters they are handling ... treat them as people/friends not a meal ticket.”
- “Approach conversations with clients and potential clients with empathy, aiming to understand the broader business landscape and identify opportunities to offer additional firm services.”
- “The BD team can get the attorney all the way up to the finish line with a prospect, but the attorney has to be engaged enough to take it over the line. Engagement is the single biggest issue for sales, period.”
- “Better articulate the value of what [you] and [your] group do so the rest of the firm can cross sell more effectively.”
- “Think more collaboratively about how [your] colleagues could help [your] clients, and reach out more to existing clients and referral sources.”
- “Create an action list and execute on that action list on a regular basis”
- “Focus on a few targeted efforts [with] organized follow-up on key contacts.”
- “Be coachable and open to new ideas.”
- Don’t “assume [you] know everything about marketing/BD, just because [you] have a JD.”

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

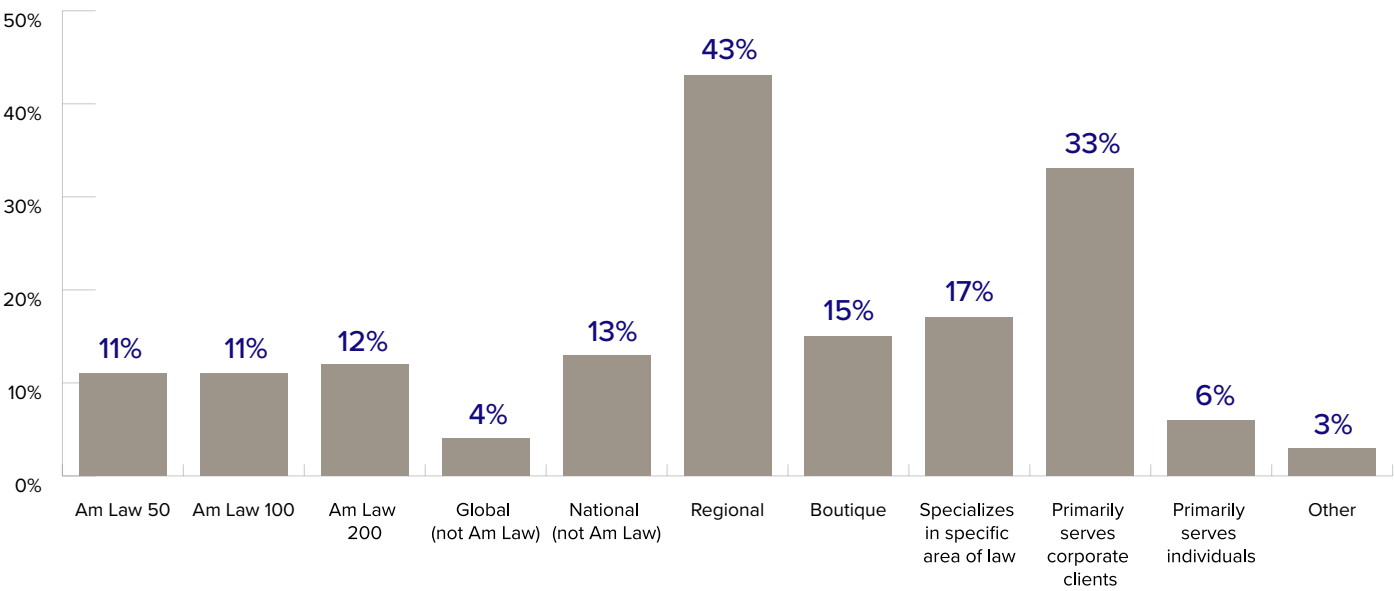
FIRM SIZE

How large is your firm?



FIRM TYPE

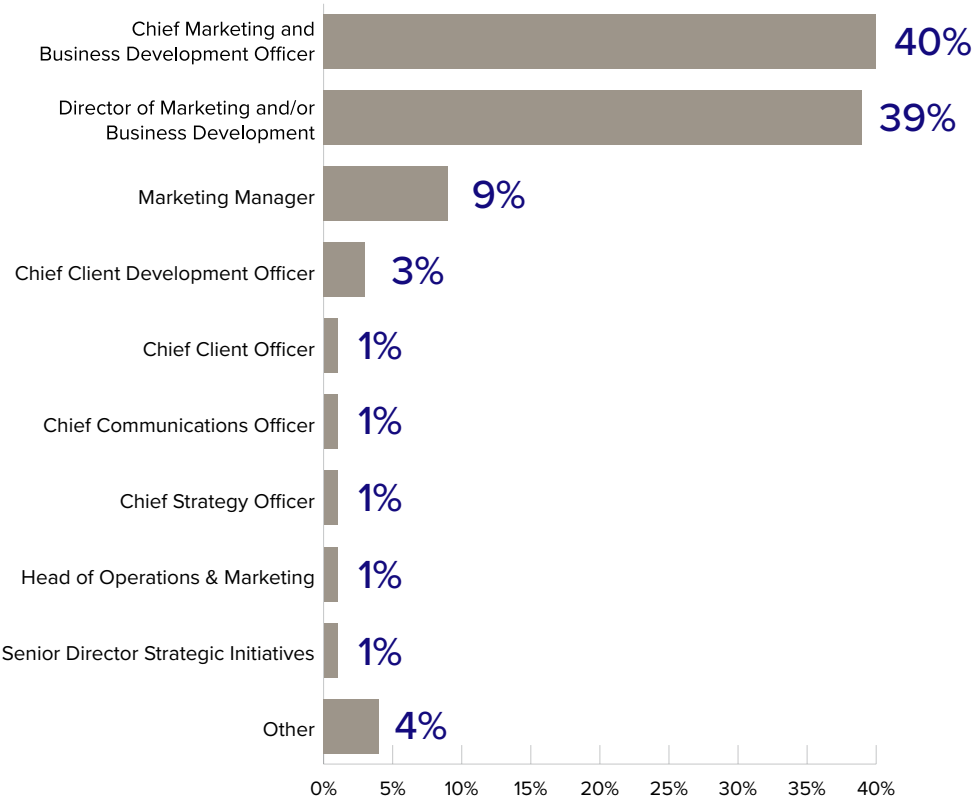
Which of the following categories or terms best describe your firm? (select all that apply)



RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

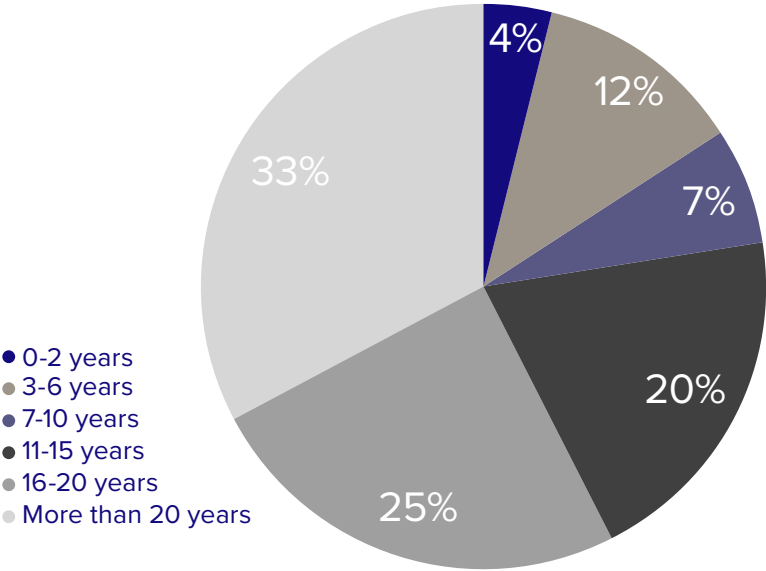
TITLE

Which of the following most resembles your title?



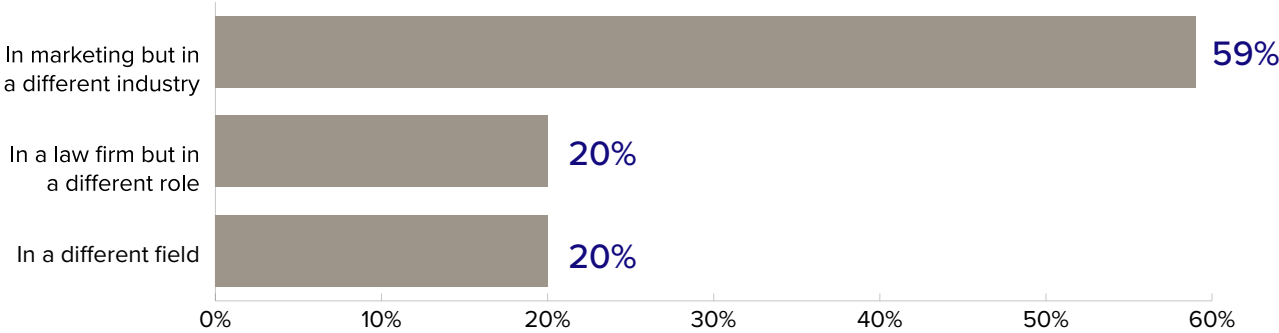
EXPERIENCE

How many years of experience do you have in law firm marketing?



RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

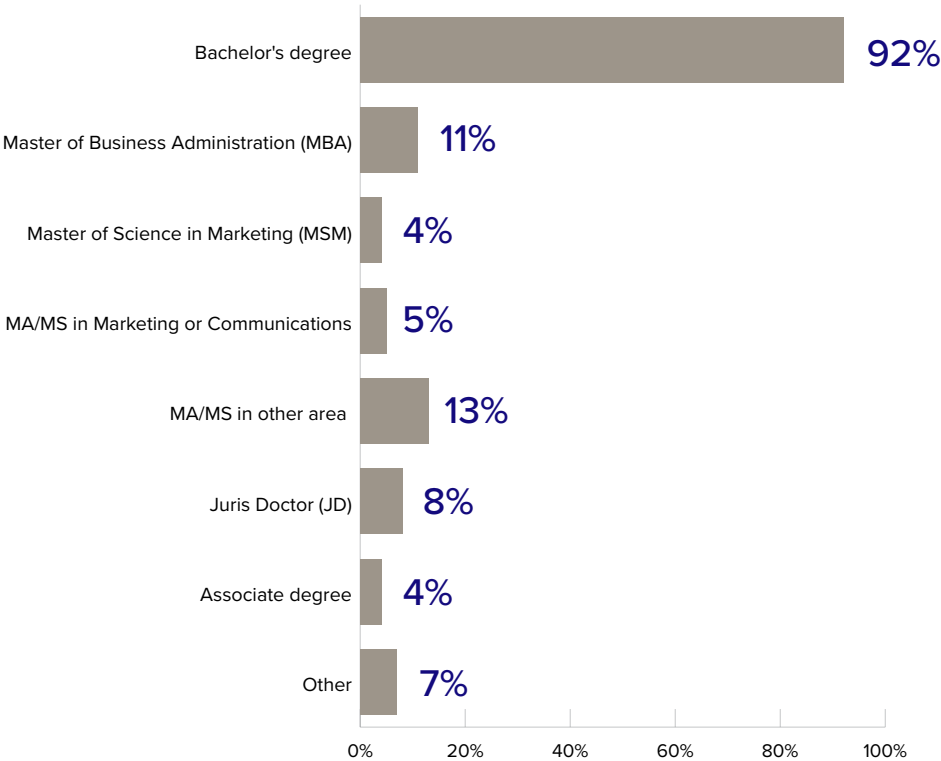
If you have prior professional experience outside of law firm marketing, please indicate where you worked. (select all that apply)



Other fields include journalism, politics, nonprofit, hospitality, advertising, entertainment, banking, property management, technology.

EDUCATION

Please indicate which of the following degree(s) of education you completed. (select all that apply)

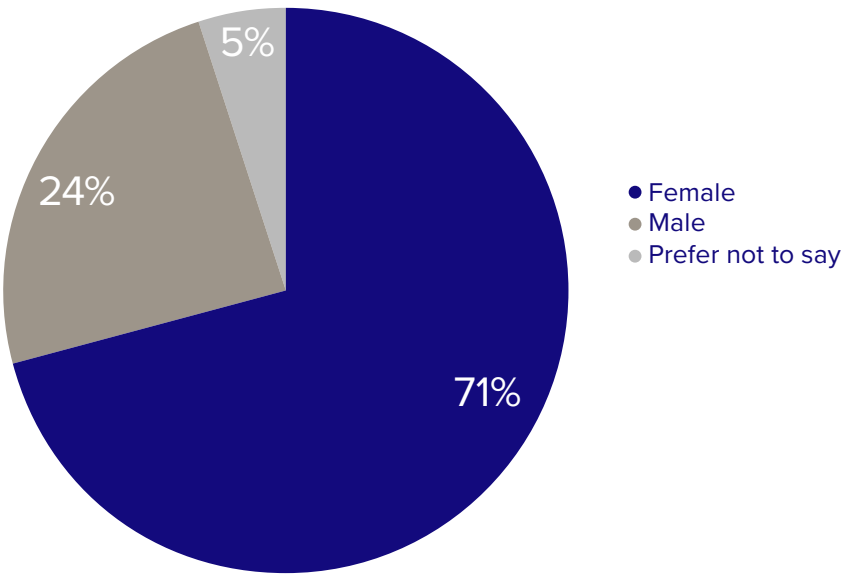


Of the bachelor's degrees, nearly all are in the humanities/arts and sciences. The largest number (26%) have degrees in marketing and/or communications. The second-most common major is English, followed by journalism and business administration.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

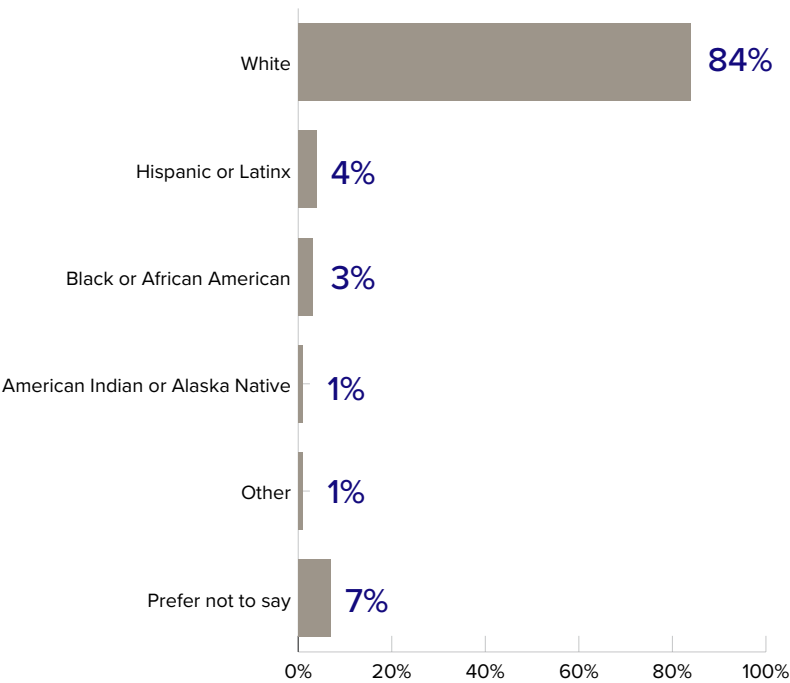
PERSONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

How do you identify your gender?



No respondents identified as Asian, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

How do you identify your race/ethnicity?





ABOUT THE LEGAL MARKETING ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1985, LMA is the universal voice of the legal marketing profession, a forum that brings together all levels, from CMOs to entry-level specialists, from firms of all sizes, consultants and vendors, lawyers, marketers from other professions and marketing students to share their collective knowledge. More than 90 percent of the largest 200 U.S. law firms employ an LMA member. Members at every stage in their career development benefit from LMA participation because the association's broad array of programs and services can be tailored to their specific needs. Visit www.legalmarketing.org to read more about LMA.

ABOVE THE LAW

ABOUT ABOVE THE LAW

Above the Law takes a behind-the-scenes look at the world of law. We provide news and insights about the profession's most colorful personalities and powerful institutions, as well as original commentary on breaking legal developments

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