

Briefing Leaders

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JUNE 2021

**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
AND MARKETING LEADERS**

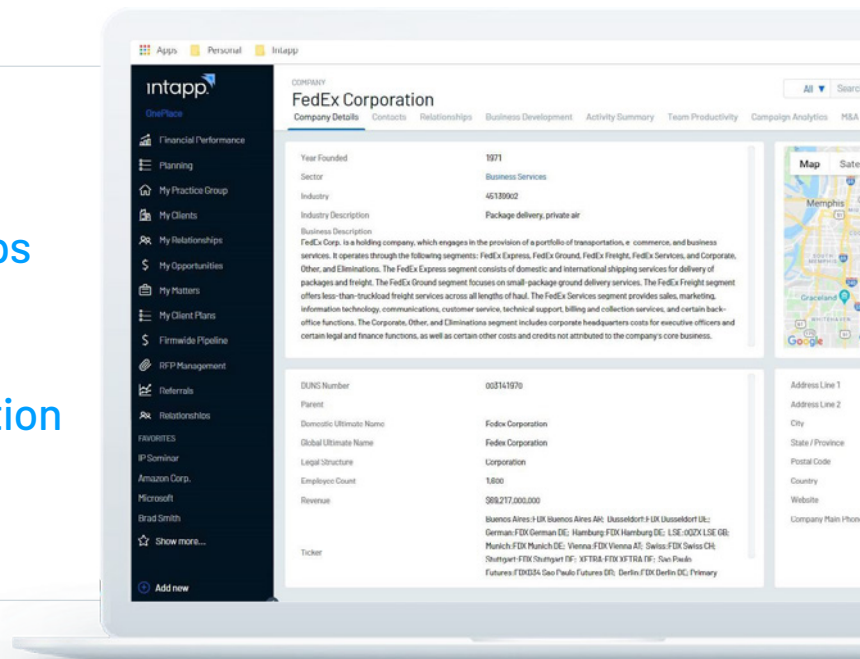
2021

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IN BRIEF

More than half of **Briefing** law firm business development and marketing leaders in 2021 tell us that this business area now has a seat on the firm's main board – and if we can say one thing, it has certainly been a year during which BD strategy and delivery has needed some intense attention. Client-listening skills had surely never been more important, and the big pivot to digital was suddenly upon us. Indeed, 84% of leaders say their client development strategy has been changed by the Covid-19 and remote-working experience, either moderately or a lot (p7). At the same time, almost three-quarters of leaders are seeing an increase in demand from clients for firm-made solutions that deliver them value, such as through requests for proposal, and two-thirds are getting quite involved in the creation, testing, communication and selling of such solutions (p13). It's somewhat reassuring perhaps that one thing hasn't changed – client relationship management (CRM) remains a space with plenty of room for future process improvement (p14). ▲

PARTNER COMMENT



Lavinia Calvert
General manager,
marketing and business
development solutions
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Reviewing this year's **Briefing** Business Development and Marketing Leaders report, it's clear that the focus on client development programmes – and the strategies surrounding them – has increased considerably as firms begin to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the legal industry will continue to face an array of global uncertainties, upending traditional marketing and business development planning and budgeting activities. The situation at hand requires a measured and nuanced approach that focuses on investments that will deliver reliable returns – investments like key-client programmes and the technologies that support their successful execution.

Despite having a documented client development strategy, many firms find they're hobbled by siloed data and workflows, poor data quality, and data misalignment – and are unable to keep pace with competing firms when vying for new business. They also struggle to meet their clients' rapidly shifting demands and expectations. Consequently, these firms lose market share to competitors who possess broader access to client intelligence and stronger business agility.

By contrast, firms that make strategic investments in technologies that provide global firm-wide access to a centralised data repository and timely insights find themselves better poised to achieve the collaboration required to deliver superior pitches, surface greater opportunities for upselling and cross-selling, pull together multidisciplinary teams preemptively, and to close new business in a faster and more cost-effective fashion.

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BRIEFING PEOPLE



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01

Has Covid-19 changed client strategy?

How has the world of the law firm marketing and business development (M/BD) leader changed during a year of unprecedented disruption to how this area of the business would usually operate? In addition to tracking some long-term **Briefing** management trends – movement on leadership role titles, job mobility and diversity (p9) – for **Briefing** Business development and marketing leaders 2021 we've also sought significantly greater insight into the extent to which strategies, challenges, and

technology or transformation priorities, are driving these leaders in new directions.

Briefing wasn't all that surprised to learn that the majority of M/BD leaders (80%) report their firms have a documented client development strategy (p5). This hopefully keeps different pockets of the firm on more or less the same page of the business growth story – however sophisticated their client relationship management (CRM) system happens to be. However, we were surprised to see quite such a divergence in

Words

Richard Brent,
editor-in-chief

Research

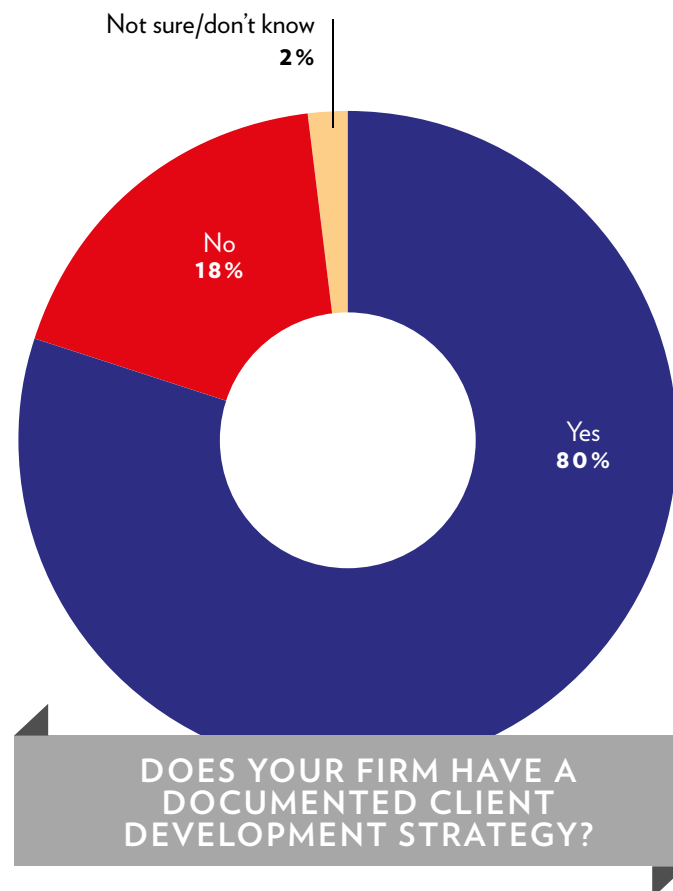
Sarah Butler,
data team leader

terms of how far that strategy attempts to peer into the future for business (p6). For example, just under a fifth (19%) say their strategic horizon is just one year. Is our current/next 'normal' really so unpredictable that it's impossible to plan any further out than this? Another 19% say they will plan over two years, and then it's a third (31%) on the established three-year strategic window. A further 31% appear to be confident pursuing a strategy that stretches more than three years into the future.

Arguably, a much clearer signal is 95% of leaders reporting that this strategy has been changed by the events of the pandemic – with over a fifth (21%) saying that's by 'a lot' or 'a great deal' (p7).

Julie Stott, business development and marketing director at Travers Smith, says it can hardly surprise if many have changed their approach to managing client relationships. After all, clients themselves have had to change so much, and law firms all needed to adapt to support them in that. "The market has changed, the demands have changed, and what people need from their law firms has also changed," she says. "When the financial crisis struck there was a very immediate response as well, but it was relatively specific in terms of client activity. The pandemic has impacted client activity across so many different practices – from furloughing, which nobody had even heard of before, to funding."

Leor Franks, business development and marketing director at Kingsley Napley, adds: "With the world turned upside down, during the first few months of lockdown many clients expected



timelines to slip and deliverables to be delayed. As the 'new normal' emerged over the past six months, however, expectations have risen back to pre-pandemic levels."

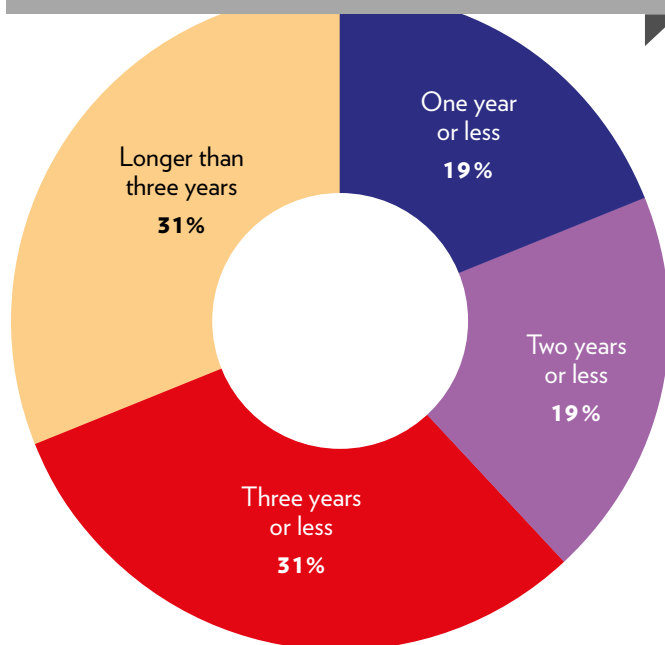
Owen Williams, global head of practices and markets at Simmons & Simmons, says the period has underlined the advantage in having a highly focused sector strategy – four core pillars in the case of his firm. "And we have actually increased focus on our key clients within the sectors, directing more of our resource and effort into those particular portfolios." There are a number of strands to that work, he says – exploring how the team could get closer to those clients through the different touchpoints available, and in particular "recognising the importance of data when managing client portfolios, to understand who is receiving what, and how much it resonates".

Indeed, many M/BD leaders point to the impact both of the shift to more digital marketing activity at a time when there was simply no choice, and the fact this makes reliable and actionable data on engagement levels even more critical.

"The market has changed, the demands have changed, and what people need from their law firms has also changed."

Julie Stott, business development and marketing director, Travers Smith

WHAT'S THE HORIZON FOR YOUR CLIENT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY?



Franks at Kingsley Napley says: “There’s a greater emphasis on digital today than ever before, and across a range of tactics, including events, content and networks. The shift to digital was already underway before the pandemic, but it has been sped up significantly, probably cutting three to five years off of what would have been the natural course of development.”

Daryl Atkinson, business development and marketing director at Howard Kennedy, adds: “Accepting that online relationships will be ever more important, we are upping the investment into developing online content, personalising the online experience, and using the readership data gained to ensure data-led decision making about what we do next.”

And Jamie Wallis, head of BD – international corporate and special projects, at DLA Piper, says there is still room for technology and data to make a greater difference to outcomes: “There isn’t yet enough connection between having the data about successful volumes of ‘views or ‘hits’, and then how to use that data to influence what somebody does next time.”

Samantha Maher, head of brand and marketing operations at HFW, adds: “With a new focus on virtual events the firm has needed to upskill to

deliver engaging webinars, and to understand the data that can be drawn from them.” Moreover, these formats are now “a key BD strategy as we are reaching bigger, more diverse audiences”, she explains. “Using Zoom for webinars has increased attendance at events, and led to more global clients attending, and the data captured has opened up further client conversations and helped to identify relevant topics for future whitepapers or events.”

But at the same time, BD hours have been needed to support individual partners who’ve been able to spend rather more time focusing on winning business. “Working from home has made the firm much more accessible,” Maher explains. “Partners have inevitably travelled less, and so have been more focused on BD activity – making the global marketing and BD team busier than ever.

“We’ve all been really focused on ensuring that we remain in close contact with our clients, and on developing our client relationships across HFW’s industry groups and offices. We want to make sure that our clients understand the breadth of our offering as a global, sector-focused firm.”

Franks agrees: “There has been an increase in activity around client development. With fewer people travelling, diaries have opened up, and the ‘war-time spirit’ over lockdown also empowered our people to reach out more regularly to clients

“With a new focus on virtual events the firm has needed to upskill to deliver engaging webinars, and to understand the data that can be drawn from them.”

Samantha Maher, head of brand and marketing operations, HFW

to check in on how they are, both personally and professionally.”

Wallis says DLA Piper embarked on a new three-year strategy towards the end of 2020, with BD leadership emphasising “world-class basics”.

“That includes having the right people, in the right roles, with the right training, consistency in our bidding and pitching process, and a more integrated client programme internationally.” The last of these involves managing greater clarity for partners about the support available to them, plus the investment going into particular clients, and ultimately aims to build deeper more institutionalised relationships.

However, Wallis too singles out a fairly simple nudge on the client-listening front as one of the most effective moves of the last 18 months. “You can have the best internal plan and mapping, which is all valuable, but partners just didn’t need a reason to pick up the phone and talk to their clients in the early days of lockdown.” It was illuminating, he says, to see how some exhausted their lists quicker than others, and some were challenged to have deeper conversations. Wallis worked up a short programme to bring groups of partners together to share stories that clients were telling them. Others could then potentially use these in further conversations.

And Stott at Travers Smith adds that as well as spinning more tactical plates like this, leaders will ideally have increased their horizon-scanning efforts – but managing both at once is challenging to say the least.

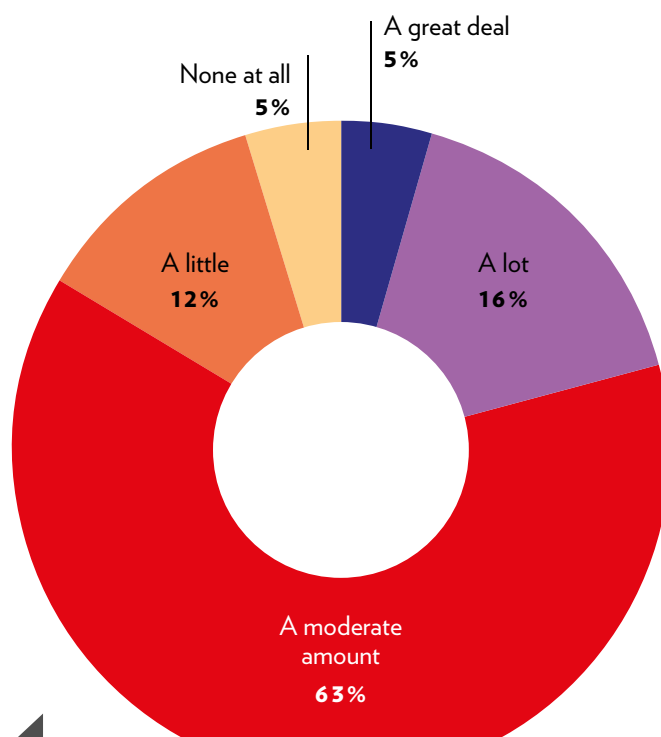
“BD leaders need to think hard about what the

“Partners just didn’t need a reason to pick up the phone and talk to their clients in the early days of lockdown.”

Jamie Wallis, head of BD – international corporate and special projects, DLA Piper

IN BRIEF

Law firm client development strategies cover a range of horizons, but **one fifth** of leaders say their strategy has been affected “a lot” or “a great deal” by Covid-19



HOW MUCH HAS THE PANDEMIC CHANGED YOUR CLIENT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY INSIDE ITS NORMAL HORIZON?

future will look like – not only to respond to change effectively, but also to anticipate it. This thinking includes reviewing the size of the team, identifying any new skillsets we might need, and ensuring that client strategy and development are brought more to the fore. There will be less thinking about what you might call ‘the machine of marketing’.

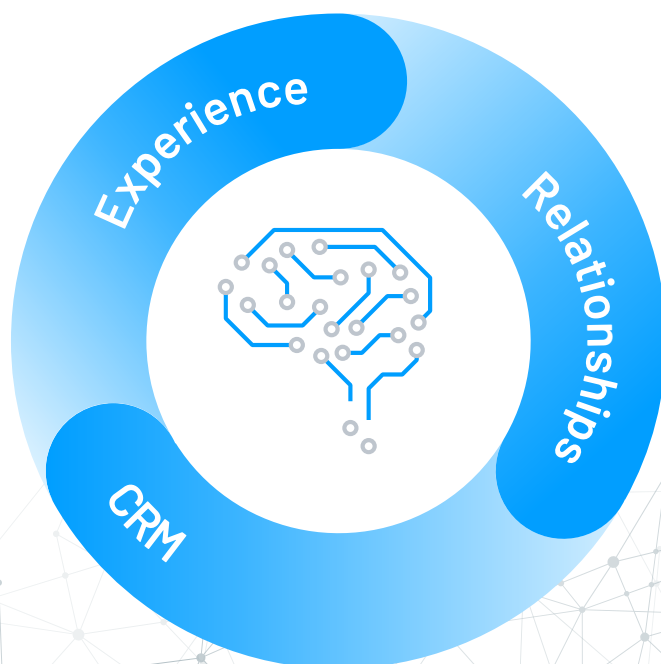
“That requires a lot more leadership thinking time. However, there often hasn’t been as much thinking time, as everything also needs to be done quickly.” ▀

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02

Who are today's leaders and where have they come from?

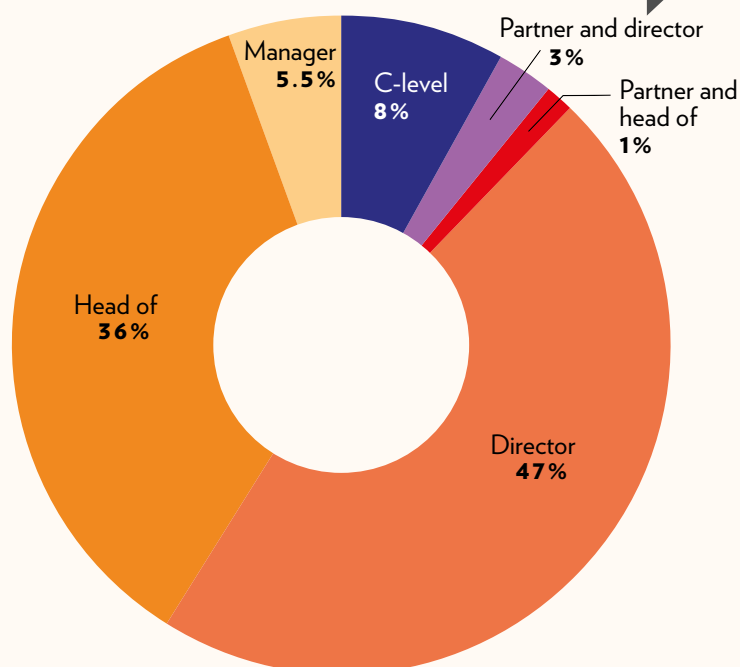
While there were plenty of changes for legal business leaders to handle in the course of 2020, three simple questions we have long asked to get a snapshot of this market in time sees rather less movement on the status quo.

First, what is your job title? (p9) Almost half of respondents to our poll this year (47%) say they are a director, with around a third (36%) enjoying 'head of' status instead. The proportion with a 'C-level' title such as chief marketing officer is practically unchanged (8%, compared with 9% when we last asked for the information in early 2020). At that time, however, we noted that the number of C-level titles in circulation had more than doubled on the figure for 2019.

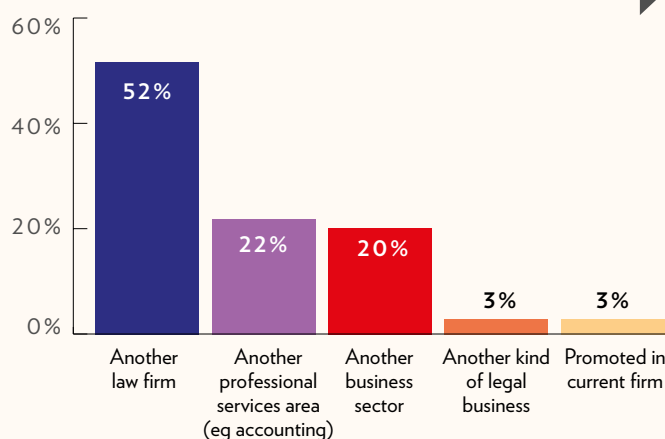
We also ask which organisations leaders were working in before their current firm – the idea being to gauge something of how open the legal profession is proving to expertise that has been developed in other fields (and which therefore might be expected to help it to change and innovate). Again, there's not a great deal of change to note here – other than a clear majority continuing to arrive in post from another law firm, if not another type of legal business or having been promoted within their current firm. In 2021, a fifth say that they previously worked in another sector that was not a professional services vertical – broadly in line with last year when it was 25%.

Finally, how diverse are marketing and business

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE TITLE?



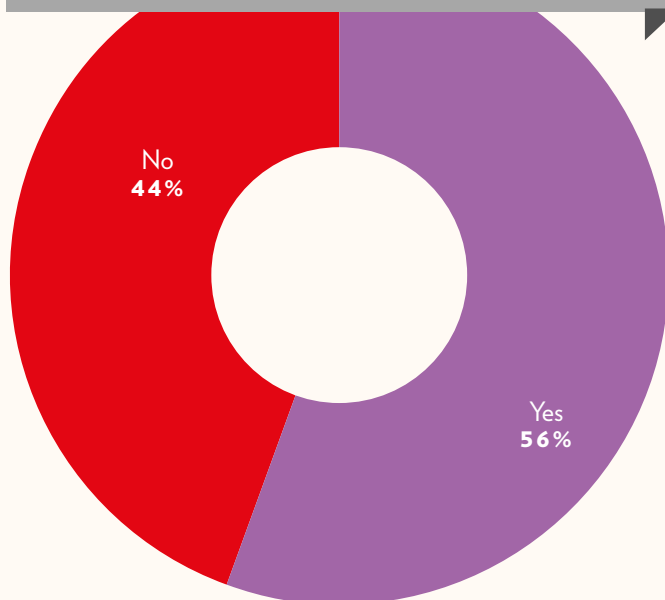
WHERE DID YOU WORK IN YOUR PREVIOUS ROLE?



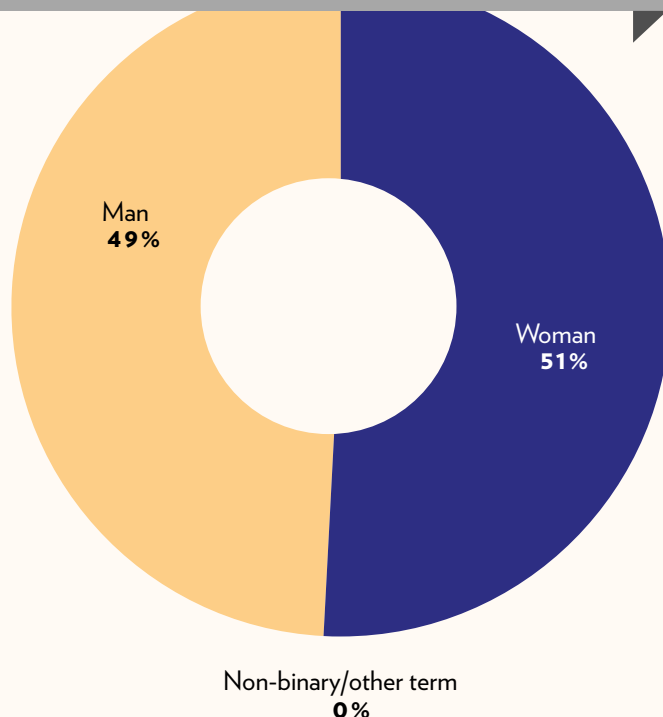
"I'm heavily involved with our business plan, long-term strategy and reputation. I think it's critical for BD to have an input into these."

Leor Franks, business development and marketing director, Kingsley Napley

DOES THE M/BD FUNCTION AT YOUR FIRM HAVE A SEAT ON THE BOARD?



HOW DIVERSE IS 2021 M/BD LEADERSHIP?



IN BRIEF

Over half (56%) of M/BD departments now have a seat on the board – an increase on 45% when we polled in 2020 – perhaps suggesting growing recognition of the role's strategic value

development leaders in legal as a group? (p10)
On the surface the answer here above looks like a story of remarkably equal opportunity in 2021. But it should be made clear that our annual research is into the gamut of UK law firms – from those with annual revenues of £18m right up to the very largest international outfits – and in 2020 we noted that all revenue bands were not equal when it came to M/BD leadership diversity.

The overall picture is one of continuation then, rather than this set of shapes shifting. However, one development worth noting is that over half (56%) of responding leaders report M/BD now has representation on the board. That's an increase on the 45% that said so in 2020.

Leor Franks, business development and marketing director at Kingsley Napley, says: "My

last two roles have had executive committee seats. This was helpful for discussing tactics and resources, but strategy sat with the board. I chose to join my current firm in part due to being offered a board seat. It's early days, but so far I'm heavily involved with our business plan, long-term strategy, and reputation. I think it's critical for BD to have an input into these and other matters as part of the team making decisions, rather than merely feeding in from the outside."

Daryl Atkinson, business development and marketing director at Howard Kennedy, adds: "The old ways of working have changed so much that we have had to radically change the way in which we promote ourselves. Radical change can only happen if you have senior folk driving this change from the top." ▀

Data based on responses from M/BD leaders at 76 UK law firms with annual revenues of £18m+

"Radical change can only happen if you have senior folk driving this change from the top."

Daryl Atkinson, business development and marketing director, Howard Kennedy



03

Is the shape of M/BD work shifting?

So, what of the M/BD leader's wider team's size and skillset in 2021? More of our leaders say the size of their team has increased since February 2020 (30%) than say that headcount has reduced (21%) – although 4% do say the area is now “significantly smaller” (p12).

Perhaps some firms heeded views expressed in **Briefing Business development and marketing leaders 2020** – namely, that entering the challenges of a recession is the time to increase marketing activity, both to support “share of voice”, and as we've heard, to support clients through the crisis as effectively as possible.

In any case, there's little sign that skills to deliver effective content – or indeed, efficient and high-

value legal services – digitally will become less important if more in-person activity of the past returns.

Daryl Atkinson at Howard Kennedy says: “We surveyed our clients to ask them about their experience of working with us remotely and their thoughts about needing to attend our offices to do this in future. While we were not surprised that our clients had been happy with working with us remotely, what was a surprise was the apparent keenness not to attend our offices to undertake the majority of their legal work in future.”

Julie Stott at Travers Smith says a significant proportion of her M/BD team were reskilled in the first few months of the pandemic to provide

better digital services faster. She now has plenty of people who can produce and edit videos and podcasts, and not only manage webinars but also incorporate pre-recorded pieces into that format. In addition, the team are skilled to make decisions about how design and animation of content can deliver messages more effectively on different social media platforms.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of leaders report they have also seen demand from clients for “firm-made solutions” increase since early 2020 – a fifth saying significantly so – and two-thirds (65%) say their team has become more involved in product/solution creation for clients as a result (p13).

Samantha Maher at HFW says: “In line with most firms we do look to drive the efficiency of our client service. We will look to implement new technology to enhance this, and we’ve seen new ideas and projects emerging from an engaged partnership.”

Owen Williams at Simmons & Simmons confirms the shift of focus to products as a trend playing out; and says it’s one that also plays very much to his firm’s strengths in line with recent strategy. In 2019 Simmons acquired the world’s first regulated ‘legal engineering’ business Wavelength Law, and alongside four core legal practices there is a fifth called ‘Solutions’.

“I’ve worked on some pitches where bringing Wavelength into the equation is a game-changer – they can apply technology and develop solutions that move things along much faster and more cost-effectively,” he explains. “And we find clients are much open to that sort of conversation today.”

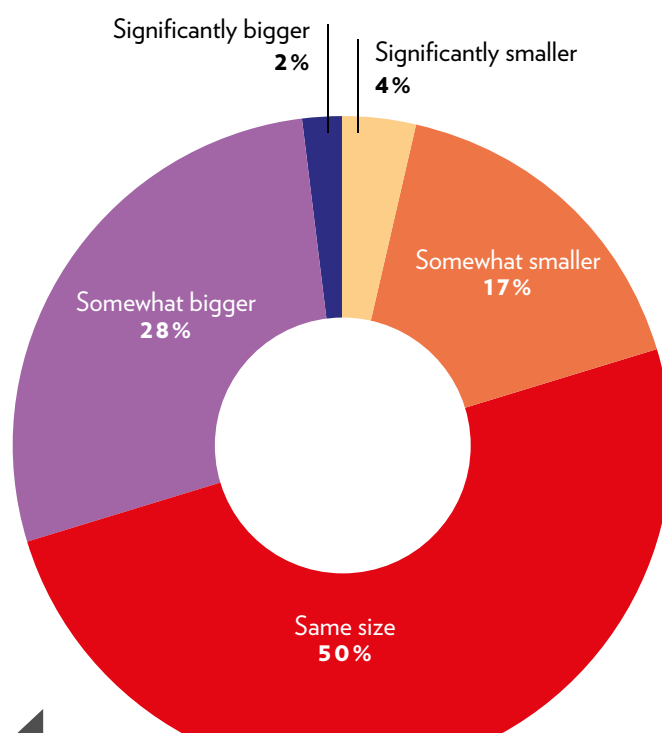
Moreover, Simmons & Simmons ‘Solutions’ has its own product development team, with a senior member of the M/BD team working full-time in a product sales role. This role works closely with the product development team in defining the market for legal products and has been integral to the

“We have people who want to do things differently in marketing and BD, and we’ve jumped at the opportunity to add more value that way.”

Owen Williams, global head of practices and markets, Simmons & Simmons

IN BRIEF

More M/BD leaders say their teams have grown (30%) than say they’ve shrunk (21%) since early 2020 – there is more to do perhaps, and marketing has not been seen as an area for cost-cutting

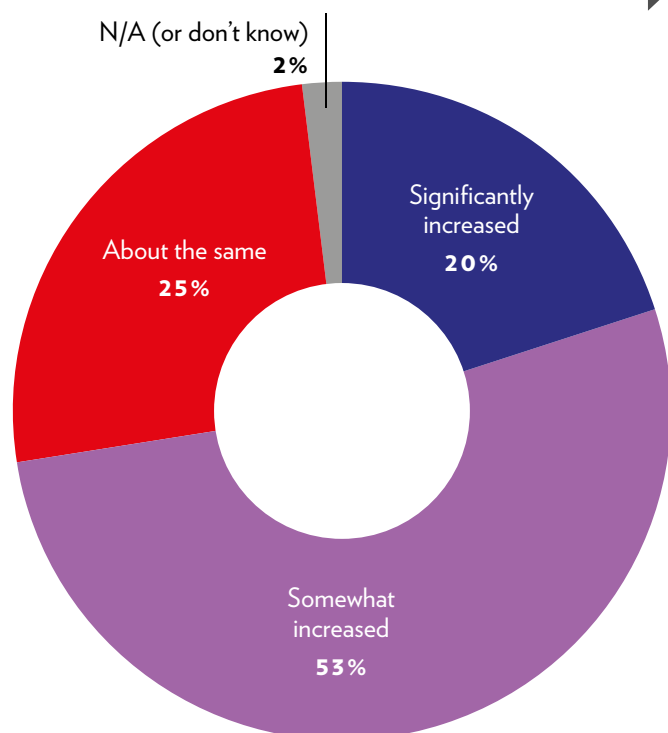


HOW HAS YOUR OVERALL M/BD TEAM SIZE CHANGED SINCE FEBRUARY 2020?

successful launch of CtrlTransfer, for example, which is a new product aimed at streamlining international data transfers, and an area of clear interest to clients experiencing a specific challenge, says Williams. “We have people who want to do things differently in marketing and BD, and we’ve jumped at the opportunity to add more value that way. In the last 18 months the door has opened, and a lot of people have walked straight through it.”

This has required some other effort to reduce workload in certain areas, he adds. But just as significantly, it has underlined there is no room for

HOW HAS CLIENT DEMAND FOR FIRM-MADE SOLUTIONS TO DELIVER VALUE (FOR EXAMPLE, THROUGH RFP REQUESTS) CHANGED IN THE LAST YEAR?



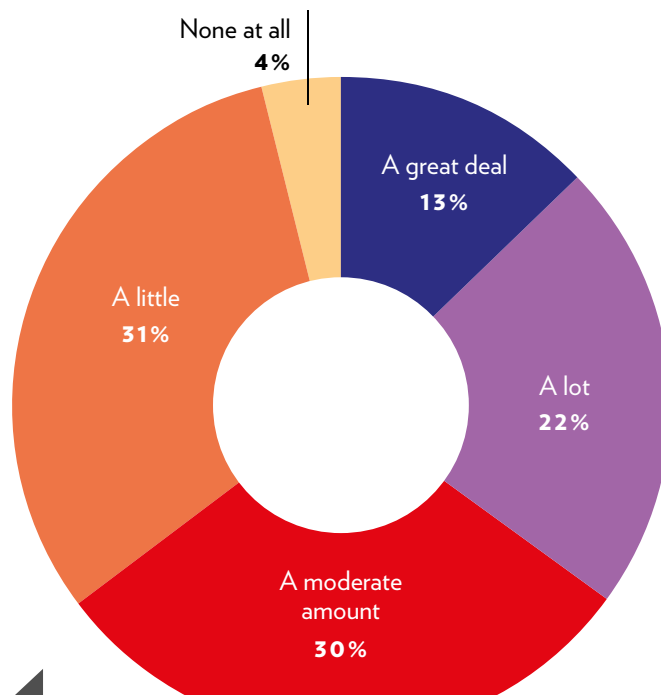
any silo working of the past in legal. “Marketing can’t improve its approach to managing data without working closely with the IT team, and we can’t ‘re-engineer’ lawyers into better salespeople or relationship managers without working hand in glove with learning and development.”

Jamie Wallis at DLA Piper agrees. “Clients increasingly expect services that go beyond traditional law, and also that we will develop those solutions with them rather than plug something in and see if it works.” At his firm, M/BD has been heavily involved in implementing a design-thinking methodology client-side (**Briefing** covered its “radical change” initiative in February 2020). As an example, one of his BD colleagues has worked closely with a small group of lawyers and an external technology provider to develop and launch a tool applying artificial intelligence to identifying evidence of cartel activity, he says.

“There’s lots of good promotion of this across the firm. The challenge then is to get others excited and comfortable enough to have conversations

IN BRIEF

Two-thirds of leaders say M/BD has been more than “a little” involved in creating new solutions/products for clients – and 13% of teams have been doing this “a great deal”



TO WHAT EXTENT HAS YOUR M/BD TEAM BEEN INVOLVED IN PRODUCT/ SOLUTION CREATION FOR CLIENTS IN THE LAST 12-18 MONTHS?

about opportunities like this with their own clients.”

Indeed, he sees the ability to coach and support partners in this regard as a high priority within the BD skills mix. “Clients increasingly expect to see multi-dimensional teams – it isn’t all about the lawyer – but there is also greater perception of the value we bring to those communications.” ▀



04

What are today's M/BD technology priorities?

Asked for examples of M/BD-related technology that had proved to have the most positive impact on the firm's processes or outcomes in the past 12 months, it's perhaps unsurprising to find our leaders mentioning platforms such as Zoom for webinars, Microsoft Teams, and other opportunities to manage virtual networking. As one leader succinctly put it: "A 100% virtual/digital channel strategy implemented on the back of the pandemic."

Another leader had plenty of internal system

plates also spinning, "developing our own solutions using our file-opening, data warehouse, matter management, client relationship management and billing systems".

CRM and marketing automation were both identified as areas of success in 2020. However, even more leaders said improved CRM was the application or tool they'd prioritise if they could change anything at all (that is to say, if **Briefing** were immediately to wave its 'magic wand' for the funding to give something a boost).

Jamie Wallis at DLA Piper says: “I would say CRM, but so much of that is about adoption mindset that even the best systems will fail without it.” The BD team at DLA Piper will soon be kicking off a new project to streamline credentials-gathering. The intention is to make “a significant difference in terms of efficiencies, consistency and the ability to sell better based on the firm’s previous experience”, Wallis explains.

“There are ways to automate more with CRM – linking to email – and the more the better, but it’s a journey. You must start to show some value to the lawyers – how the data and connections to clients in other countries can help to inform their own future conversations.”

Julie Stott at Travers Smith can see the firm developing its CRM further in the short and mid-term, particular as platforms such as Teams are focused on introducing productivity tools that can hook into core systems to help people work more efficiently with the data available.

And Leor Franks says Kingsley Napley is looking to implement a more “modern” system – one that would integrate with the full existing tech stack. “Ideally this would link into a range of other systems, from conflicts checks to email marketing,

and possibly also client feedback surveys. The hope would be to have fewer systems, with better-quality data and simpler processes for both data input and analytics output,” he says.

Daryl Atkinson at Howard Kennedy also identifies a particular opportunity to increase CRM effectiveness as hybrid working sees people spending some more time in offices again. He says fewer days in the office for focused activity in a ‘normal’ week will allow for less ‘slack’ to meet in group settings.

“Online webinars and events will continue to be the dominant format for interesting seminars and roundtables, and as we aren’t constrained by meeting room size, catering or support resources, we can continue to promote more widely. That means we’ll continue to gain new top-of-funnel contacts we don’t know, and an AI-enabled CRM system can enable them to be assigned to partners. Automated ‘welcome’ emails can be generated, seeking to ascertain the particular interests of the individual so they can be added to appropriate mailing lists for further invitations and content.

“Simple application of CRM technology can both deepen and widen the relationship without partners having to do anything.” ▀

“Simple application of CRM technology can both deepen and widen the relationship without partners having to do anything.”

*Daryl Atkinson, business development and marketing director,
Howard Kennedy*

