

Briefing

November 2025

SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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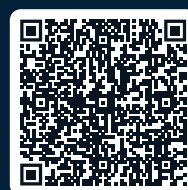


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EDITOR'S LETTER

For the last few years, the legal sector has been plagued by macroeconomic volatility, inflation, transformation frustrations and clients' new pricing expectations, all of which have been putting significant pressure on law firm operations and profitability. While firms' plans for strategic growth remain undeterred by uncertain economic conditions, according to the 2025 **Briefing**/HSBC UK law firm investment and strategy data, leaders have had to adjust their profitability strategies and pricing models to keep themselves competitive, attractive to clients, and healthily in the black.

In this issue's cover story, we speak to finance leaders from some of the top UK law firms to investigate how they are adapting their people, process and pricing strategies to meet these hefty challenges head on. We also explore what the roadmap to optimising financial management performance looks like, and hear how Travers Smith effectively ditched paper-based billing, paving the way to many other potential process improvements.

On the legal AI front, we explore how this technology is reshaping career progression in law firms, why the gender AI gap is a problem that needs addressing now, and how the sector is moving to a new stage of AI-focused planning and implementation — one defined by proof, not hype.

Innovation management also remains front of mind for many law firms. However, as the chief operating officer of Harbottle & Lewis highlights in this issue, this goes beyond technology investment. Innovation can come in many forms: for Charles Russell Speechlys' knowledge function, it has manifested in the form of a new central knowledge lawyer role — as the firm's director of knowledge outlines in our regular brain training section bringing detailed practical examples of business transformation at work. As for business development, industry experts highlight how the secret to innovation could lie in the power of strategic client intelligence.

I hope you enjoy the very varied reads on offer from **Briefing** this month, and please reach out to us any time with your own news and views to share!

ANDREEA DULGHERU **EDITOR**

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INSIDE THIS MONTH

16

THE BIG IDEA

"When it comes to pricing and value, and the evolution of technology and AI, that's a journey that the entire legal sector will be on."

Andy Stephens, chief financial officer, Browne Jacobson



UPFRONT

06 Q&A CATCHUP WITH Katja Ullrich-North, director of knowledge management at **Simmons & Simmons**

08 DATABASE Has ESG been a solid priority on law firms' agendas?

OPINION

09 Harbottle & Lewis chief operating officer Andy Wansell on why innovation is a mindset

10 Moira Slape and Rachel Woodburn at **Travers Smith** on how AI changes skillsets and career progression

11 Elite chief product officer Elisabet Hardy on the next stage of AI innovation to be managed

12 Attest Group CEO Paul Suffield on the roadmap to optimising financial performance

FEATURES

14 THE EVENT The lead scoop from **Briefing Finance Leaders**

16 THE BIG IDEA An in-depth look at how firms are managing the pillars of profitability: people, process and pricing

BRAIN TRAINING

24 Innovation and AI expert Shilpa Bhandarkar on the need to tackle the gender AI gap in legal now

26 Aileen Johnson at **Charles Russell Speechlys** on how a brand new role is proving the knowledge function's value firm-wide

INDUSTRY VIEWS

30 Mark Lake at **Travers Smith** on how **Aderant Expert** made billing a much smoother business

34 Eric Wangler at **BigHand** on why financial success requires innovation and greater transparency in billing

36 **Litera** and **Postilize** uncover the secret ingredient to levelling up BD

LAST WORD

38 **Briefing's** 15th anniversary, in pictures from our wonderful community frontline



65 SECONDS WITH KATJA ULLRICH-NORTH

Katja Ullrich-North, director of knowledge management at Simmons & Simmons and UK chair of So They Can, discusses the profound impact of education-led charity work, the importance of long-term partnerships, and the role of the legal sector in driving meaningful social change

Q When and how did you get involved in So They Can?

A The connection began late last year through colleagues who were already passionate about So They Can's mission to empower children through education. In July 2025, I had the opportunity to visit its programmes in Kenya and Tanzania with my family and board members from Australia and New Zealand. The experience was both confronting and incredibly inspiring, and led me to deepen my involvement to become chair of the charity's UK board.

What stood out was its focus on

long-term community partnerships rather than short-term aid, and a model that invests in learners, teachers, parents and schools to create lasting change.

Since then, it's been incredible to see how many people across the legal industry have joined in. Organisations such as Thomson Reuters, Totum Partners and BARBRI have committed to provide financial support and skills aimed at amplifying the charity's message. Their involvement has shown how powerful collective action can be when professional networks come together behind a shared cause.



Q What is one example that illustrates the difference the charity has made on the ground?

A The teacher training and school leadership programmes in Kenya and Tanzania are excellent examples. By equipping teachers with the tools and confidence to inspire students, So They Can is driving real transformation in classrooms and communities. In schools where the charity works, student attendance has risen dramatically, girls are staying in education longer and teachers are mentoring others to spread good practice. Those results reflect a ripple effect that continues to grow. Every success story is a testament to the support coming from individuals and organisations in the legal sector who believe in education as the most powerful route to opportunity.

Q What is one key lesson you have learned?

A One clear lesson is that sustainable change is always collaborative. Whether in education, business or law, progress happens when people align around shared purpose. So They Can's approach is rooted in partnership.

After meeting the Tanzania country manager Roselyne Mariki, and Kenya country manager Boni Mouti, I appreciated the importance of combining collaboration and local leadership to support culturally grounded and sustainable change. So They Can's approach is unique as it involves direct partnerships with government schools and active

engagement with local communities. That philosophy offers a valuable reminder for all of us: leadership is often about creating the space for others to thrive.

Q What personal values have been reinforced or challenged working with the charity?

A The experience has reinforced a belief in education as the foundation for equality and empowerment. It has also underscored the idea that professional communities like the legal sector can and should play a role in driving social impact. Perhaps the biggest challenge has been learning to embrace the slower pace of systemic change. Real progress takes time, but that patience also ensures the results endure, to effectively break the cycle of poverty.

Q What role can other law firms play, and how do you and Simmons & Simmons plan to continue supporting this charity?

A Law firms are well positioned to help by combining resources, visibility and influence. What may seem like a little for us can go a very long way. In practice, £30,000 funds a borehole at a primary school, providing safe water for the community, while £5 is enough to supply educational resources for one child for a year.

Financial support is vital, of course, but advocacy is just as powerful. When firms use their platforms to highlight an initiative like this, the message travels far beyond traditional charity networks. At Simmons & Simmons, colleagues are encouraged to support causes that we care deeply about through engagement efforts that range from fundraising through to volunteering.

I've been moved by the support we've received so far from

colleagues at other firms, and those across the wider industry ecosystem including our clients and suppliers. The industry is a powerful community and, through this, I believe we can raise the awareness we need to make lasting change and funds that are vital to support these initiatives.

Q What do you hope your legacy will be through this involvement?

A My hope is to see children empowered through education. If, through my involvement, more people across the profession feel inspired to support organisations like So They Can, that would be a legacy worth leaving. ▀



What is So They Can? It's an international NGO dedicated to transforming the lives of vulnerable children, particularly girls, through education and community-led change in East Africa. Its mission is to end child poverty by providing access to quality education. Started with one school in Kenya 16 years ago, the charity now reaches 49,500 children across 52 partner government schools in Kenya and Tanzania.

How can you help? Scan the QR code to learn how you can support So They Can:



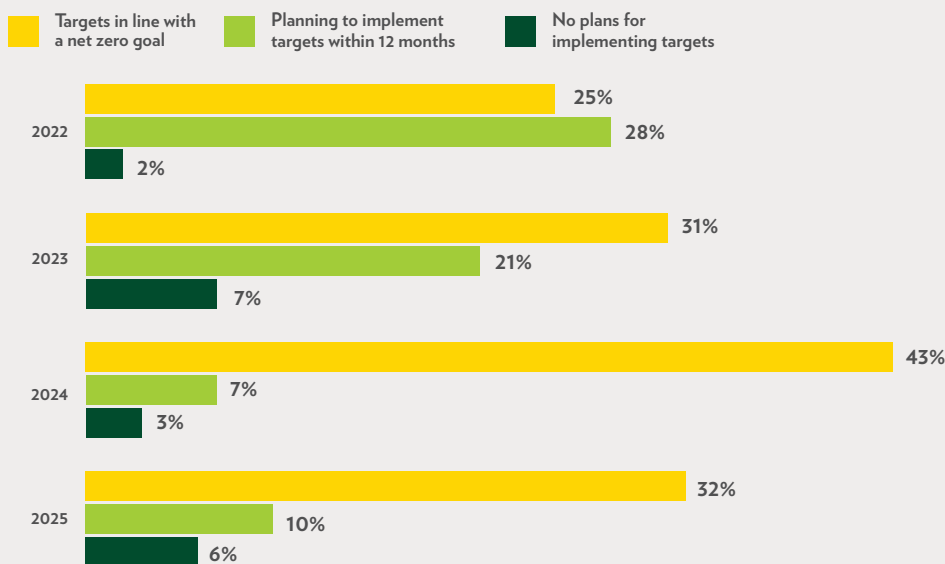


DATABASE

Have law firms' commitments to ESG initiatives grown or diminished over the years? Analysis of the Briefing/HSBC UK law firms strategy and investment data shines a spotlight on this trend

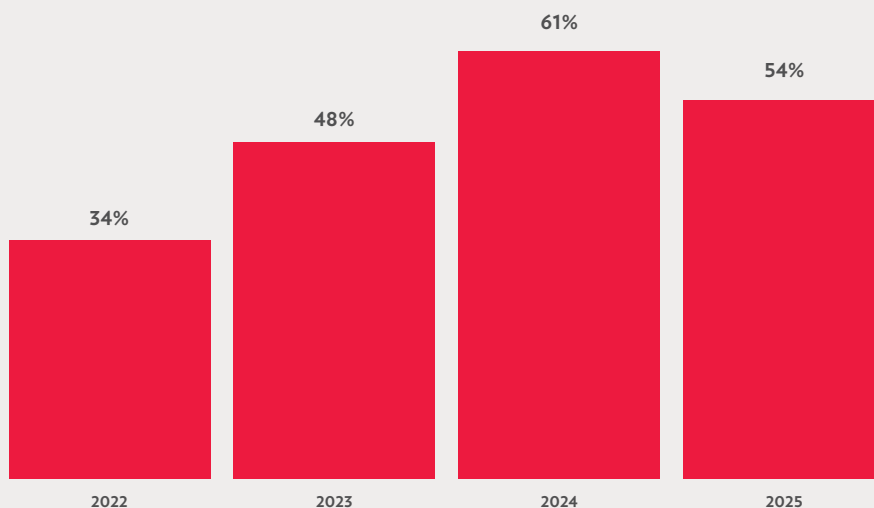
The proportion of leaders saying the firm has a net-zero target for carbon emissions reduction has been on the rise since 2022, but peaked in 2024

NUMBER OF FIRMS THAT HAVE CARBON-REDUCTION TARGETS IN PLACE



The number of strategy leaders who say their firms have specific firm-wide KPIs to set and track progress against ESG goals is generally on the rise

NUMBER OF FIRMS THAT HAVE ESG-BASED KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, ACCORDING TO LEADERS



Briefing's perspective

It is encouraging to see law firms have continued to focus on ESG over the past few years. Many firms that planned to implement targets in the past have made this a reality — showing their commitment to environmental initiatives.

It's interesting that more leaders said their firms had a net-zero carbon-reduction target in summer 2024 — especially given that less than a year before, the UK's Prime Minister at the time Rishi Sunak changed the country's net zero strategy by delaying the ban on sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 to 2035, and scrapping plans for greater energy efficiency mandates for households.

From investment in mental health and wellbeing support and upgrades to make office spaces greener, to greater diversity target ambitions, firms are consistently embracing many measures that make up ESG. This is partly driven by the demand for such proof from prospective new hires, and clients themselves — according to the Briefing/HSBC UK data, in 2022, 2023 and 2024, around 80% of leaders said their firm saw client requests for information about their firms' ESG-focused actions (either sometimes or regularly). Given the evolving ESG regulatory and compliance space and the views of new generations, these expectations are here to stay — and firms will have to comply. ▲

SPEAK UP

Innovation: an indispensable mindset

ANDY WANSELL

Chief operating officer at Harbottle & Lewis

When considering the role innovation plays in the success of a law firm, it is important to illustrate not only what innovation is, but also what it is not.

Innovation is not technology

It may sound obvious, but conflation of the two is prevalent and this reflects a failure to grasp the very nature of innovation.

Innovation should be thought of as a mindset — a lens through which every business decision is made. It is looking at everything from your most mundane habits to the weightiest pillar of your strategy, and thinking: how can we do this differently?

Investment in people is key. Law firms now rely upon the expertise of innovation specialists, however it is not for them to ‘do the innovating’ or to act as a bolt-on to teams of lawyers who otherwise continue as they were. Collaboration between the two is crucial in bringing about change and instilling an innovative mindset across the whole business.

While innovation is not technology, technology often supports innovation. In fact, in today’s environment, a firm can scarcely consider itself innovative without the backing of an armoury of tech-powered tools and platforms. The advent of AI has provided challenge and opportunity to law firms in equal measure. Those who don’t embrace it stand on a burning platform. The pace of progress is relentless and the competitive landscape unforgiving.

Ability to significantly invest in these

areas has historically been the preserve of the largest firms. This has presented a challenge to smaller and mid-sized firms as they seek to compete. But the difference in size brings its own advantages; being smaller can mean being more agile and having fewer walls of bureaucracy to break through. When done right, this can mean innovation at speed.

This is a challenge we embrace at Harbottle & Lewis, where we’ve established our own Innovation Fund used to invest in solutions designed to unlock opportunities from ideas generated across the business. This has embedded innovation in the foundations of how we operate and been an important driver behind our recent strong financial performance.

The pressure to innovate comes from many sides. Aside from the need to keep pace with peers, pressure increasingly comes from clients. Transparency is, rightly, an expectation and firms must explain to their clients how they are using innovation to improve efficiency and, of course, reflect this in their pricing. Not doing so can make the difference when appointing counsel.

We are way past innovation being an optional luxury. The degree to which this mindset is effectively implanted will be a material factor in distinguishing the firms who succeed from those who fall away. ▀



The advent of AI has provided challenge and opportunity to law firms in equal measure. Those who don’t embrace it stand on a burning platform

SPEAK UP

Learning and career progression in the AI-enabled law firm



RACHEL WOODBURN and MOIRA SLAPE

Director of knowledge and learning and chief people officer at Travers Smith



The legal sector is adapting to AI with uncharacteristic speed and agility, with important implications for training and performance assessment.

AI can perform tasks that were an important training ground for junior lawyers, and firms are questioning how juniors will develop expertise if deprived of significant workplace learning experiences, such as due diligence and other resource-intensive tasks at which AI excels.

Addressing the knowledge gap

Lawyers will still need critical analysis skill, expert legal knowledge and practical experience to interpret and refine AI-generated content effectively. AI platforms are capable of critical analysis, but human judgment is needed to determine whether their conclusions are sound. So, preserving the breadth and depth of traditional legal training and skills development seems sensible and necessary.

Continuing to facilitate the capture and sharing of tacit knowledge and practical insight of experienced lawyers remains important. At Travers Smith, we are keen to preserve the learning opportunities provided by our room-sharing model. This type of learning will always be at the

heart of how our lawyers develop expertise and ability to make the fine judgment calls that will continue to distinguish success.

Adapt to survive

However, lawyers must become more proficient at

interacting with technology, evidenced by the growing trend in hybrid legal/tech training contracts. Rather than developing a new career pathway, Travers Smith's current approach is to weave new tech skills (for example, developing AI applications, prompt drafting skills, rules for safe use) into existing training programmes, reflecting the extent to which technology is now embedded in our day-to-day.

Firms should also embrace advances in training design and delivery, including more 'experiential' training which matches the learning preferences of generation Z/Alpha. For example, we are currently seeing the emergence of virtual reality platforms for professional skills training, and law schools using AI to spot gaps in students' knowledge and channel relevant learning resources.

A broader skillset?

Firms shouldn't overlook the need to upskill lawyers in critical business and people skills (such as project management and business development), which are less vulnerable to the march of technology. Lawyers of the future must be multi-talented professionals and traditional competency frameworks are evolving to reflect this broad skillset, including new tech and innovation skills.

Entirely new career pathways are also emerging, including legal technology specialists trained at law firms, who facilitate close collaboration with lawyers on the development of legal tech products. These new pathways are attractive both to lawyers looking for a new challenge and to new entrants with different skillsets. ▴

Lawyers of the future must be multi-talented professionals and traditional competency frameworks are evolving to reflect this broad skillset

INDUSTRY VIEW

AI's reality check has arrived

ELISABET HARDY

Chief product officer at Elite

The legal industry doesn't need another AI demo. It needs a reality check.

For years, we've been dazzled by what AI could do — drafting documents, analysing contracts, summarising calls. But for all the noise, the real question remains unsolved: where is the measurable value?

That question is about to separate the serious players from the showmen. The firms moving ahead aren't chasing novelty, they're demanding proof that AI can be audited, that it can be embedded in day-to-day workflows, and that it removes unprofitable work, not just speeds it up. Because let's be honest: efficiency isn't the revolution, unified intelligence is.

Unified intelligence means that a firm's financial, operational and client data are connected through one architecture — where AI doesn't operate in isolation, but learns from every interaction across the business. When systems talk to each other, insight compounds, forecasts sharpen and redundancy disappears. The result is not just automation, but an intelligent core that continually improves how the firm operates and decides. That's what makes AI measurable, trustworthy and transformative.

The promise of AI isn't simply faster reconciliation or quicker reporting. It's a system where data, process and insight operate as one — where information flows freely across the business and decisions become predictive, not reactive.

That's the shift now taking shape as

law firms mature in their adoption. The conversation is moving from curiosity to consequence. Leaders are asking harder questions:

- Can AI stand up to governance, audit and compliance scrutiny?
- Can it explain its outputs and decisions?
- Can it integrate with how the firm actually works — not how a vendor showed it in a demo?

Most importantly: can it prove a return on investment that's real, repeatable and defensible?

This is where the shakeout begins. The era of 'innovation theatre' — where AI lived in slides and sizzle reels — is ending. What will endure are the use cases that are measurable, governed and invisible in their precision.

The firms that thrive in this next phase won't talk about 'using AI'. They'll operate inside systems where intelligence is unified, not bolted on, and performance is thus amplified.

The hype cycle has had its turn. The proof cycle has arrived. ▀



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The firms moving ahead aren't chasing novelty, they're demanding proof that AI can be audited, that it can be embedded in day-to-day workflows, and that it removes unprofitable work, not just speeds it up

INDUSTRY VIEW



Mapping your way to profit

PAUL SUFFIELD

Managing director at Attest Group

When we think about people, process and pricing — particularly from the perspective of optimising financial performance — we must also include data. In the context of the growing legal services market, a data-driven approach to financial performance optimisation will give firms the insight to capitalise on growth.

Clearly understanding how the firm onboards and services clients from beginning to end, and how the firm manages its people through the delivery and reporting of KPIs, is a crucial first step in improving financial performance.

A firm must know and document how it currently delivers the core financial processes of order-to-cash, procure-to-pay and record-to-report. Once these are understood, they can then be leveraged against the other business services processes that intersect with that — for example, the people record within HR. The firm can then get a clearer view of availability, utilisation realisation and profitability. How the firm reports on these key metrics will ultimately dictate its ability to optimise financial performance drivers.

Understanding the end-to-end client engagement and collections process is just as important. This as-is mapping of people, process and pricing will highlight any duplications, particularly in reporting. Identifying automation opportunities and efficiency gains in these areas is essential. AI can help firms achieve this without the traditional scaling of full-time equivalent requirements in business services.

However, depending on the scale and the complexity of the firm, gathering this understanding can be challenging. One of

the challenges I've seen in many firms is getting an accurate, timely and transparent record-to-report process. Many firms still manage this offline in Excel, leading to delays and weeks-long period close processes, making it difficult to access the right information at the right time.

Technology has a critical role to play here — as it drives the firm to take time and understand the as-is state, and provides the solutions to boost end-to-end financial efficiency. Corporate performance management suites, for example, enable firms to model internal and external scenarios against actuals to unlock opportunities for improvement.

When it comes to the pricing element, it's not just about enhancing the process of creating quotes on matters, it is also about tracking the performance and the delivery of that matter against a budget. Again, technology is essential, helping firms to model alternative fee arrangements and track their performance by linking the data assets in core business systems.

Ultimately, optimising financial performance is about getting timely insight to enable data-driven decisions about both revenue and expense strategies, answering key profitability questions: who are we investing our time in? How productive are our people? How effective is our pricing? What additional services could we offer to what clients?

Understanding the core processes and the people who interact with them must be the foundation of any project for optimising financial performance. If elements such as pricing are looked at in isolation, firms will struggle to take advantage of the technologies that will truly drive change. ▴

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A data-driven approach to financial performance optimisation will give firms the insight to capitalise on growth

FEATURES



14

THE EVENT

Richard Brent hears conversations about driving financial process improvement with deeper insight and purposeful collaboration at **Briefing** Finance Leaders

16

THE BIG IDEA

An in-depth look at how firms are managing the pillars of profitability: people, process and pricing

EVENT REPORT

ON THE MONEY FINANCE LEADERS ASSEMBLE

Law firm chief financial officers of 2026 must choose which changes are worth the investment. Richard Brent reviews our annual **Briefing** meetup of the guardians of profitability

As the big, bad budget day in the UK looms, speculation grows as to which levers will be pulled to bring in additional revenue — including the thorny prospect of a new tax for partnerships.

The smell of uncertainty already permeated the air back in September, when **Briefing** firm finance leaders gathered to discuss the latest state of strategic play. You'd need to have been living under a boulder not to know the economy has long been only just bumping along with rather low growth, albeit as headline inflation eases somewhat — and conditions aren't exactly expected to nourish the environment for potential investors any time soon. Productivity is, of course, a connected problem — where dials may be moved through strategic investment in either efficiency-enhancing technology (including AI), or the competitive, growth-friendly human skillsets innovation promises to release to thrive. It is likely that, further off, AI could also pave paths to some services with different resourcing models and delivery channels.

Our panel of finance leaders made the point that firms can't sidestep economic uncertainty but

must work with it — indeed, it invariably generates legal work. However, steering with steady hands needs a joined-up approach to working, armed with reliable data that can alert us to risks and identify client opportunities.

Jenny Elgie, chief financial officer at Womble Bond Dickinson, outlined how the firm has moved to give fee earners more accessible, on-point data about different aspects of performance, including client payment, through a set of business-intelligence apps. Combined with a review of policies, partners are clearer about steps they must take to pull their weight on firm-wide lockup performance.

Andy Stephens, chief financial officer at Browne Jacobson, said data-serving technology can also help to track indicators such as payment trends and deviations. This empowers you to act early, if





Steering with steady hands needs a joined-up approach to working, armed with reliable data that can alert as to risks and identify client opportunities

FEEDBACK FOCUS IN BRIEF

Roundtable leader groups discussed different approaches to cut lockup time and protect key working capital, with a watchful eye on the ultimate prize of profitability. Here is a selection of practical possible process improvements:

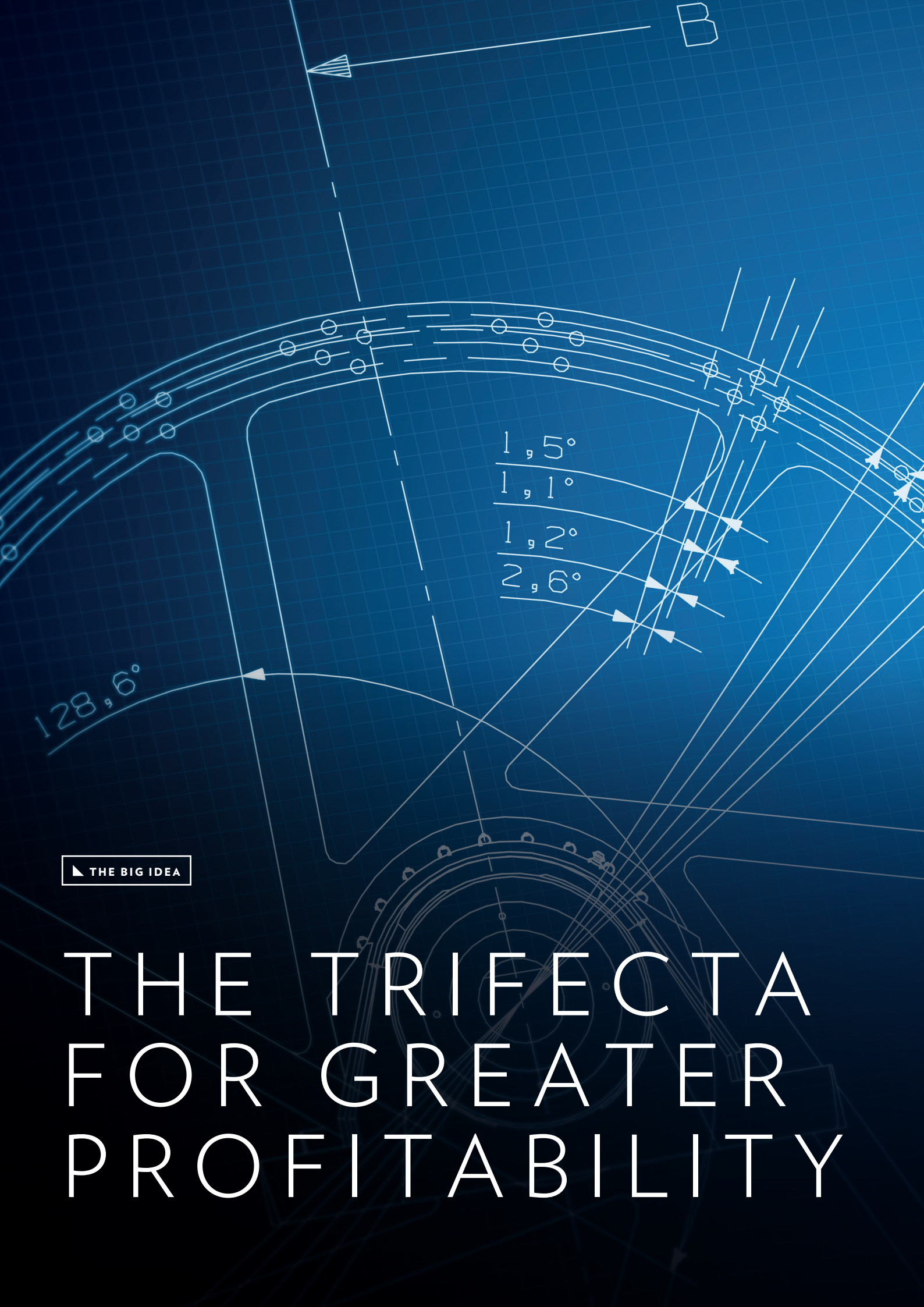
- Establish a feedback loop to identify key problem process inefficiencies earlier.
- Encourage a form of internal competition to help to cultivate behaviours you want to see — consider both rewards and penalties as incentives.
- ‘Commercial mindset’
- prowess isn’t one-size-fits-all — establish both a base line and ‘gold standard’ across aspects, including data literacy. Give clear examples where client pricing conversations aren’t inevitably difficult to start a crackdown on default-discounting.
- Establish opportunities for automation already available before turning to additional AI — although the latter can support effective time-recording among other uses.
- Bill more regularly in the first place to see less of an unruly rush for the finish line!

not always at the first sign — although a human is still usually required to initiate action and frame the right conversation.

Indeed, supporting the human in a loop like this is a reason for the role of finance ‘business partner’ — increasingly in demand, we heard, to effectively bridge the demands of back-office and client experience; and perhaps building partner confidence to battle on the latter front in the process. Right-sizing investment in appropriately attractive, future-fit workspaces also has a part to play in sustaining a collaboratively high-performance culture across all aspects of the work.


Clearly, finance leaders must also take proactive steps themselves to anticipate possible futures. For example, how will office footprint and requirements evolve if a larger role for AI in legal work changes the partner pyramid/business-support structures more fundamentally? Rhona Ibrahim, commercial pricing manager at Fieldfisher, also underlined that the time to invest in a more collaborative approach to dissecting and defining client value in an ‘AI age’ is now. Firms must treat need for pricing change seriously — whether rethinking a traditional rate card setup for lawyer time in light of tech advances, or much more fundamental shifts such as subscription models and different options that lead to growth at either margin or market share level. ▲





THE BIG IDEA

THE TRIFECTA FOR GREATER PROFITABILITY



Cash remains king, but the legal world is changing. There are more options promising to power up efficiency than ever, but they often come with a hefty price tag too. Firms can't afford to take eyes off the profit margin, and are their people even prepared to change how they approach commercial matters? Maria Shahid reports

The persistent economic volatility, inflation, rapid technological advances demanding serious spending power, and changing client expectations around pricing and levels of service, are creating a perfect storm — one that is putting pressure on law firms' profitability.

The latest PwC law firm survey data revealed how some firms have fared so far. The top 10 global firms have seen a 0.6 percentage points rise in average net profit margin to 37.4%. Many UK firms have also seen modest increases in net profit margin, with the highest seen among the top 51-100 firms (1.1 percentage points rise). However, not all firms saw success — net profit margin among the top 11-25 global law firms fell by 0.3 percentage points (to 25%), while the top 26-50 UK firms saw a 0.9 percentage points drop (to 24.3%).

Technology and AI have certainly made firms rethink their profitability strategies. For a start, the promise of greater efficiency (and potential cost savings in some areas) may be partly offset by the high prices of legal-specific solutions — according to the 2025 **Briefing**/HSBC UK law firm strategy and investment survey, firms' average technology spend has jumped to 6.5% of annual revenue.

This increased productivity is also resulting in growing client expectations that this efficiency will translate into lower fees; indeed, over a third (35%) of the 2025 **Briefing**/HSBC UK research participants see client pressure around price as a major challenge they must find ways to manage, and PwC data shows more than half of firms have concerns about price erosion as a result of improvements in efficiency.

Alongside this is the growing fear that AI will mean more clients wanting to ‘reclaim’ work as they embrace new technology — in early 2025, Thomson Reuters’ latest State of the legal market report found that 28% of UK-based legal departments planned to reduce legal services spend this year.

Add to this a list of many other factors — office costs, investment in cybersecurity measures, and bank debt for example — and you’ve got an equation for profitability filled with variables. Given rapid developments, firms are having to reconsider their profitability strategies and pricing models.

Structuring fees commercially

Demonstrating value is now more important than ever, as is the need to develop client relationships into strategic partnerships.

Andy Stephens, chief financial officer at Browne Jacobson, says: “Not everything is about chasing every pound of profit. Rather than investing in those short-term profit maximisation activities, sometimes you are much better off investing in long-term, enduring client relationships. That is more important than ever nowadays, as clients are reassessing how much they need to use external legal advisers.”

He adds: “Clients are much more informed and educated about options. They are intelligent procurers of legal services, and we’ve got to get better at being not just good lawyers, but trusted advisers.”

Adapting to clients’ needs, and structuring fees accordingly, is an important part of this exercise, says Ian Caulfield, head of finance at Ellisons. “We are a commercial firm, and are willing to listen to clients and structure fees in a way that works for both them and us. For example, we are undertaking more work on a risk-sharing basis, where a discounted hourly rate is charged but with a success fee or uplift should the matter resolve in our client’s favour.”

Reassessment of pricing models

Legal tech has undergone a period of exponential growth, with AI tools able to power

up the efficiency of carrying out routine legal processes. However, with this increased efficiency comes concern that, as in-house counsel become more value-driven — according to **Briefing**/HSBC data, almost a third of leaders say they hear more clients asking for value-based pricing — firms will need to offer alternative pricing models that focus more on output than time taken.

Technology investment brings with it a number of associated costs, for both updating infrastructure and software and training staff. Knowing how to recover this cost is an ongoing

“Technology like AI will certainly put pressure on firms to come up with different ways of valuing the work they do for clients.”

Chris Stanton, chief financial officer at Shoosmiths





challenge for finance leaders, and one that may need to be addressed through value pricing.

Chris Stanton, chief financial officer at Shoosmiths, says: “Assessing the value associated with a piece of work from a client’s perspective is inherently hard, and the chargeable hour has historically been used as a proxy for this. Technology like AI will certainly put pressure on firms to come up with different ways of valuing the work they do for clients.

“There are different ways you can deal with that: you can either move away from hourly pricing entirely, or build that ‘tech premium’ or ‘tech value’ into the chargeable hours model. You could easily argue that something delivered faster or better than could be done by a human should have a premium attached to it. However, clients will say that if the task didn’t take as long [to complete], why should they pay as much? There’s a shifting dynamic there between law firms and their clients.

“We are trying to communicate this to people internally, and to build that confidence, so they can go out to the market and have those conversations with clients. Where previously a product or a service might have been the result

of humans doing 1,000 hours of working on a transaction, now that might be 600 hours and a whole load of technology sitting behind. We have to figure out how we communicate that both internally and externally.”

Gareth Jones, chief financial officer at Freeths, acknowledges his firm is still quite early in that learning journey. “One fee earner comment has been: ‘We have this product now, which allows us to do the job in seven minutes, so I will charge the client for that time’. But this fails to recognise that you are paying for expertise. The example I give is that of buying a coffee: you might get that coffee somewhere for 60p, but people are still going to Starbucks to pay £4.90 for it.”

Closing the skills gap

Tighter client budgets require fee earners to be equipped with the skills to value and sell their expertise, negotiate fees effectively and overcome the challenges in cash collection.

Browne Jacobson recently reset its internal goals to raise commercial awareness among lawyers using a series of roadshows. Stephens says: “We have really transformed the level of



transparency and visibility of our finances. We literally go to every office with all of the leadership team.

“A lot of people get promoted, and while they may be really good lawyers, no one tells them how to go about conducting pricing negotiation. So we are doing a lot more of that, alongside helping people to really understand the drivers of how we make money.”


Ellisons has also rolled out training for partners and fee earners to instil some pricing fundamentals across the firm. “This includes understanding that pricing is a confidence game,” explains Caulfield. “We need our fee earners to be cognisant of the value they bring to the client, not just the time it will take to complete a matter.” And ideally to avoid the quadruple discount, he adds: “quoting low to win work, under-recording time, reducing the invoice and accepting a price chip.

“We also educate our clients that, if they have an urgent piece of work, it will come at a premium, and encourage fee earners to record all their matters to allow us to assess profitability of work even if that is done on a fixed fee.”

Stanton notes that his team collaborates with the marketing and business development function as much on improving pricing confidence and negotiation techniques as it does on reminding fee earners of the firm’s value and position in the market.

“We are constantly working on the internal perception of what the firm does externally,” he says. “Shoosmiths has been on a bit of a journey over the last 10 years, so it’s about moving those internal perceptions of value to match where we are now. We’ve worked hard on ensuring our people believe the proposition we offer to clients.”

Jones adds that lawyers must also understand the fundamentals of what drives profit as well as leakage. “It starts with looking at where you lose profit, which can happen in several ways. First, there is productivity — if you have a lawyer who is not doing anything and you are still paying them, you’ve got an idle asset. Second, when a piece of work comes in, who do you give it to? If a junior and a senior lawyer could both do it, the latter might be able to do it faster, but ultimately it will cost more per hour. Then you’re thinking about recoverability if on a fixed fee, and where you can maximise the return.”



When it comes to incentivising lawyers to deliver on financial goals, firms are often using a ‘carrot and stick’ approach, with metrics based on personal performance, billable targets in the case of fee earners, and the overall success of the firm. Stephens says: “If our business does well, as we have done over the last couple of years, we pay bonuses as an enhanced multiple. This means people are incentivised to maximise personal performance, but in such a way that it benefits the whole firm. It’s like the rising tide that benefits all the boats in the harbour.”

Tech’s role in process and profitability

Inefficiencies in the work-to-cash cycle are also starting to be addressed through technology, although ultimately some benefits that should come will take time to flow through.

Stephens continues: “While technology and AI have the potential to speed up billing, the true nature of a law firm is that there’s always a human interaction. With all these tech products, I still need the fee earner to raise the bill, so some benefits of solutions will take a while to realise. There must be a cultural shift as well.”

Shoosmiths is using a new inception system that captures much data, notes Stanton. The firm has also started to look at credit control

processes, and where more automation can be used to chase clients. “You can see a situation where AI could run over a client’s profile and check their payment history. That type of process refinement to target specific areas that need a nudge can be really helpful when you’ve got thousands of invoices to chase.”

One of the biggest challenges is still unbilled work in progress (WIP), adds Caulfield. “It’s something we monitor closely. To mitigate we have introduced interim billing where possible, and centralised the billing process for a number of departments. The billing team will identify all billable WIP and raise bills unless otherwise requested by the fee earner, which has really improved lockup.”

Budgeting and business planning

Turning to the longer term, horizon-scanning through the uncertainty is simply vital in the current market, and some firms are adopting technology solutions to help them here too.

“An adaptive planning tool we brought in is really helping us to streamline our forecasting and planning,” says Stephens. “We built a financial planning and analysis function into that product, and are now evolving it into cashflow management as well. It’s about using technology as a facilitator, rather than necessarily radically transforming operations.”

While their corporate clients might be nervous of current market uncertainties and changes the forthcoming autumn budget could bring, finance leaders remain confident in their ability to ride these forces out. “Geopolitical and economic uncertainty may be rife, but there’s actually still plenty of work to be done,” concludes Stephens. “When it comes to pricing, value, and the evolution of technology and AI, it’s a journey the entire legal sector will be on. The pace of change is accelerating, but it’s not all going to happen overnight.” ▀

“The true nature of a law firm is that there’s always a human interaction. With all these tech products, I still need the fee earner to raise the bill, so some benefits of solutions will take a while to realise. There must be a cultural shift as well.”

*Andy Stephens, chief financial officer at
Browne Jacobson*



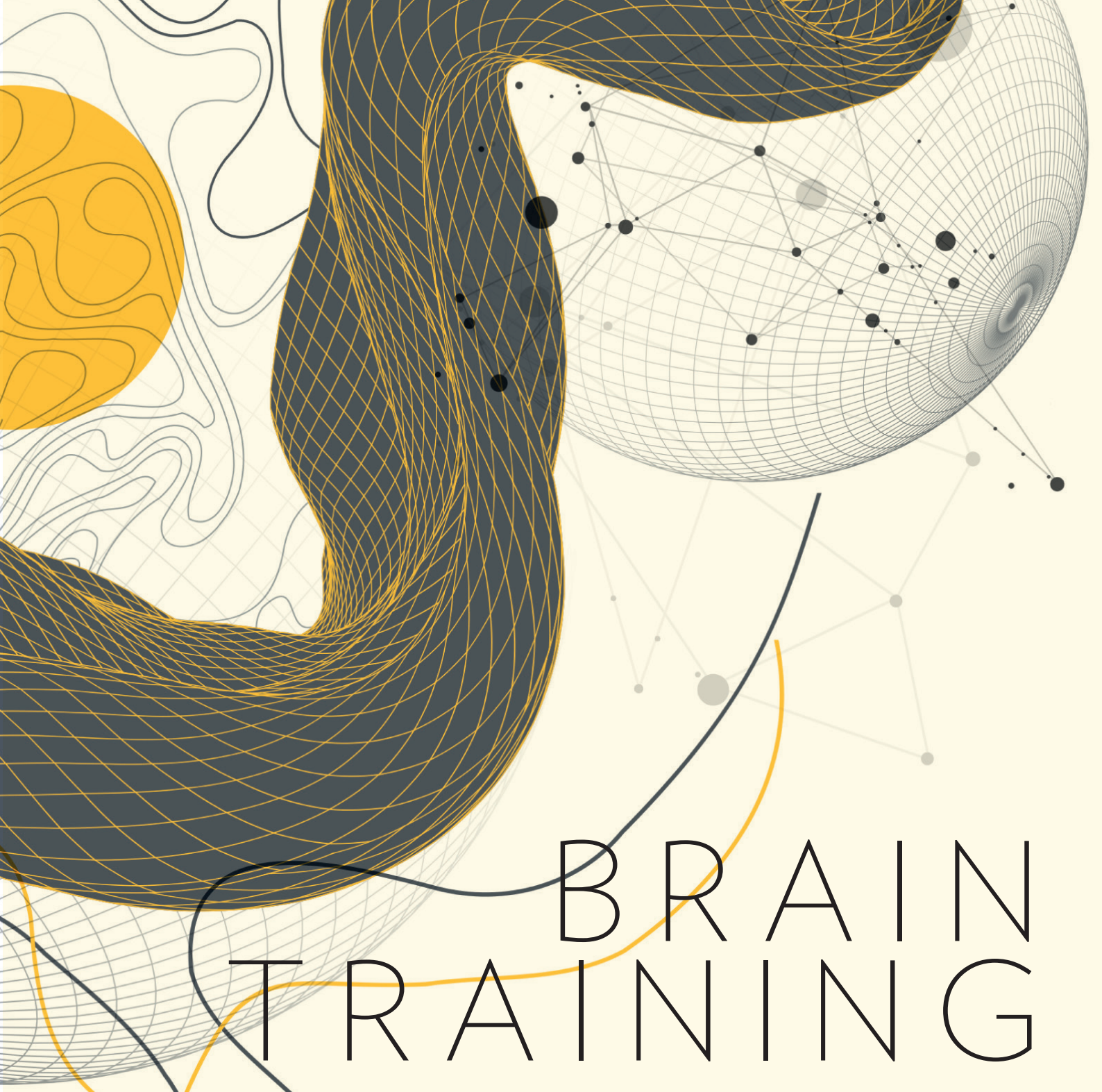
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BRAIN TRAINING

24

ADDRESSING THE GENDER AI GAP

Innovation and AI expert
Shilpa Bhandarkar on the
need to tackle the risk of
systemic bias entering
alongside game-changing
process transformation

26

EVOLUTION, REVOLUTION AND TRANSFORMATION

Aileen Johnson at **Charles
Russell Speechlys** on how a
brand new role is proving the
knowledge function's value
firm-wide

HANDS ON

THE GENDER AI GAP MUST BE ADDRESSED NOW

While AI offers many benefits to law firms, it also risks bringing in systemic gender bias, most clearly evidenced in fewer women adopting it. Left unaddressed, this could lead to women being excluded from this tech revolution, writes AI and innovation strategist Shilpa Bhandarkar

The current phase of digital transformation, powered by AI advancements, is creating huge waves of change across every industry and sector. However, research is increasingly evidencing a substantial gender gap in AI adoption.

Data from app analytics firm Appfigures shows nearly 85% of ChatGPT's mobile users are male. Meanwhile, a report published by Berkeley, Harvard and Stanford found that "the gender gap in adoption is nearly universal... from mothers in Mumbai to managers in

Madrid, women use AI less than men."

This is not entirely surprising when you consider the lack of gender diversity in the tech sector more broadly. There is a serious lack of female representation at nearly all stages of the AI lifecycle, from research and development to policy and regulation. This, coupled with algorithmic bias stemming from historical gender bias in our datasets, ends up creating AI tools that are perpetuating — if not exacerbating — a gender gap.

The legal sector is no exception. According to the No Woman Left Behind: Closing the AI Gender Gap

in Law report published last year, one of the key barriers to adoption identified by women who participated in the study is the entrenched bias in the AI products available to them. These tools have been observed to default to male pronouns and creating stereotypical images. One respondent noted an example of a female lawyer who was only able to get the tone of an email right when she explicitly asked for it to be written as a man.

It is particularly unsettling when you consider the pace of AI advancement and the wide spectrum of settings which now



lose when AI mistakes are made, owing to societal factors affecting their confidence and the fear of harsher judgment for errors. This fear is not unfounded — recent market research showed that the competence penalty was twice as severe for the women in the study compared to the men.

Breaking the gender AI barriers

The report sets out several actionable recommendations to address the AI gender gap and ensure women are set up for success. One of the key steps firms must take is to provide dedicated time for training and upskilling female employees, and offer opportunities to get practical experience using AI tools. Organisations should consider providing online, self-paced training programmes to accommodate different work schedules, which is especially important for women balancing work and caregiving.

Another recommendation is for firms to actively foster inclusive recruitment and support women into senior AI leadership roles — the power of mentorship and role modelling cannot be underestimated.

It is also important to audit AI tools for bias to ensure that the ones being onboarded into firms do not perpetuate (intentionally or otherwise) existing gender biases. Firms should also involve diverse teams in product development and deployment, as they are more likely to spot and mitigate biases in AI design and implementation than homogenous teams.

Finally, firms need to be mindful of how they communicate their plans and ambitions around AI. They should avoid 'tech elitism', and frame AI as a tool to solve everyday business problems rather than

something only for technology experts. The more inclusive the language is, the higher the engagement will likely be.

Next steps towards a truly inclusive innovation landscape

As Priya Lele, co-founder and chair at She Breaks the Law says "the legal profession cannot afford to let AI become yet another advancement barrier for women. Now more than ever, it is imperative that organisations champion inclusive practices and foster environments where women's voices are not only heard, but are integral in driving innovation. Only by embracing inclusive strategies can we unlock AI's full potential as a tool for progress".

This research is just the beginning of the journey to ensure that AI serves as a catalyst — rather than a barrier — for equality within the legal sector and beyond. If women continue to shun AI and genAI, they might well fall behind in building the valuable skills they will need to succeed in an AI-enabled world — which could then widen the already persistent gender gap in wages and career opportunities we have seen for decades.

Closing the AI gender gap requires men and women to take an active stance, addressing challenges head on. Whether mastering new AI tools, scrutinising AI applications within firms, or raising awareness about gender disparities, everyone can contribute to ensure women are not left behind. ▴

Closing the AI gender gap requires men and women to take an active stance, addressing challenges head on

employ AI — including in recruitment tools, talent pipelines, case outcomes, financial reporting and healthcare, to name a few. Used in such crucial areas, it is not hard to imagine how biased AI outputs could significantly disadvantage women in the workplace, possibly restricting access to new roles and promotion opportunities, for example.

Respondents also raised concerns about accuracy. While inaccurate results impact all users, they have a potentially disproportionate negative impact on female lawyers — put simply, women have more to



EVOLUTION, REVOLUTION AND TRANSFORMATION

▶ HANDS ON

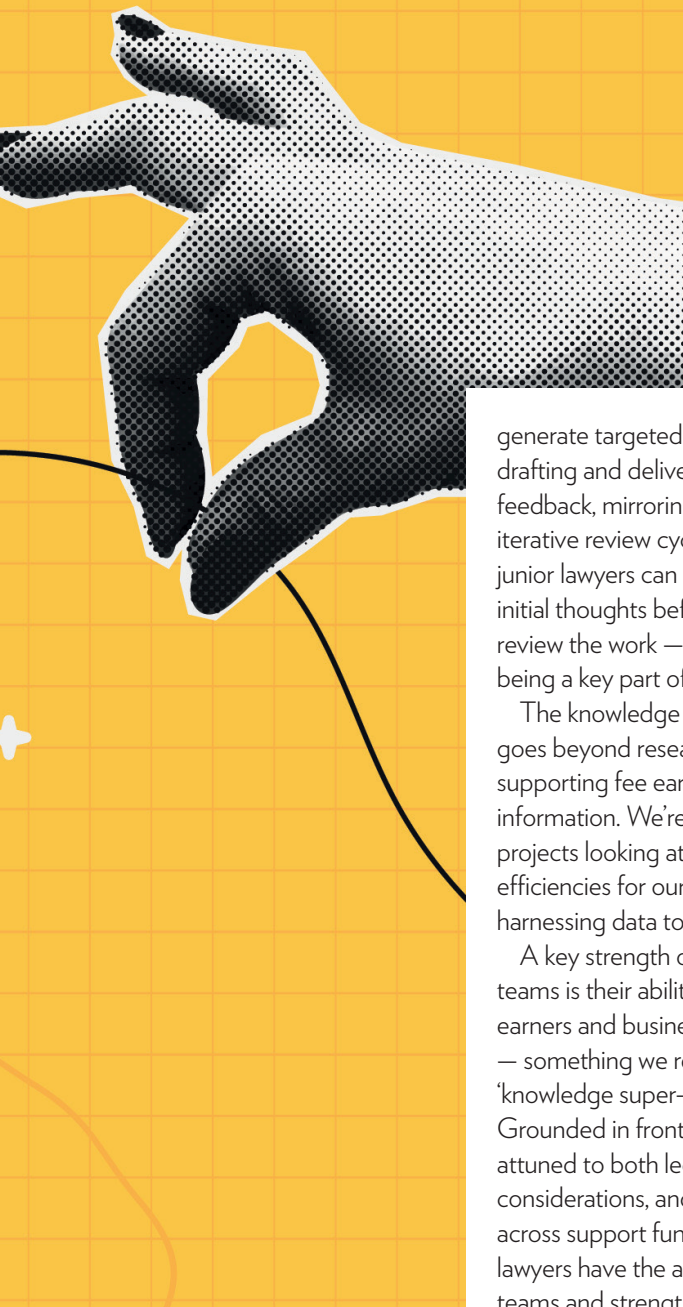
Aileen Johnson, director of knowledge management at Charles Russell Speechlys, reflects on the circumstances that have influenced the creation of a new central knowledge lawyer position — and how this role is embodying the growing influence of the knowledge function

Nowadays, the legal sector is changing at a rapid pace, and knowledge teams have had to adapt to this just as fast — with knowledge lawyers having to become more tech savvy, ultra flexible and dynamic.

The value of human skills to better understand clients' perspectives, forge connections and surface opportunities has never been more critical than now, in the current tech-enabled world. And with the regulatory environment changing so often and so fast, fee earners are under pressure to stay on top of it to

be able to deliver valuable legal services to their clients.

Naturally, this has resulted in a need for more training to help fee earners keep abreast of these changes. At Charles Russell Speechlys, we are seeing much more legal training delivered by the knowledge team. The pace of change also means that we are looking at more dynamic ways to structure training — moving away from the traditional training programmes developed in anticipation of legal changes, or 'vanilla' content delivered by external providers. We are now drawing more



on our internal expertise to deliver bespoke training quickly.

An example of this is our AI Accelerator Programme (named after particle accelerators, indicating the speed of change). It incorporates 'evergreen' online learning modules alongside live webinars with subject matter experts in the room who can answer questions immediately. Live sessions are recorded and can be watched on demand, but everyone is upskilled quickly, and the benefits of AI are realised as soon as possible.

I can also see AI being used more actively in training — as it can

generate targeted questions, review drafting and deliver structured feedback, mirroring the partner's iterative review cycle. Trainees and junior lawyers can road test their initial thoughts before supervisors review the work — the latter still being a key part of the workflow.

The knowledge function's role goes beyond research and supporting fee earners with information. We're now integral to projects looking at increasing efficiencies for our clients and harnessing data to do so.

A key strength of knowledge teams is their ability to connect fee earners and business services teams — something we refer to as the 'knowledge super-highway'. Grounded in frontline legal practice, attuned to both legal and practical considerations, and networked across support functions, knowledge lawyers have the ability to align teams and strengthen client delivery. The knowledge team makes critical connections across the firm, creates opportunities for growth by raising awareness of what other teams and offices do, and unlocks new work by cross-selling the firm's multiple service lines.

A new role enters the ranks

Our firm's core focus is understanding people and building meaningful relationships, and achieving these goals can't be realised by technology alone.

This client-led approach brought about the strategic hire of a central knowledge lawyer — a role we created to deepen our understanding of the client

perspective and apply an in-house lens to our offering, and also support internal knowledge gathering and sharing across the firm.

We designed this role to span many duties. On the client-facing side, the central knowledge lawyer is responsible for helping to develop knowledge products to cross-sell the firm's multiple service lines and unlock work, deliver bespoke legal and regulatory horizon-scanning products for clients and support the business development team with pitches — all so we can ultimately provide clients with a better service going forward. The remit of the role also includes delivering sessions to internal stakeholders on in-house perspectives. Meanwhile, on the internal-facing knowledge side, we wanted this role to help develop knowledge strategies that align with the firm's strategic priorities, develop KPIs for knowledge to demonstrate success and ROI and, above all, to be the bridge connecting the firm's different functions for greater collaboration.

With such vast responsibilities, selecting the right person for the job was paramount — and we looked carefully at the qualities we wanted that would deliver the most impact.

The knowledge function's role goes beyond research and supporting fee earners with information. We're now integral to projects looking at increasing efficiencies for our clients and harnessing data to do so

This new role is highlighting the need for us to have a ‘GC mindset’, to stretch beyond our immediate areas of expertise and view challenges as opportunities — an imperative in the fast-paced, ever-changing world in which we now operate

The ability to deliver client-focused knowledge that anticipates their needs was a given — something that is clearly aligned with our knowledge and firm strategic priorities. Experience of working in a busy in-house team, bringing with it a true understanding of the day-to-day pressures faced by some of the people who instruct us, was also a key requirement. We wanted someone who had lived and breathed this kind of role.

On top of this, we needed someone who could bring ideas to the table and forge connections across a broad stakeholder base along with great listening skills — as the immediate priority was to observe, gather information and identify gaps and opportunities.

This role is practice-group agnostic: the benefit being the ability to maintain oversight of our knowledge offerings across the board, with a view to facilitate knowledge sharing and repurposing in order to maximise the value of our expertise. For example, we can adapt ideas that have worked well for a particular client and use them for other matters and clients to try to unlock work across new service lines.

The role has certainly brought a fresh pair of eyes to some of our client-facing knowledge products and content. Our new recruit, Helena Heaton, has worked with fee

earners, business development and relevant knowledge lawyers to revamp these offerings in order to increase user engagement and ultimately benefit clients. And the proof is in the pudding: on her second day at the firm, our new recruit had already refined a pitch document for a new client — which went on to receive feedback that we offer “a comprehensive and bespoke approach that reflects a good understanding of client needs”.

This new role is highlighting the need for us to have a ‘GC mindset’, to stretch beyond our immediate areas of expertise and view challenges as opportunities — an imperative in the fast-paced, ever-changing world in which we now operate.

Not only that, but it emphasises the essential value of business

services — and the knowledge function in particular — in client delivery and facilitating more cross-functional collaboration across the firm. It has done so by convening open, context-rich dialogue about the world in which clients operate — their day-to-day pressures alongside the broader legal, regulatory and economic landscape. The highly collaborative nature of the role means we can bring expert insights from across business services to practice group teams at the right moment to meet our clients’ needs.

By fusing trusted knowledge, human judgment and responsible AI, our knowledge team upskills our lawyers at speed and turns relentless change into measurable client value — ensuring we lead the way, not follow behind. ▴

THE CENTRAL KNOWLEDGE LAWYER’S PERSPECTIVE

“Having been ‘on the other side’, I can give fee earners a window into what life is like for in-house lawyers and what the day-to-day really entails. We are developing knowledge products that cross-sell the firm’s service lines and give clients more of what they actually want.

In a world dominated by technology, clients want more than technical excellence — they want people they can call who understand the challenges they face and can deliver what they need. Experience working in-house teaches you to get comfortable with uncertainty, to be a creative thinker and back yourself to make a call. I am motivated by being able to do anything that can help our clients meet their challenges of unmanageable volumes, insufficient resources, and demanding stakeholders in an increasingly complex legal environment.”



INDUSTRY VIEWS

30

TRANSFORMATION TO SIMPLER TIMES FOR FINANCIAL PROCESS

Mark Lake at **Travers Smith** discusses how **Aderant Expert** transformed billing into a smoother process in support of stronger cashflow

34

THE KEY INGREDIENTS FOR FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Eric Wangler at **BigHand** explains why financial success requires innovation and greater transparency in billing

36

BD 'SIGNALS' HELP FIRMS MAP FUTURE BUSINESS

Litera and **Postilize** uncover the secret ingredient to levelling up legal business development

INDUSTRY CASE STUDY

TRANSFORMATION TO SIMPLER TIMES FOR FINANCIAL PROCESS

Mark Lake, head of business systems at Travers Smith, outlines how choosing Aderant Expert for its practice management system has cut the manual effort and regular problems of inefficient paper-based billing — rewarding people in the process — and the firm’s planned migration to the cloud in 2026 sets the stage for another potential step change in productivity



Just before the Covid pandemic forced huge change on so many businesses at the turn of the decade — law firms, of course, being no exception — Travers Smith had already identified the need for a significant transformation to move firm management forward into the 2020s. It would move to a new practice management system (PMS) in the shape of Aderant Expert.

Mark Lake, head of business systems at Travers Smith, joined the team after the business case and big decision had been made, but the rationale that “it was a moment to modernise” was just as clear to him. “There were simply too many ways of working across the firm — we needed to simplify as far as possible and push more rigour into the preferred process,” he says.

“The billing system, for example, was highly paper-centric — this was prone to errors.” By contrast, Aderant effectively “unifies everything within the one system, including the idea of updating a pre-bill in the interests of compliance,” he explains. “Ultimately there may be some more checks to complete, but you

produce fewer cancelled and reissued bills.” It’s a more efficient process overall with the result of faster payment.

As March 2020 arrived the advantage of the change was obviously enormous. Lake says: “We heard about some businesses that were forced into delivering printers to their revenue controllers at home. There was none of that for us, and it also proved a positive to support the later switch into productive hybrid-working.”



“Part of the firm’s transformation strategy is to invest in growing technology talent in-house wherever possible — you achieve a real depth of knowledge throughout the business systems team specifically but also through all tech teams.”

The PMS has since been a solid foundation for the firm’s own more iterative improvements to how it works — to accounts payable, for example, as well as creating Intapp workflows that pull data from Aderant Expert into use for reporting purposes and subsequent push it back. “File-opening has also seen three iterations in the space of seven years, which is so much easier because everything integrates,” he says.

More broadly, Lake sees the Aderant team as a highly collaborative partner on the path of embracing transformation for new efficiency gains — a case in point being a useful conversation surrounding enhancements to an in-house-built work allocation product it could go on to support.

Another chapter of change — cloud first

In 2026 Travers Smith will be moving from its on-premises system to the cloud-hosted version Aderant Expert Sierra, potentially unlocking more opportunities for more streamlined cashflow by bringing AI to bear on its business-improvement efforts. There is quite a roadmap almost within reach. Lake says highlights include Stridyn Analytics, with its vastly improved operational reporting capabilities; a modernised and refreshed general ledger; the accounts receivable module that harnesses AI

to help to match and identify payments; and the automated bill-management space BillBlast (with analytics surfaced from across the ecosystem), where so much work has been carried out already on continuous transaction control (CTC) billing, which is something he believes will impact all law firms.

“The Aderant strategy really aligns with our goals, and is ambitious but steeped in making common-sense improvements to the technology,” he explains. But prior to that there’s a lot of painstaking preparatory work in mapping integrations over for the cloud future, some even predating the move to Aderant Expert. “What will need to be rewritten? Which APIs have changed? The PMS has a finger in almost every piece of the pie,” he says. The firm has plenty of in-house expertise itself for this work, with Aderant on hand for support.

“Part of the firm’s transformation strategy is to invest in growing technology talent in-house wherever possible — you achieve a real depth of knowledge throughout the business systems



team specifically but also through all tech teams,” he says. “When members present the work there’s a true sense of pride in it and responsibility for results. This approach also has the benefit of avoiding costly consultant fees when maintaining systems going forwards.”

Results in resourcing

With fast-moving AI perhaps calling for another round of transformational process efficiency in the engine room then, in the meantime, how does he assess the success of Travers’ investment in Aderant to date?

Subscribing to the ‘people, process, technology’ prioritisation principle, he says: “This technology change effectively enabled us to centralise the area of revenue control — it means we’ve recruited more revenue controllers, which frees lawyers from a lot of the billing responsibility they had. Of course, they can put that time to much better use on higher-value activities for the business with a positive impact on the bottom line. If

“This technology change effectively enabled us to centralise the area of revenue control — it means we’ve recruited more revenue controllers, which frees lawyers from a lot of the billing responsibility they had.”

technology executes for us really well, we can certainly trust the experts to use it — likewise, the firm’s risk and compliance team does a lot of the heavy-lifting on file-opening,” he concludes.

“Clearly, we can also measure the successful change by the volume of paper saved during the billing process — previously manually moved around — and there are some automated billing guides, which just wasn’t a possibility in earlier systems.” ▀

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INDUSTRY INTERVIEW

THE BLUEPRINT FOR FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Law firm profitability will need more than a move away from the billable hour. A recent BigHand research report shows it'll require innovation and greater transparency in billing practices, says Eric Wangler, president — global legal market at BigHand



1 What are the key barriers stopping firms from leaving the billable hour behind and fully embracing new pricing models at scale?

The biggest barrier is structural, as the billable hour is deeply embedded in firms' financial models, compensation systems and data reporting. It remains the easiest way to measure productivity, even if it's not always the best reflection of value.

There's also an element of cultural inertia. Partners understandably trust a model that's worked for decades. Additionally, clients tend to ask for creative pricing and then fall back to what they are comfortable with: the billable hour. However, as more clients get deeper into their firms' billing data, I expect this to change.

Our latest pricing report shows 79% of firms see an opportunity for more value-based billing, but many simply don't have the data maturity to implement this confidently. Without accurate insights into matter costs and profitability, it's difficult to scope and price differently without risking margin erosion.

2 Are alternative fee arrangements (AFAs) the best long-term solution for firms' profitability, or does the billable hour still have value in certain instances?

AFAs have an important place in the market, and I expect use of them to continue to increase from the 30% of matters that many firms currently report. For repeatable, process-driven

work, they are efficient, predictable and drive stronger client partnerships. That being said, the billable hour still has practical value as a shared risk mechanism for complex, high-risk or bespoke matters like large-scale litigation or strategic M&A.

As AI is embedded further into the practice of law, I suspect we'll see a flip of the current structure — value and outcome-based pricing will be used for most matters, with time-based pricing still an available option to use only when needed.

3 According to your research, clients are demanding greater transparency in billing practices. Are firms doing enough to meet this requirement?

In short: not yet. Many firms are still constrained by systems and processes not designed for real-time cost visibility or budget agility. Our latest research shows less than half use dedicated pricing software, and almost 40% require one to two weeks to make pricing adjustments due to mid-matter scope changes. That's unacceptable for many clients, who want certainty wherever possible.

Clients are increasingly sophisticated buyers who expect the same level of transparency they receive from other professional services. As a buyer of legal services ourselves, we have experienced this lack of transparency firsthand. Cost overruns only get communicated after the

fact, often after the matter has closed, and almost always lead to higher write-offs. Given this growing trend, the firms that give them high quality service and budget certainty will win the day.

4 According to BigHand's latest research, more than half of firms mandate budgets on only 11–20% of matters despite the increased client demand for them. What are the reasons behind this low rate?

Many lawyers still view it as a compliance exercise instead of a core commercial tool, whether that's because they aren't being properly trained on the business of law or they lack visibility into cost drivers. They are also reluctant to give up control or subject their clients to something they don't completely understand or trust.

Some of the leading factors determining whether to use a budget are the value of the matter, whether previous work resulted in significant write-offs, or in cases where the client requests it directly. Firms are using it as a defensive mechanism, not a profit driver.

5 What are the main benefits of embracing matter budgeting at scale – both for the firm's overall financial performance and profitability, and for client relationship management?

There's one big stat that sticks out in the report that every firm needs to hear: 99% of respondents report increased billing realisation where matter budgets are assigned – with 70% experiencing an increase of 9% or more.

This may sound a bit hyperbolic, but it's free money – and clients are more willing to pay because they've been included and updated throughout the entire lifecycle of a matter. That increased realisation is a massive profit driver for firms and leads to stronger client relationships.

6 Our Briefing Frontiers data shows firms have consistently cited pricing tools as needing improvement or replacing over the past three years – yet your research shows that finance tech adoption has remained stagnant. What are the barriers stopping firms

“As AI is embedded further into the practice of law, I suspect we'll see a flip of the current structure – value and outcome-based pricing will be used for most matters, with time-based pricing still an available option to use only when needed.”

from investing more in introducing or upgrading their current finance-focused technology stack?

That is an interesting question, isn't it? They know they need it, but adoption isn't increasing very much. I think some of it is fatigue from previous tech investments that didn't deliver the expected value, or finance systems that were built for back-office teams rather than lawyers. If a tool doesn't fit seamlessly into the way legal work happens day-to-day, adoption will always lag.

This has to change, as pricing/budgeting technology is becoming a non-negotiable for clients. That pressure will force firms to implement it eventually, but the biggest winners will be those that do it proactively.

7 What core steps must firms take to equip lawyers with the necessary commercial skills and awareness, and why?

One of the most surprising stats in the report might be the decrease in commercial training and financial data access for lawyers. Even work-in-progress and accounts receivable information is provided at just 33% of firms.

This training needs to start early, when they are younger associates, and continue for longer than that initial programme. Successful firms are telling us that not only is strong commercial acumen helping maintain profit margins, it's even increasing loyalty, as lawyers feel the firm is investing in their career. It also cements the client relationship, as the lawyer has a sensible, proactive conversation with them about the business aspect of the relationship. ▀

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INDUSTRY CASE STUDY

BD 'SIGNALS' HELP FIRMS MAP FUTURE BUSINESS

Jody Glidden, founder and CEO at Postilize and Barry Solomon, vice president of client value and innovation at Litera, shine a spotlight on the valuable resource that can take a law firm's business development strategy to the next level

As the legal industry faces increasing competition and rapidly changing client expectations, firms are embracing a new kind of business development. By harnessing real-time signals and data-driven insights, they can anticipate client needs, stay ahead of the curve, and secure their future in a dynamic market.

In this hyper-competitive legal market, relying on RFPs, referrals or reputation alone isn't a growth strategy, it's a gamble. Client needs evolve quickly, industries shift overnight, and by the time a firm learns of an opportunity, it's often already gone to a competitor. The most successful firms are no longer those that respond fastest, but those that see what's coming next.

That shift from reactive to proactive business development (BD) is reshaping how firms think about client relationships — and it's driven by a new kind of intelligence that we call signals.

The changing face of legal business development

For decades, BD in law was largely relationship driven. Partners cultivated clients through experience, intuition and periodic check-ins. That approach worked when markets were stable and client loyalties were predictable.

But those conditions have changed. Today, clients are more sophisticated in how they allocate work and competition has intensified.

Legal departments are operating like procurement arms, benchmarking performance and diversifying risk by spreading matters across multiple firms. A single client may now work with ten or more external providers at once.

Meanwhile, the business of law has become more data driven. Firms are investing in client intelligence platforms, customer relationship management system integrations and analytics to understand where opportunities exist and how relationships are evolving. Yet, even with these tools, many firms still find themselves reacting to developments they could have anticipated. That's where the concept of signals comes in, bridging the gap between information and insight.

The rise of signals as strategic intelligence

A 'signal' is any observable event that suggests a shift in a client's or prospect's legal needs. It might be an executive appointment, a funding round, an acquisition, a regulatory filing or even a change in hiring patterns. Each one hints at underlying business momentum and, therefore, at the potential for new legal work.

Signals allow firms to interpret these moments not as isolated data points, but as part of a larger narrative about a client's trajectory. Recognising those patterns can help firms anticipate needs across multiple practice areas — from employment and M&A to compliance and IP.

This approach mirrors the data-driven sales

and relationship management models long used in other professional services industries. What's new is seeing it applied meaningfully and ethically within legal, where client sensitivity and trust are paramount.

Why visibility has become the new differentiator

Law firms rarely lose clients because of price or performance alone — the most common cause of attrition is lack of meaningful engagement. When clients only hear from their firm during billing cycles or after a problem arises, the relationship becomes purely transactional.

Signals help firms stay connected in more intentional, value-driven ways. They point to the moments when outreach feels natural and relevant, such as congratulating a client on a leadership change, sharing insights tied to a new market entry or offering proactive guidance after a funding announcement.

In this sense, signal-driven engagement isn't about chasing billable hours. It's about being present when it matters most. That presence builds credibility and trust, the foundations of long-term client loyalty.

Turning insight into impact

Of course, data is only as useful as the action it inspires. The challenge for most firms isn't collecting information, it's filtering and applying it. Too much noise can overwhelm partners who are already stretched thin.

Signals change that dynamic by curating only the most actionable events, mapped to a firm's

priorities and client base. Instead of reacting to yesterday's news, partners can make well-timed outreach that strengthens relationships and positions the firm as a strategic partner.

Firms that build a culture of signal awareness often see tangible benefits, including higher client retention, better cross-selling and increased agility in closing deals.

Most importantly, it makes engagement feel more human. A well-timed note of recognition or support can convey attentiveness in a way no marketing campaign can.

Technology as the enabler, not the story

The growing sophistication of client intelligence tools has made this evolution possible. Platforms that aggregate data from sources like LinkedIn and press releases now give firms near-real-time visibility into client movements. The best systems don't just present raw data, they analyse and prioritise it, ensuring only high-value signals reach the right lawyers at the right moment.

But the real story isn't about the tools themselves. It's about how they enable cultural change. Technology can surface opportunities, but only people can turn those opportunities into trust and partnership.

The proactive future

The legal industry's future will be defined by firms that can anticipate, not just respond. In that context, signal intelligence is more than a trend — it's a mindset. It reflects a shift toward continuous listening, contextual awareness and relationship depth.

At Litera, this philosophy underpins our AI-driven relationship management solution Foundation Proactive, powered by Postilize. The platform operationalises the concept of signals, turning data into daily insight and action.

Beyond any specific technology, the broader lesson is clear: firms that learn to read and respond to the world in real time will build stronger, more resilient client relationships. ▀

To learn more,
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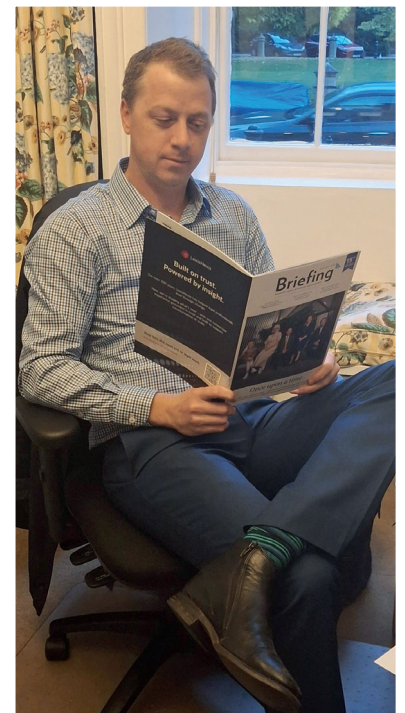
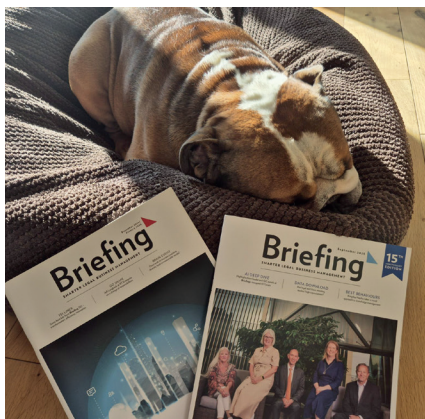


“The legal industry’s future will be defined by firms that can anticipate, not just respond. In that context, signal intelligence is more than a trend — it’s a mindset.”



HAPPY BIRTHDAY BRIEFING!

In September, **Briefing** celebrated its 15th anniversary in style — bringing back its beloved print edition. Of course, the birthday bash wouldn't be the same without our loyal readers, who have quickly read the issue cover to cover, and eagerly shown us their best smiles for our quirky in-person front cover.





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