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Business Development and Marketing for Mid-Market B2B Law Firms

How Law Firms Win Business

Referrals vs. RFPs vs. Direct Marketing Channels

Mid-market corporate law firms rely heavily on existing relationships and referrals to generate new business. In fact, one survey found **over 70% of new law firm business comes from existing clients** (expanded work or cross-selling), and about **10% comes from direct client referrals** [1]. By contrast, other channels – such as referrals from business partners (e.g. accounting or VC firms), inbound inquiries from marketing, or entirely new-client pitches – each account for well under 10% of new work on average [2]. This means that **the vast majority of revenue growth is relationship-driven**, with marketing-led direct lead generation playing a comparatively smaller role. Even a firm's website is usually more a credibility tool than a direct lead funnel – industry data shows that while 87% of firms have a website, only about one-third have ever signed a client directly through the site [3] [4]. Given this landscape, mid-market firms prioritize nurturing current client relationships and leveraging referrals, since these yield far more business than cold outreach or generic advertising.

How Referral Networks Work (Attorney, Client, and Alumni Referrals)

Referrals in the legal industry operate through a network of professional contacts. **Client-to-peer referrals** are paramount – in-house counsel overwhelmingly cite "recommendations from trusted sources" as their number-one method for finding new outside counsel (used by 92% of GCs in one survey) [5]. Satisfied clients often refer their law firm to other companies or bring their trusted firm along when they change jobs. **Attorney-to-attorney referrals** are also common: Lawyers refer matters to outside colleagues when a client needs expertise the original firm cannot provide (due to conflicts or niche specialty), often expecting the favor to be returned in the future. Many firms formalize these cross-referral relationships through networks or alliances of firms. Additionally, **former partners and associates (alumni)** serve as an important referral conduit. Large firms increasingly invest in alumni programs to keep in touch with ex-lawyers who move in-house or to other firms, knowing those alumni carry goodwill and may send work back. A well-run alumni network can transform former attorneys into "lifelong ambassadors, clients, and collaborators" for the firm [6] [7]. Alumni who land senior in-house roles become key decision-makers who naturally think of their old firm for new matters, and firms that nurture these relationships (for example, by inviting alumni to events or co-author content) often benefit from a steady stream of referral work [8]. In short, whether via happy clients, friendly peer lawyers, or firm alumni in influential positions, referrals are the lifeblood of mid-market law firm business development.

The Role of General Counsel Relationships

In corporate law, **relationships with general counsel and in-house legal teams are critical**. Many mid-market firms have grown up alongside their middle-market clients, developing deep personal ties over years. These trust-based relationships often translate into recurring work without a competitive bid. General counsel (GCs) typically prefer outside lawyers they know, or who come recommended by peers, rather than unfamiliar firms. As a result, a firm partner's personal rapport with a GC can be decisive – it may get the firm invited to pitch on a new matter (or even hired directly) when otherwise the company might not consider outside counsel. The legal industry is, as Thomson Reuters puts it, fundamentally **"a relationship-driven business"**, and maintaining strong client relationships is *crucial* [9]. General counsel leverage those relationships to ensure they hire lawyers who understand their business and can deliver value. In practice, this means successful partners invest significant non-billable time in client service: checking in with GCs, learning their industry pressures, offering counsel informally, and proving reliability. When a GC trusts a lawyer, that firm is far more likely to get the call for new work – even if competitors might be bigger or cheaper. Conversely, if a longstanding relationship frays, the GC may start entertaining pitches from other firms. In summary, personal relationships with GCs and legal department leaders are often the **gateway to new business**; marketing and branding efforts support this, but cannot substitute for the credibility earned via trusted relationships.

RFP Processes for Legal Services (Issuers and Evaluation Criteria)

For larger companies and new engagements, formal **Requests for Proposals (RFPs)** are a common way that business is awarded. Typically, an in-house legal department (often the GC or legal operations team, sometimes with procurement's help) will issue an RFP inviting a handful of firms to propose solutions and pricing for a set of legal matters. Usage of RFPs has been rising – by 2018, about **76% of corporate legal departments were using RFPs as part of their spend management strategy** [10]. An RFP is essentially a structured competition: multiple firms submit written proposals describing their experience, team, approach, and fee structure for the work [11]. The process is time-consuming for both sides, but it allows the client to **compare firms objectively on criteria like expertise, responsiveness, and cost** [12]. RFPs are issued in various scenarios: to create or update a panel of preferred outside counsel, to source counsel for a one-time project or new specialty area, or to pressure an incumbent firm on pricing. Who runs the process can vary – historically GCs led RFPs, but now many organizations involve **legal operations and procurement professionals**, who bring rigor and cost-focus. In fact, **legal procurement now negotiates 57% of all legal service purchases**, according to a 2021 survey, and this involvement can trim legal spend by an estimated 15% [13].

Once proposals are in, **evaluation** is typically a joint effort by the legal department (focusing on quality and experience) and procurement (focusing on pricing and efficiency) [14]. In-house lawyers scrutinize the firm's relevant experience, proposed team (often looking for lawyers they know or who have a good reputation), and suggested approach or innovation. They place heavy weight on whether the firm demonstrates understanding of the company's industry and specific needs. Meanwhile, procurement staff will parse fee proposals, project budgets, and value-add offerings to ensure cost-effectiveness [14]. Both groups care about "value," but they define it in complementary ways: the GC side prizes legal expertise, results, and service, while procurement emphasizes predictable pricing and efficiency [14]. Other factors can include a firm's technology usage, diversity and inclusion metrics, geographic coverage, and references from other clients. The **win rates in RFP competitions are low** – one analysis of thousands of law firm proposals found firms win roughly 27–30% of the time on average, even top-ranked firms, showing how competitive these bids are [15]. Notably, incumbent firms are not safe: a formal RFP means the client is open to switching if another firm offers better value. As legal consultant Michael Rynowecer observes, "the RFP is a wake-up call – a signal your client relationship is at risk because you are no longer winning work on a sole-source basis" [16]. To improve their odds, savvy firms often **engage early** (some even help the client shape the RFP's scope if given the chance) – Rynowecer notes that if a firm was not involved in shaping the RFP, their likelihood of winning drops below 12% [17]. In summary, RFPs are an increasingly important channel for mid-market firms to win new corporate work, but success requires competitive pricing, credible expertise, and often a pre-existing relationship to even get invited.

Triggers for Companies Seeking New Outside Counsel

Because established relationships are so prevalent, companies typically **seek new outside counsel only when a specific trigger forces them to look beyond their incumbent firms**. One common trigger is a **new legal need or specialization** – if a novel issue arises (for example, a cybersecurity incident or a unique regulatory issue) and current firms lack that specialty, the company will search for a firm with the requisite expertise [18] [19]. This often leads to targeted RFPs or reaching out via professional networks for recommendations. Another trigger is **dissatisfaction with current counsel**. If a long-time firm's performance or value starts to lag – say, the client feels fees are too high or results too slow – the company may solicit proposals from other firms as a corrective measure [20] [21]. In some cases, a client will even initiate an RFP to pressure a complacent incumbent to improve service or pricing; Susan Hackett of Legal Executive Leadership notes that legal departments sometimes use an RFP to gather fresh ideas and pricing from competitors, then give their legacy firm a chance to match those terms [22] [23]. A more positive trigger is simply **corporate growth or change** – as a mid-market company expands (new markets, acquisitions, etc.), its legal needs can outgrow the capacity of its small regional firms. This creates an opening for larger mid-market or BigLaw firms to step in. Indeed, rapidly growing companies often add new firms when they cross certain size thresholds or face increasingly complex matters on par with Fortune 1000 companies [24] [25]. Other triggers include **conflicts of interest** (when an incumbent firm is conflicted out of a matter, the client must find new counsel) and **leadership changes** on the client side. A new general counsel, for example, will often review or rebid key outside counsel relationships and may bring in favored firms from their past. Finally, **pressure from company management or procurement** can prompt a search for new counsel – e.g. a CEO or CFO might mandate a cost review of legal vendors, leading to new firms being considered for better pricing [26] [27]. In all cases, switching law firms is not undertaken lightly (many GCs openly admit they are reluctant to hire unfamiliar firms [28]), but significant business events or frustrations can tip the balance and cause a company to open the door to new outside counsel.

Geographic Proximity in the Modern Legal Market

Traditionally, companies tended to hire law firms with a strong local presence – geographic proximity was equated with convenience, local court knowledge, and personal touch. However, in today's market the **importance of physical proximity has diminished**. The shift to remote work and digital communication, accelerated by the pandemic, proved that effective legal service does not require being next door. As one general counsel reflected in 2020, the remote-work experience showed that **"geographic location is not as important as it once was."** Law firms no longer "need to have a lawyer at Hudson Yards in New York to practice law well" for a New York client [29] [30]. In practice, this means a mid-market company in Ohio might comfortably hire a specialist firm from New York or Chicago if the expertise and value are superior, whereas decades ago they might feel obliged to use a local firm.

That said, *proximity isn't entirely dead*. For certain matters, local knowledge and connections (e.g. knowing the local judges or regulators) can still tip the scales. Mid-market firms often leverage their regional roots as part of their pitch – e.g. "we've been in this city for 50 years and know the landscape." And some clients simply prefer counsel they can occasionally see face-to-face. But on the whole, modern corporate clients are willing to go beyond their city or state to find the right law firm. Many mid-market firms themselves have expanded geographically (opening offices in multiple cities or joining international networks) to service clients wherever needed. The rise of virtual communication tools has made it routine to manage matters via Zoom and email, reducing the need for on-site meetings. In sum, **geography is now a relatively minor factor** in law firm selection compared to expertise, price, and relationship. A firm doesn't need a local office to compete for work as long as it can demonstrate value. Indeed, some GCs encourage their outside firms to distribute work to lower-cost locations (for example, staffing a matter with lawyers in smaller cities) – a trend that suggests *being cost-effective in a lower-cost market can even be an advantage*. The pandemic proved that a lawyer can be anywhere and still be "present" for the client [29]. Thus, mid-market firms today face national competition in their home markets, but conversely they can also pursue opportunities in other regions. The key is that **clients will trade physical proximity for the right combination of quality, trust, and cost-efficiency.**

The Role of Marketing in Law Firms

What Marketing Can Influence in a Relationship-Driven Business

Legal services may be a relationship-driven business at heart, but **strategic marketing plays an influential supporting role**. Marketing cannot replace the trust built by partners, but it can enhance a firm's visibility, credibility, and appeal to both existing and prospective clients. For example, law firm marketing teams heavily focus on **thought leadership content and branding**, because these shape how the firm is perceived in the market. In a 2025 CMO survey, legal marketing leaders reported that the most effective ways to attract and retain clients include **"written content development" and "branding/profile building,"** along with facilitating speaking engagements and coaching lawyers in business development [31]. By publishing high-quality insights (articles, alerts, white papers) and promoting the firm's expertise, marketing keeps the firm **"top of mind"** for clients and prospects. This is critical given that personal networks alone have limits – one analysis noted that while referrals are potent, attorneys only maintain about 150 truly active relationships, so marketing helps extend reach beyond that circle [5] [32].

Marketing also influences how well relationships are maintained. **Client experience initiatives**, often led by marketing/BD teams, ensure the firm is engaging with clients beyond just active case work – for instance, through client newsletters, webinars on timely issues, or inviting clients to exclusive events. These touchpoints provide value to clients and subtly reinforce the relationship (without a partner having to individually call on every client). Moreover, marketing can gather and leverage data to personalize outreach – e.g. tracking which clients engage with certain content, then alerting the relationship partners to follow up on those interest areas. In firms that invest in CRM (client relationship management) tools, the marketing team often administers these systems, providing insight into client interactions. As Thomson Reuters observed, firms "get better at putting the right information into the hands of their clients" as a means of maintaining stickiness [33] [34]. In summary, marketing in a law firm **serves as the engine that amplifies and supports relationship-building**: it builds awareness among those who don't know the firm, educates the market on the firm's expertise, and helps deepen existing client relationships through consistent, value-adding communication. While attorneys close the deals, marketing creates the conditions that make those deals more likely – shaping the firm's story, keeping the firm visible, and demonstrating its value before the phone calls are made. Notably, as the legal market becomes more competitive, firms can no longer rely solely on "passive" referral flow. As one legal marketing CEO put it, *it's dangerous to rely on referrals alone; firms must bolster their odds with proactive marketing tactics that get the attention of target clients* [35]. In a relationship business, marketing is the force multiplier that broadens and strengthens the web of relationships on which the firm depends.

How Marketing Teams Support Business Development

Law firm marketing and business development (BD) teams act as facilitators and enablers of revenue-generating activity. In mid-market firms, a successful marketing/BD team works hand-in-hand with partners to drive both expansion of existing accounts and pursuit of new clients. One of the most impactful things marketing departments do is **coach and equip lawyers for business development**. Lawyers may be experts in law but not always in sales, so marketing professionals help them develop plans and skills to win work. In fact, law firm marketers in a recent survey rated **"coaching lawyers on business development" as the single most important activity** their team performs, tied with gathering client feedback as top priorities [36] [37]. Such coaching can include one-on-one sessions to formulate a partner's personal BD plan, training sessions on networking or sales tactics, and preparing attorneys for pitch meetings. As one CMO noted, the BD team can tee up many opportunities, **"get the attorney all the way up to the finish line with a prospect, but the attorney has to be engaged enough to take it over the line"** [38]. This underscores that marketing's role is to support and guide, while the lawyers ultimately close the deal.

Marketing teams also provide substantial **proposal and pitch support**. This ranges from writing and designing pitch decks or RFP responses, to developing pricing proposals and case studies that partners can use in pursuits. In many Am Law 200 firms, the marketing/BD department includes dedicated proposal writers or a "pursuit team" for major pitches. Their contribution is crucial – they ensure that each pitch is professionally packaged, on-message, and responsive to the client's stated needs (rather than a generic sales spiel, which clients loathe). They also often maintain a repository of past proposals, experience lists, and winning language to increase efficiency. It's telling that **preparing for pitches** and **responding to RFPs** both ranked among the top five most important BD activities in law firm marketing surveys [39]. Beyond pitches, marketing teams help lawyers **identify and pursue cross-selling** opportunities. They analyze the firm's existing client list to spot where one practice could introduce another – for example, noticing that a corporate client not currently using the firm's employment group might benefit from a meeting with those lawyers. Coordinating **client team meetings** and account planning is another way marketing supports BD: many mid-market firms now create cross-practice client teams for key clients, and the marketing/BD staff often organize those teams and plans. They set up regular check-ins to discuss client strategy, track client news and developments, and push out value-added ideas (like suggesting a seminar for a client's legal department). Additionally, marketing teams handle **market research and competitive intelligence** – providing lawyers with background on a target company or insights on a competitor firm vying for the same client. By arming attorneys with intel about a prospect's business and the landscape, marketers improve the lawyers' odds of making a compelling pitch. Law firm CMOs report that activities like **client research and gathering client feedback** are highly effective in retaining and expanding business [40]. Finally, marketing is often in charge of the firm's **CRM database and lead tracking**, which, even if informal, helps ensure potential opportunities (a seminar attendee, a website inquiry, etc.) don't slip through the cracks. In short, the marketing/BD team wears many hats – coach, project manager, researcher, and sometimes cheerleader – all with the goal of leveraging the firm's capabilities to win work. Their success is evident when busy lawyers who may not naturally prioritize selling are nevertheless consistently in front of clients and prospects with well-prepared pitches and follow-ups. As legal marketing veterans like to say, marketing teams strive to **"bridge the gap between client needs and firm services"** [41] [42], ensuring the firm is positioned to win the client's next piece of business.

Marketing Budgets as a Percentage of Revenue

Mid-market and large law firms invest a modest but growing share of revenue into marketing and business development. **Industry benchmarks put law firm marketing/BD spend at roughly 2-3% of gross revenue for large firms**, although this can vary. According to BTI Consulting research, the average MBD (Marketing and Business Development) budget for firms in the Am Law 200 hovered around **2.5% of revenue in recent years** [43]. For example, in 2023 the spend was 2.36% and was projected to be about 2.47% in 2024, down slightly from around 2.7% in 2018 [43]. This percentage tends to be higher at smaller firms (which often need to invest more to build visibility) and also higher for fast-growth ambitious firms. In fact, surveys that include small law firms show a wide range – some boutique firms spend well above 5-10% of revenue on marketing if aggressively trying to “dominate” a niche, whereas a very large firm with an established brand might spend closer to 2% of revenue. A common rule of thumb in the industry is a marketing budget in the **low single digits as a percent of revenue**. Notably, a majority of firms have been **increasing marketing budgets in recent years**, reflecting the recognition that business development requires more resources in a competitive market [44] [45]. For instance, in a 2025 marketing leaders survey, far more respondents reported budget increases than cuts, with mid-sized firms (51–100 lawyers) most likely to have seen their budgets grow year-over-year [44] [46]. This suggests mid-market firms are catching up in investment.

When translated to dollars and headcount, these budget percentages support sizeable marketing teams especially at the higher end of mid-market. One analysis estimated that **Am Law 200 firms collectively employ about 7,500 marketing, BD, and communications professionals**, and that the very largest firms (those grossing $1B+ annually) have roughly *one full-time marketer for every 6 partners* on average [47]. For mid-market Am Law 100-200 firms, the marketing/business development team might range anywhere from a handful of people to a few dozen, depending on firm size and strategy. As an example of scale: firms with over 100 lawyers reported a median marketing budget of around $1.4 million in one recent survey [48], which might correspond to, say, 10–15 full-time marketing staff (assuming an even split of that budget to personnel vs. other expenses). Those staff typically include a Chief Marketing or Business Development Officer (CMO/CBDO) at the helm, plus managers/directors for various functions like communications (PR and social media), events, digital marketing (website/SEO), proposal/pitch management, and practice or sector-specific business development managers who work directly with lawyers. Mid-market firms often structure their teams so that each major practice group or industry group has an assigned BD specialist to assist partners in that area. In short, while law firm marketing budgets are not as large a percent of revenue as in some other B2B industries, **the absolute dollars are significant and growing**, and they fund multi-faceted teams. Sophisticated mid-market firms realize that this investment is necessary to compete with BigLaw marketing machines and to seize opportunities that smaller firms without a marketing function might miss. The relatively lean budget percentage also underscores that marketing in law firms is expected to be efficient and closely aligned to revenue goals – every dollar needs to help bring in or keep clients.

Marketing Team Structure and Partner Collaboration

A typical mid-market law firm’s marketing/business development team has a **hub-and-spoke structure** that combines firm-wide functions with dedicated support for individual lawyers or groups. At the hub, the CMO or Director of Marketing leads overall strategy, brand positioning, and major campaigns. Under that leader, there are usually specialized roles: for example, **communications professionals** handle media relations, press releases, awards submissions, and social media presence; **content marketers** or writers produce client alerts, blog posts and thought leadership pieces with attorney input; **events coordinators** plan client seminars, webinars, and sponsorships; **digital marketing specialists** manage the website, email marketing, SEO and analytics; and **BD managers** focus on client development tasks like coordinating pitches, client teams, and coaching attorneys. In many firms, the BD managers are assigned to specific practices or industries so they can develop subject-matter familiarity and close working relationships with those attorneys. This structure allows the marketing team to both execute broad initiatives (like a firm-wide rebranding or a new website rollout) and provide *high-touch support to partners* on their individual business plans.

Crucially, effective marketing teams **work very closely with individual partners** rather than operating in a silo. Each partner is encouraged to view the marketing/BD team as a resource to help grow their book of business. In practice, this might mean a BD manager sits down with a partner at the start of the year to map out a personal business development plan – identifying target prospective clients, key cross-selling targets within existing clients, and specific actions (such as attending certain industry conferences, reaching out to X number of past contacts, publishing an article on a topical issue, etc.). The marketing team will then help execute many of those actions: for example, if a partner plans to "increase visibility in the healthcare industry," the marketing team might pitch that attorney as a speaker at a healthcare legal conference, arrange a webinar series on healthcare regulations, or ensure the attorney's new article on a healthcare law development gets wide distribution on LinkedIn and email. This *partner-specific support* extends to mundane but important tasks like updating the attorney's biography with recent wins (often handled by the marketing content team) and preparing custom leave-behind materials for that attorney's client meetings.

One of the most valuable services marketing teams provide to partners is **account management insight**. For top existing clients, marketers will often join internal client team meetings to discuss the relationship status – they track if client feedback has been obtained, log any client service issues, and help identify opportunities to "add value" beyond legal work (for instance, offering free training sessions or sharing market research). Marketers also sometimes accompany partners to client meetings or pitches (usually quietly in a project-manager role, ensuring the meeting runs smoothly and noting follow-ups). At a minimum, they debrief with the partner afterwards to refine approach for next time. All of this tight coordination is aimed at making lawyers more effective at BD while **minimizing the burden on the busy attorneys**. As one marketing leader described, the goal is often to do as much of the heavy lifting as possible – *"the BD team can get the attorney up to the finish line… but the attorney has to take it over the line"*, meaning the partner needs only to step in for the crucial relationship-building moments [38]. Partners who embrace this partnership with the marketing team tend to see tangible results (more meetings, more RFP opportunities, more wins), whereas those who resist or engage half-heartedly may struggle. Indeed, **lack of attorney engagement is frequently cited as the biggest hurdle** to law firm sales efforts [38]. To tackle this, some firms tie marketing support to attorney willingness – for example, giving more intensive support to lawyers who actively participate in training and pipeline updates.

Overall, a successful mid-market firm's marketing team operates as an **internal consultancy and execution arm for business development**, bridging the gap between legal work and the business of law. They keep the firm's messaging consistent, ensure opportunities are pursued systematically, and help individual lawyers put their best foot forward. As the legal marketing consultancy Calibrate Legal often terms it, these professionals are "**revenue enablers**" rather than just support staff [49] [50]. Their integration into firm strategy is growing – in the 2025 CMO survey, more than half of marketing leaders said they are directly involved in their firm's strategic planning process, and many feel *highly valued as strategic thinkers by firm leadership* [51] [52]. This marks a cultural shift from a decade ago, when marketing teams were sometimes peripheral. Now, especially in mid-sized firms trying to punch above their weight, the marketing and BD team is central to plotting the firm's competitive strategy and coaching each lawyer on how to build the relationships that will sustain the firm's future.

Thought Leadership in Legal Marketing

What Effective Thought Leadership Looks Like

Effective thought leadership for law firms means providing valuable, insightful content that demonstrates expertise without being promotional. The best law firm thought leadership addresses topics that matter to clients – it offers education, analysis, and guidance on emerging legal issues or business challenges, rather than a thinly veiled sales pitch. In practice, this could be a well-researched white paper on a new regulation's impact, a timely client alert breaking down a recent court decision, a practical guide or checklist for compliance, or an opinion piece that offers a fresh perspective on a trend. What distinguishes *effective* thought leadership is quality and usefulness. Clients respond strongly to content that is **useful, current, and relevant** to them [53]. In a survey by Greentarget and Zeughauser Group, 73% of in-house counsel said they are drawn to content that is *useful* (provides actionable takeaways), and 60% cited *current* content as important – they want up-to-date information on recent developments [53]. By contrast, clients are turned off by generic or self-serving material. Only 25% of in-house counsel rated the professional services content they see as "very valuable" [54], with the top complaints being that many law firm articles are **too salesy, not impartial, or not relevant** to their needs [55]. Therefore, effective thought leadership is **client-centric**: it speaks to the client's industry and concerns, uses the client's language, and avoids excessive legal jargon or self-congratulation.

Another hallmark of strong thought leadership is **unique insight or perspective**. If a dozen firms all publish a summary of the same news (say a new law passed or a big case decided), a client will gravitate to the piece that goes beyond the news – perhaps by explaining the practical implications or offering an original point of view. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, countless firms issued alerts on force majeure clauses; the firms that stood out were those that, say, compiled real-world data on how courts were interpreting those clauses or provided decision trees for clients. One GC specifically noted appreciating law firms that provided insightful **publications and webinars on COVID-19 issues** early in the pandemic, helping her company navigate unprecedented regulatory mandates [56]. This illustrates that thought leadership earns goodwill when it truly helps clients solve problems or prepare for what's next.

Tone and format also matter. The content should be written in a clear, authoritative but accessible tone. The goal is to **educate, not advertise**. Many leading firms explicitly instruct their authors to avoid overt marketing in thought leadership pieces – for instance, keeping the firm name and attorney bio at the end only, and not inserting "call us for help" language in the text. Studies confirm this approach: over half of GCs say content that feels "too much like a sales pitch" is a top turn-off [55]. Instead, leading thought leadership tends to *give away* some valuable knowledge. This builds trust – when a client sees a firm consistently providing sharp analysis for free, they infer that the firm must be even more capable if hired. It's a longer-term nurturing strategy. Additionally, effective thought leadership often leverages **data or primary research** that the firm has access to. For example, some law firms produce annual reports or surveys (perhaps polling industry players or analyzing their own deal databases) to generate proprietary insights. Such content is highly differentiating – it positions the firm as an authority that has its finger on the pulse. A marketing expert advised, for instance, that lawyers consider conducting a survey in their target industry to yield exclusive insights and cement their authority [57]. Thought leadership isn't only writing – it can be delivered through speeches, panels, or podcasts – but across all formats, the content must be **thought-**

provoking, informative, and aligned with the firm's expertise. When done right, thought leadership strengthens a firm's brand by showcasing its knowledge leadership in key areas, and it keeps the firm visible to clients who consume that content and remember it when they face related issues.

Topics That Generate Engagement and Demonstrate Expertise

The topics that gain the most traction are those at the intersection of **client pain points and the firm's strengths**. In the B2B law firm context, this often means covering emerging regulatory changes, industry-specific legal trends, and risk areas that keep general counsel up at night. For example, data privacy and cybersecurity have been hot topics in recent years – a mid-market firm that regularly publishes updates on evolving privacy laws (and practical steps for compliance) will likely see strong engagement from tech company clients. Similarly, topics like **artificial intelligence, ESG (environmental, social, governance) regulations, labor and employment issues, and international trade developments** have generated high interest as these issues evolve rapidly and pose new challenges for businesses. A late-2024 "hot topics" outlook for in-house counsel highlighted areas such as *AI adoption and its ROI, interstate litigation trends, and shifts in M&A regulatory approval processes* as issues expected to feature prominently in 2025 [58] [59]. Law firms that can produce thought leadership on these cutting-edge matters stand to engage clients hungry for guidance. It's worth noting that **industry-specific content** often resonates more than generic legal commentary. Clients love to see that a firm understands their sector. For instance, a mid-market manufacturing company might be very interested in a webinar on "New OSHA regulations for manufacturers" or an article on "Supply chain contract risks in the automotive industry," whereas a generic piece on contract law might not grab them. Thus, many successful mid-market firms tailor thought leadership by industry (e.g., separate newsletters for healthcare, real estate, fintech, etc.). In fact, some firms maintain multiple blogs or alert series – one per key sector – to ensure relevance for different audiences [60] [61].

Engaging topics also tend to be **forward-looking**. Rather than rehashing old news, content that provides an outlook or helps companies plan for the future garners attention. For example, instead of simply summarizing last year's court decisions, a great thought leadership piece might be "Five Trends General Counsel Should Prepare for in the Coming Year" covering expected changes in law or enforcement priorities. In-house counsel often must brief their CEOs/boards on upcoming risks, so they appreciate law firm content that can help them do that. Indeed, some law firms explicitly brand their alerts as "what you need to know" for the future. Another way to choose engaging topics is to listen to client questions – if multiple clients are asking, "How do we handle X issue?", that's a perfect topic for a broader article or FAQ that many will find useful.

In terms of demonstrating expertise, **case studies or war stories** can be powerful (within confidentiality limits). A mid-market firm might publish an anonymized case study of how they helped a client overcome a challenging issue – this both educates peers and subtly markets the firm's capabilities. For example, a firm might share "lessons learned from navigating a complex cross-border merger during COVID," which provides general counsel readers with insight into that process while also showcasing the firm's experience in it. Firms also use thought leadership to underscore niche expertise that differentiates them. If a mid-sized firm has a unique specialty (say, one of the few with a dedicated Drone/UAV law practice), writing and speaking frequently on that niche topic can draw in clients who need that knowledge and might not even be on BigLaw's radar.

Finally, **timeliness** cannot be overstated: when a major law or ruling comes out, clients have a short attention span for analysis. The firms that generate thoughtful commentary quickly (within 24-48 hours ideally) see the highest engagement. Clients facing urgent issues will read the first credible analysis that hits their inbox. If your firm is the *twelfth* firm to blast an alert a week later, it's likely too late – one GC remarked that after a big Supreme Court decision, dozens of near-identical law firm emails hit her inbox; any that were late or repetitive added no value [62] [63]. The takeaway: **topics must not only be relevant but also timely** to capture engagement. If you can't be first with the news, you must offer a distinct angle or deeper dive to make it worthwhile.

In summary, mid-market firms generate engagement by focusing on **practical, timely, industry-aware topics** that help clients do their jobs better. Whether it's a breaking regulatory change or a trend piece on an emerging risk, the content should answer the question: "What does this mean for my business?" Firms that consistently hit that mark – delivering insight on what clients care about most – establish themselves as go-to authorities.

Formats and Channels: Articles, Alerts, Webinars, Podcasts, and More

Format plays an important role in thought leadership success, and a multi-format approach tends to work best. Different clients have different content consumption preferences, so mid-market firms often repurpose important content into several forms. The traditional format is the **written client alert or article**, usually 1-3 pages, emailed to clients and posted on the firm website. These remain highly effective: surveys show in-house counsel *continue to rely on articles* – in one study, 67% of GCs said they read attorneys' firm-authored articles as part of their vetting and learning process [64] [65]. Well-written articles allow a nuanced discussion and are easily forwarded or archived by clients. However, brevity is crucial – corporate audiences vastly prefer short-form content. In fact, general counsel in a survey were **7 times more likely to prefer short content over long content** (and CEOs even more so) [66]. So the modern client alert aims to distill key points in a concise way (often bullet-pointed highlights at top, with an option to read more detail if desired). Many firms have also adopted **visual aids** within articles – infographics, flowcharts, quick reference tables – to cater to readers who skim. Notably, while lawyers love dense text, business executives often think in visuals; a Greentarget study found that *C-suite executives had the highest affinity for interactive charts and data visualizations*, even more than traditional text articles [67]. A savvy firm might thus include a simple chart or decision tree graphic in an article to increase its impact, especially for non-lawyer readers.

Beyond static articles, **webinars and seminars** have become a staple format. Webinars (or live seminars when feasible) allow a more dynamic, interactive discussion of a topic. Clients appreciate the ability to hear directly from lawyers and ask questions. During the pandemic, webinar attendance surged as clients sought real-time guidance on fast-changing issues. Many mid-market firms found success hosting series of brief webinars (20-30 minutes) on niche topics. For example, a firm might run a "Lunch and Learn" webinar series every Friday for a month on different aspects of a new law. These sessions not only educate but also build a personal connection between firm lawyers and attendees (who may later reach out directly for help). Even post-pandemic, **webinars remain popular** for reaching a broad audience efficiently, and recordings can be posted for on-demand viewing (extending the content's life). Similarly, **podcasts** have emerged as a viable format, though perhaps less universally consumed than webinars or articles. Still, many law firms have launched podcasts targeting specific audiences (e.g. a bi-weekly podcast on fintech law updates). Busy executives might listen to these on commutes or while multitasking. A recent Greentarget report indicated that around 1 in 3 in-house counsel listen to podcasts for business information, and that number has grown year over year. Podcasts work best when they are conversational and feature experts or even clients as guests, making for an engaging narrative rather than a monologue.

Video content is another format gaining traction. Short videos of attorneys explaining a concept (2-3 minute “quick takes”) can be shared on LinkedIn or embedded in blog posts. While law firms were traditionally text-heavy, there is recognition that some concepts lend themselves to visual explanation – for instance, a demonstration of how a cyber breach occurs and steps to mitigate, in video form, might capture more attention than a long text description. Firms like Norton Rose Fulbright and Squire Patton Boggs have embraced a mix of media: they offer blogs, podcasts, webinars, and videos on their thought leadership portals to meet audiences where they are [60] [68]. The key is ensuring consistency of message across formats.

In terms of **distribution channels**, email is still king for directly reaching clients (most firms maintain robust mailing lists segmented by practice or industry, so clients receive alerts relevant to their interests). According to industry benchmarks, around 40% of law firms send email newsletters regularly (monthly or more) [69] [70]. Posting on the firm’s website in an Insights or Knowledge center is standard, as that content can attract search traffic and serve as a library for visitors. Social media, particularly **LinkedIn**, is extremely important for amplifying thought leadership. Many general counsel browse LinkedIn for professional content; in fact, 62% of in-house counsel reported consulting LinkedIn profiles and presumably by extension, seeing content shared there [64] [71]. Law firms encourage their lawyers to share firm articles on LinkedIn to increase visibility (which can multiply reach through personal networks). Twitter (now X) has seen some decline among lawyers for content – only 13% of in-house counsel use X for attorney-related content according to one survey, down from previous years [72] [73]. Thus, LinkedIn is generally a higher priority. Some firms also utilize platforms like JD Supra or Lexology to distribute articles to broader subscribed audiences. These platforms can syndicate the firm’s content to thousands of subscribers interested in certain legal topics, increasing reach beyond the firm’s own list.

To maximize engagement, **re-purposing content across formats and channels is key**. For example, a firm might start with a comprehensive client alert on a new law (written format). That can be broken into a few bite-sized LinkedIn posts highlighting key points. The firm might then host a webinar where the authors discuss practical implications and answer questions – with the webinar recording later posted on YouTube and linked in a follow-up alert (“Missed our webinar? Watch here.”). A transcript of the webinar might be edited into a Q&A blog post. And perhaps the firm’s podcast hosts invite the authors for a deep-dive episode on the same law’s business context. This way, one core piece of thought leadership is *leveraged in multiple ways*, catering to different consumption preferences and reinforcing the message. The firms recognized for exceptional thought leadership (e.g. **Baker McKenzie or Reed Smith**) tend to have an entire ecosystem for their content – Baker McKenzie even has an Insights hub called “Insights Plus” offering blogs, podcasts and more in an easily navigable interface [74]. They push content out through every available channel and make it simple for clients to find what’s relevant by topic or industry. Norton Rose, similarly, has separate blog sites by topic and uses a mix of media (blogs, videos, webinars) to meet audiences on their terms [75].

Ultimately, the best format is the one the target audience actually consumes, so firms often experiment and then double down on what works. Some audiences may love a live roundtable (webinar) where they can interact; others may prefer a neatly packaged PDF report they can circulate internally. So, firms do well to collect feedback – e.g. via email click metrics, webinar attendance stats, and direct client comments – to gauge which formats hit the mark. The common thread for success is ensuring the **content quality is high** no matter the format. A slick video or well-produced podcast means little if the substance is lacking. But when strong insights are delivered in engaging formats through multiple channels, a mid-market firm can greatly expand its reach and reputation, punching above its weight in thought leadership.

Examples of Law Firms Excelling at Thought Leadership

Several law firms – including some in the mid-market tier – have distinguished themselves through exceptional thought leadership initiatives. One standout example is **Baker McKenzie**, a global firm but one that mid-market firms often look to emulate. Baker McKenzie prioritizes thought leadership so highly that its website features a prominent "Insights" section leading to an array of content: blogs, an Insights Plus portal, podcasts, videos, and more [74]. They produce a constant stream of industry-specific updates (from tax to technology) and often incorporate multimedia. For instance, Baker has run multi-part report series on topics like digital transformation and supply chain risk that solidify its reputation as an authority in those areas. Importantly, Baker McKenzie's content is known for being *practical and client-focused*, not just academic musings – this is key to its impact.

Another notable firm is **Norton Rose Fulbright**. They take a very client-centric approach by "meeting the audience where they're at," offering resources in whatever format the audience prefers [60]. Norton Rose maintains a suite of blogs (each dedicated to a particular topic such as financial services regulation, employment law, etc., often under distinct names and domains) which makes it easy for readers to follow specific subjects [60]. They bolster these with podcasts like their "Planned Obsolescence" series on technology, and regular webinars. A client interested in, say, privacy law can find a whole microsite of Norton Rose content just on that, demonstrating the firm's depth. This breadth and organization of content show a strategic commitment to thought leadership as a two-way conversation with clients.

A mid-sized firm example is **Buckley LLP** (which before its combination into a larger firm, was highly regarded for thought leadership in the financial regulatory arena). Buckley ran both a general blog and a special "InfoBytes" resource center on its website [76]. The resource center allowed users to filter content by legal topics and was updated extremely frequently – essentially acting as a trade publication for banking law updates. This level of currency and the ease of search made Buckley a go-to source for clients in that niche. Even as a smaller firm (around 100 lawyers), Buckley's commitment to publishing timely updates on, for example, CFPB enforcement actions or fintech developments, helped it compete against much larger firms for clients who valued current awareness.

Squire Patton Boggs, a law firm in the Am Law 50 (with Midwestern roots), is another good example relevant to mid-market ethos. They emphasize an *educational tone* in all content – their blogs and client advisories avoid self-promotion and focus on delivering value [68]. Squire produces content in many formats (they host webinars frequently and have a range of video insights), and they ensure that even on social media, their posts highlight useful takeaways rather than firm accolades [68]. This consistent value-driven approach resonates with in-house counsel who follow them.

Finally, **Reed Smith** (an Am Law 30 firm) is often cited for digital thought leadership. Reed Smith runs a network of focused blogs (e.g. a shipping law blog, an entertainment law blog, etc.), and they heavily leverage social media to amplify their insights [77]. They also incorporate short video explainers on LinkedIn and attorney-authored LinkedIn Pulse articles, extending the reach of their content. Reed Smith's marketing team encourages individual lawyers to build a personal brand via thought leadership, and many of their partners are known for their LinkedIn posts or frequent media quotes sharing perspectives on current events. By empowering attorneys as visible thought leaders, Reed Smith multiplies the firm's overall thought leadership impact.

The common thread among these successful examples is that the firms treat thought leadership as a strategic, firm-wide initiative – not sporadic one-off articles. They organize content in user-friendly ways (by topic, industry), maintain consistent output frequency, utilize multiple formats (ensuring content can be consumed as an article, podcast, video, etc.), and crucially, **focus on delivering insight and value rather than self-promotion**. As Good2BSocial's analysis put it, *audiences are suffering digital fatigue and will tune out content that is pure self-promotion – the firms that stand out are those providing high-quality, educational material* [78] [79]. Law firms like the ones above "ranked and stood out" in thought leadership because they understand this principle [80] [81]. Mid-market firms can take a page from these playbooks: even without BigLaw resources, a firm that commits to thoughtful, client-centric content on a regular basis can build a strong reputation. In fact, thought leadership is a classic arena where **a smaller firm can punch above its weight** – a well-written guide or a timely series of webinars by a 100-lawyer firm can attract as much attention as content from a 1000-lawyer firm, if not more, provided it's insightful. The ultimate measure of success is when clients and industry players start *relying* on the firm's publications as a primary source of guidance. At that point, the firm has achieved true thought leadership eminence – it's influencing the conversation, not just reacting to it.

Legal Marketing Benchmarks & KPIs

Key Metrics Tracked by Law Firm CMOs

Sophisticated law firm marketing departments track a blend of output metrics, engagement metrics, and business development outcomes as their KPIs (Key Performance Indicators). Unlike product companies, law firms can't always draw a straight line from a marketing campaign to a sale, but they still quantify many facets of their marketing and BD efforts. On the marketing communications side, common metrics include **website traffic and online engagement**: for example, unique visitors to the firm website, page views on thought leadership content, and time spent on those pages. Many firms monitor the traffic trends to their insights pages as an indicator of content reach (some firms even benchmark against peers' traffic growth [82]). They also track **email marketing stats** – open rates and click-through rates for client alerts and newsletters – to gauge what percentage of clients are engaging with the content. Another important set of metrics involves **event and webinar participation**: the number of RSVPs, actual attendance, and attendee feedback scores for firm-hosted events. This shows how effective events are at drawing the interest of clients/prospects. On social media, marketing teams measure **follower counts**, impressions, and engagement (likes, shares, comments) for the firm's posts, particularly on LinkedIn. For instance, a CMO might report that a certain white paper garnered X thousand impressions and Y hundred downloads, or that the firm's LinkedIn posts average a certain engagement rate – these are proxy indicators of brand visibility in the marketplace.

On the business development side, **pipeline and conversion metrics** are tracked to the extent possible. Many law firm BD teams maintain a list of active opportunities (significant pitches or RFPs) and record **win/loss rates**. A key metric is the firm's overall win rate on RFPs or pitches – e.g., "we won 30% of the RFPs we participated in this year." Win rate can further be segmented by existing vs. new-client opportunities, by practice, etc., to identify where the firm is strong or needs improvement. (It's worth noting that historically not all firms tracked this rigorously – one study noted *20% of firms did not track win/loss on pitches* at all [83] – but this is changing as firms push for more data-driven BD). Alongside win rate, **origination of new**

matters is something CMOs examine. For example, how many new client matters opened in a quarter, and how were those sourced? If the firm has a CRM or at least an internal tracking of leads, they might attribute matters to categories like "existing client cross-sell" vs. "client referral" vs. "marketing-generated lead." The Intapp survey indicated over 70% of new business comes from current clients and 10% from client referrals [1], so a CMO might specifically measure *cross-selling success* (e.g., number of top clients that bought a new service from the firm this year) and *referral rates*. **Client retention and expansion metrics** are also key: firms may track the revenue from top clients year-over-year (growth in key client accounts), the number of practice areas serving each top client (as a proxy for how well relationships are being broadened), or client turnover (how many significant clients were lost). Sophisticated firms use **client feedback scores** as a metric as well – for instance, if they conduct client satisfaction interviews or Net Promoter Score (NPS) surveys, the marketing/BD team will own that data and aim to improve it over time.

Internally, marketing leaders keep an eye on **budget efficiency metrics** too: marketing spend as a percentage of revenue (to ensure it stays in an acceptable range, or to make the case for increase if needed), and return on specific initiatives. For example, for a sponsorship or advertising spend, they might track how many leads or introductions it generated. However, quantifying direct ROI is tricky in this relationship business (more on that below). As a result, many CMOs also report **qualitative KPIs** or milestone achievements: e.g., "number of attorneys trained/coached in BD," "completion of 15 client feedback interviews this year," or "increased proposal library content by X%," which indicate improved capabilities.

Interestingly, as law firm marketing becomes more data-driven, there's been a surge in using technology to gather metrics. Some firms now employ tools that capture how clients interact with content (which pages of an e-brochure they clicked, etc.) and feed that info to partners. **Marketing attribution models** – common in other industries – are still nascent in legal, but firms are beginning to look at metrics like *cost per lead* or *conversion rate of event attendees to matters*. For instance, a firm might note that a particular seminar with 50 attendees directly led to 3 RFP invitations – a conversion rate of 6%. Or that their website's "Contact Us" form had 20 inquiries, of which 5 became matters (25% conversion). While these numbers are usually small, tracking them helps justify marketing spend and refine tactics.

In summary, **sophisticated law firm CMOs maintain a dashboard of metrics such as**: website traffic and SEO rankings, email open/click rates, social media engagement, event attendance and leads, pitch win rates, cross-selling revenue, new client count, client satisfaction scores, and marketing budget utilization. By monitoring these, they can demonstrate how marketing and BD efforts are contributing to firm growth. It's telling that more firms are investing in data: over 90% of firms use internal and external data now for activities like pitch support, cross-selling targeting, and directory submissions [84]. Some marketing teams are even using AI tools to compile "hard data, helpful metrics, and tracking" on KPIs automatically [85] [86]. The law firm CMO role is increasingly about combining creative strategy with analytical rigor to show progress in these metrics quarter by quarter.

Measuring Marketing ROI in a Relationship-Driven Business

Demonstrating **return on investment (ROI)** for marketing in a law firm is notoriously challenging, given the long sales cycles and the importance of personal relationships. Unlike, say, an e-commerce business where a campaign's ROI can be calculated from immediate sales, a law firm might publish a brilliant article that influences a GC's perception, and only a year later that GC hires the firm for a $1M matter – it's almost impossible to draw a straight line. That said, firms are making strides in measuring ROI in proxy ways. They often start by defining what “return” means for them: most look at **new business opportunities and client retention** as the primary returns. For example, if the firm spent $50k on a series of industry conferences and in the subsequent 6 months they landed two new clients from contacts made there, they’ll consider the ROI in qualitative terms (“the conferences paid for themselves with those two matters”). Some firms will even estimate revenue from marketing-sourced matters in a year – e.g., “Matters influenced by marketing efforts this year resulted in $X revenue,” acknowledging that without the marketing touch, that work might not have come.

However, it must be admitted that many law firms still struggle to formally measure this. A 2018 survey found a full **85% of firms did *not* track ROI on pitches or RFP responses**, and 20% didn’t even track basic win/loss outcomes [83]. The situation is gradually improving as pressure mounts to justify marketing budgets. Law firm marketing leaders are borrowing techniques from other professional services: things like **attribution tracking**, where they ask new clients “How did you hear about us?” on intake forms or track which content a client engaged with prior to a hire. If a new client says they came because they read the firm’s white paper or saw their webinar, that gets noted as direct ROI of that content. Similarly, firms monitor **referral sources** of new matters – if a matter came through an alumni referral or an intermediary (like an accounting firm introduction), that is logged, allowing marketing to quantify how their relationship-building or network initiatives contribute.

Another approach to ROI is looking at **marketing cost per new matter or per client** in a general sense. If last year the firm spent $1M on marketing and acquired 10 new significant clients, one might say cost per client acquisition was $100k. If this year they spent $1.1M and acquired 15 new clients, cost per client dropped to ~$73k, indicating improved marketing efficiency. These are very rough metrics, but they provide some barometer. Many firms also try to measure **engagement ROI**: for instance, tracking how many clients who regularly consume the firm’s content end up giving new work versus those who don’t. If data shows that clients who clicked on at least 5 pieces of content in a year gave 20% more revenue than those who clicked on none, that suggests the content program has ROI in deepening client engagement.

Client surveys and feedback can directly tie to ROI as well. Some firms ask clients questions like “Did you receive valuable information from us this year (newsletters, seminars) that helped you in your job?” A strong positive response can be used to argue ROI in terms of client satisfaction and loyalty (which correlates with repeat business). One could say, “X% of our clients credit our thought leadership with adding value – keeping those clients happy and informed helps retain them, which is ROI in the form of saved revenue.” As an extreme example of retention value: if marketing efforts (such as a well-run client feedback program) help save even one major client from leaving, that could be millions in revenue retained, far outweighing the marketing budget.

Despite best efforts, law firm marketing ROI is often more art than science. CMOs frequently have to **tell the story of ROI** through case studies: e.g., “Our webinar on new import tariffs had 100 attendees, which led to follow-up meetings with 10 companies, 3 of whom became clients. The revenue from those matters was $500k, versus a webinar cost of $5k – a clear ROI win.” Or, “We revamped our website (cost $200k) and saw a 40% increase in traffic; more importantly, our attorneys report that prospects now often mention the helpful content they saw on our site as a reason for reaching out – indicating our digital presence is paying off.” These narrative ROI examples often resonate more with law firm partners than spreadsheets do.

Increasingly, firms are comparing their marketing metrics to **industry benchmarks** to infer ROI. For instance, knowing that roughly 1 in 3 law firms get a client through their website [3] [4], if your firm can claim, say, 5 clients came via the website last year, you're outperforming peers and thus getting good ROI on your site investment. Or if your email open rates are above legal industry averages, you take that as a sign your content strategy is yielding engagement which should translate to opportunities. Benchmarks help translate numbers into context ("our 15% email click rate is strong relative to industry 10% average, indicating high engagement").

Ultimately, **ROI in a relationship business is measured in the long game** – things like enhanced brand equity, client loyalty, and positioning for high-value opportunities. Many top law firm marketers assert that while they use metrics to guide decisions, one shouldn't undervalue *qualitative returns*. For example, being recognized in an influential ranking or having your partner quoted in major media might not have an immediate dollar ROI, but it builds credibility that makes a GC more likely to include you in their next panel. Those indirect effects are real but hard to quantify. As one marketing veteran noted, *"Not everything that counts can be counted."* Thus, law firm CMOs often present a mix of quantitative data and qualitative achievements to convey ROI. They might highlight, for instance, that the firm improved its Chambers rankings in key practices (which, while an output, is a proxy for future revenue since 50%+ of clients use such directories in hiring decisions [87]). They also emphasize efficiency gains – say, using a new CRM system saved 200 hours of lawyer time in BD, which is an ROI in productivity.

In summary, measuring ROI in legal marketing is a nuanced exercise combining tracked metrics (new matters, engagement rates, etc.) with reasoned judgment about how marketing activities contribute to the firm's success. The trend, however, is toward more data-driven analysis. Firms that historically didn't track these things are starting to – even basic steps like tracking pitch wins and client growth attributable to marketing are becoming standard. As 72% of firms say they prioritize **quality leads over sheer volume** [88] , ROI discussions focus on how well marketing is delivering those quality opportunities. And as law firm marketing budgets face scrutiny like any investment, the ability to articulate ROI – even if partially qualitative – is increasingly vital for CMOs.

Defining Success for a Law Firm Marketing Function

What does "success" look like for a law firm marketing and BD team? In essence, **success means driving tangible growth and strengthening the firm's competitive position, while earning trust from both clients and the firm's partners**. At a high level, a successful marketing function results in *more revenue* – from both new and existing clients – that would not have occurred but for the team's efforts. This could manifest as the firm moving up market share rankings, improved financial performance, or expansion into desired industries or geographies, attributable in part to marketing strategy. For example, if a mid-market firm set a goal to break into the life sciences sector and, after a year of targeted marketing (thought leadership, events, outreach in that sector), the firm lands three new life sciences company clients, that's a clear success indicator.

Success is also measured in **client metrics**: high client satisfaction and retention, strong brand recognition among the target client base, and being seen as a "trusted advisor" beyond just a legal technician. If the marketing team's initiatives lead to the firm being more frequently shortlisted in RFPs or more often mentioned in GC peer discussions (e.g., "I keep hearing about XYZ firm's work in data privacy"), that is a success. Many firms gauge this through client feedback and market feedback. For instance, an increase in favorable client feedback scores year over year, or a jump in the firm's Net Promoter Score, suggests that marketing and service efforts are yielding a better client experience – a long-term success since it drives loyalty.

Internally, a successful marketing team is one that has a **seat at the table in firm strategy and is valued by the lawyers**. We see evidence of this when partners actively involve marketing in planning and recognize their contributions. In the 2025 CMO survey, a *strong majority of marketing leaders said they are involved in strategic planning at their firms, and 60% feel highly valued as strategic thinkers by firm management* [51] [89]. That scenario – where the marketing/BD team is not an afterthought but a core component of firm leadership decisions – is itself a marker of success. It means the function has proven its worth. Additionally, success can be reflected in budget and staffing: if the firm is increasing the marketing budget and adding headcount, it indicates confidence that those investments pay off (indeed, 74% of mid-sized firms reported budget increases, showing growing trust in marketing's impact) [90] [46].

On a more granular level, specific **KPIs turning positive** signal success. This might include hitting certain targets like: a certain number of new matters from marketing campaigns, a rise in cross-selling rate (e.g., 50% of top clients now use 3 or more practice groups, up from 30% last year), improved proposal win rate, growth in website traffic and content engagement, and media/directory recognition. For example, being ranked in Chambers for a practice that wasn't ranked before can be seen as a success for the marketing and lawyers together (since getting ranked often involves a concerted effort of quality work and effective submissions). Since **rankings and awards** were mentioned: while these are "icing on the cake" and not the ultimate goal, they do matter as competitive differentiators [87] [91]. So, a successful marketing function often has a strategy for directories like Chambers, and success might mean more practices or lawyers recognized this year than last. That, in turn, can help the firm compete (clients do use those as a factor).

Moreover, **success looks like a firm culture that embraces business development**. The marketing team's efforts are successful if they result in more attorneys proactively engaging in marketing and BD activities. For instance, if previously only 10% of partners contributed content or went on client visits and now 50% do, that culture shift is a huge success (it means the firm is more outward-looking and growth-focused). BTI Consulting noted that the most successful firms are "embedding business development into their culture" and scaling it, which is why the largest firms pulling ahead are doing so – but any firm can choose to do the same [92] [93]. So an internal success metric is attorney participation: number of attorneys actively involved in marketing initiatives, training completion, etc. One marketing leader in a survey succinctly said *"engagement is the single biggest issue for sales"* [38] – getting attorneys engaged is critical; thus, if the marketing team achieves high engagement, they've solved a big piece of the puzzle.

Finally, a successful marketing function is one that can **demonstrate ROI and justify itself**. We discussed measuring ROI above – when the team can come to firm management with clear stories and data of how their work led to revenue or improved standing, that cements their success. For example, if the CMO can show that a targeted campaign yielded $5M in new work, or that client attrition dropped to near zero after implementing a client feedback program, that success is tangible.

In summary, "success" for law firm marketing is multi-faceted: it's about *external impact* (more clients, more revenue, better brand recognition, higher client satisfaction) and *internal impact* (greater attorney engagement in BD, a strategic voice in the firm, efficient use of budget). Industry benchmarks increasingly encourage focusing on those outcomes. Thought leaders advise that firms must focus on **lead generation, client retention, and high-impact thought leadership to outmaneuver competitors** [94] – if a marketing team is hitting those marks, the firm will thrive. Or as BTI puts it, the firms that act decisively on client development and thought leadership "will thrive" while those who hesitate will fall behind [95]. Therefore, a successful marketing function is ultimately evidenced by a thriving firm: one that is growing, has loyal clients singing its praises, is recognized for its expertise, and has a pipeline for future business. If the marketing and BD team has played a key role in achieving that, then it is indisputably successful.

Industry Benchmarks for Web Traffic, Engagement, and Lead Generation

When assessing their marketing performance, law firms often look to **industry benchmarks** to see how they stack up in areas like web traffic, content engagement, and lead generation efficiency. While specific figures vary widely by firm size and market, there are some benchmark stats and standards in the legal industry. For law firm websites, a commonly cited benchmark (from surveys by digital marketing agencies) is that **around 35% of firms report gaining a new client directly via their website** in a given year [3] [4]. This implies that direct web-generated leads are relatively rare for many firms (especially mid-market B2B firms, where referrals dominate). Top-performing firms, however, exceed this: if your firm can attribute say 5-10 significant new matters a year to web inquiries or people who “found us online,” that is above-average. In terms of **traffic volume**, specific numbers are hard to pin down publicly, but some digital reports rank Am Law 200 sites by traffic. Generally, larger firms see on the order of hundreds of thousands of visits per month, whereas a mid-market Am Law 150 firm might see tens of thousands. One proxy is search engine visibility: a “Digital Visibility Index” study by Poston Communications weighted web traffic trends and SEO strength for Am Law firms [82]. If a mid-market firm is investing in SEO and content, they’d expect to see an upward trend in organic search visits (one benchmark: about 69% of law firm site traffic on average comes from organic search and local search combined [96]). So, success could be, for example, a 20% year-over-year increase in organic search traffic – indicating content is drawing more interest. Another interesting benchmark: about **26% of law firms updated or redesigned their website in the last 6 months** according to a 2025 marketing report [97] [98]. This shows many firms are actively investing in their sites, and staying current is a moving target.

For **content engagement**, benchmarks often come from email and social metrics. Typical email newsletter open rates for legal industry emails might hover around 20-25%, with click-through rates around 2-5%, according to marketing services data. If a firm’s client alerts are getting, say, a 30% open rate and 8% click rate, that would be considered very strong engagement. Internally, firms might benchmark how many clients or contacts download major pieces of content. For instance, a benchmark might be that a well-promoted white paper could get a few hundred downloads in a mid-size firm context. Some firms compare engagement on thought leadership to industry averages: e.g., Greentarget’s survey of in-house counsel might reveal that, on average, GCs spend X minutes reading law firm content per week; a firm then tries to capture a good share of that attention. A very concrete benchmark from Greentarget was that only **25% of in-house counsel find the content they get very valuable** [54] – which is sobering. It implies that if a firm can push their content to be in that top quartile of value (through relevance and quality), they are beating the benchmark. Another statistic: **51% of in-house counsel and 62% of execs use legal rankings like Chambers as part of their hiring consideration** [87]. So if a firm’s content or presence can improve its rankings, that indirectly ties to engagement (as being ranked can increase traffic to your site via those directories).

On **lead generation**, many law firms (especially mid-market) don’t have “leads” in the traditional sense of high volume inquiries. Instead, they treat things like event attendees or webinar registrants as leads to nurture. A benchmark here: a successful client webinar might expect 50-200 attendees depending on topic and firm size; converting a handful of those into follow-up meetings could be considered a win. One general stat: *72% of law firms prioritize higher quality leads over increasing volume* [88], indicating the focus is on nurturing a smaller number of strong prospects rather than mass marketing. This is typical for B2B/services – one quality GC relationship is worth more than dozens of casual website form fills.

Some data from the consumer law side (which can provide upper-bound benchmarks) show that many law firms aim for **5-10% of revenue to be spent on marketing** (especially for aggressive growth) [99] [100], but for mid-market B2B, as noted, ~2-3% is more usual [43]. This lower spend reflects the fact that lead gen is more relationship-based. Benchmarks for conversion rates: anecdotally, law firm marketing teams often consider it good if they can arrange initial meetings with, say, 25% of the prospects on their target list per year, and then maybe half of those eventually turn into some work. These aren't published stats but ballpark goals.

In terms of **web lead response**, an ALM study noted that **67% of legal clients base hiring decisions on how fast a firm responds to an inquiry** [101] [102]. And firms responding within 5 minutes see drastically higher conversion (400% higher) [103]. While that data skews toward smaller/faster-paced matters, it sets a benchmark for responsiveness. Mid-market firms, when they do get inquiries (whether via website or email), should ideally respond within hours, not days, to be above benchmark. Another tech-forward benchmark: some firms use AI chat or intake tools now – a personal injury firm in one stat saw a 25% increase in consultations by using AI for instant response [104]. A mid-market firm might not need a chatbot, but the point is the faster and more efficiently you handle leads, the better your conversion relative to peers.

Benchmarking against peers can also involve looking at awards like the Social Law Firm Index or other marketing awards. If a firm can say it's ranked in the top quartile for digital presence among Am Law second hundred, that's a bragging right (for instance, Good2BSocial's Social Law Firm Index often highlights which mid-market firms excel in content and social – being on that list is a de facto benchmark of being ahead of the curve).

To summarize: while concrete industry-wide numbers for web traffic or leads are hard to generalize, mid-market firms often evaluate success by comparing to known reference points. They know BigLaw giants get hundreds of thousands of site visits; a mid-market might aim for tens of thousands and growing. They know typical client alert engagement is modest; they aim to beat that by targeted, quality content. They know few firms get direct web clients; they treat even one or two a year as a bonus and focus on leveraging digital content to influence offline decisions (like RFP shortlists). Ultimately, the **trend benchmarks are as important as absolute numbers**: a firm's marketing should be showing positive trends (more traffic, more engagement, more opportunities) relative to itself and stable or growing share of voice relative to competitors. If the average firm's marketing output is static and yours is rising, you're effectively ahead.

In the end, what gets measured gets managed. The best practice is for law firm marketers to set benchmark-informed goals (e.g., "increase email engagement by 10%" or "achieve top-3 Google search ranking for [key practice] in our region"), track progress, and adjust tactics accordingly. By staying aware of industry norms and outperforming them, mid-market firms can ensure their marketing is not just checking the box but truly making a competitive difference.

Competitive Landscape and Differentiation

Competing Against Larger and Smaller Firms

Mid-market B2B law firms (roughly those in the Am Law 100-200 range) occupy a **middle ground** where they face pressure from both ends: the mega-firms above them and the specialized boutiques below. To compete effectively, mid-market firms leverage certain advantages unique to their size and focus. One key advantage over the **larger Am Law 50 firms** is often **pricing and value**. Mid-market firms frequently have lower billing rates or more flexible fee arrangements than the biggest firms, which appeals to cost-conscious clients. They pitch themselves as offering "BigLaw quality at mid-law rates," essentially. For many routine corporate matters, mid-market firms can deliver the same outcomes as a top-50 firm but with leaner teams and lower overhead, translating to savings for the client. Especially for middle-market companies (which themselves may be smaller than Fortune 500), hiring a mid-size firm can be a better fit culturally and financially. In fact, big firms have started eyeing those mid-market company clients as growth opportunities, but those big firms often struggle to break in because **mid-market clients tend to have very strong existing relationships with their mid-sized law firms** [28] . A regional CEO quoted in a piece noted that large firms entering mid-market territory come in saying "we're more expensive but we have more experience," yet that argument falters when incumbent mid-sized firms already have *decades of experience with those clients* and deep personal ties [105] . This highlights another competitive edge of mid-market firms: **relationships and client service**. They often pride themselves on high-touch service – their partners are more accessible than those at mammoth firms, and clients won't be handed off to armies of junior associates. General counsel at midmarket companies frequently know the name of the firm's managing partner and have long-standing friendships with key partners. That loyalty is hard for a newcomer (especially a large out-of-town firm) to dislodge. As one law firm leader noted, middle-market companies "generally have very strong relationships with their lawyers" and it's hard to undo those bonds [28] . Mid-market firms capitalize on that by emphasizing stability and trust: "We've been by our clients' side for years; we know your business intimately and aren't just parachuting in."

Against **smaller boutique competitors**, mid-market firms position themselves as having **broader capabilities and scalability**. A boutique might excel in one practice (say a litigation boutique known for trial prowess or a regulatory boutique deep in one area). Mid-market firms counter by being full-service or at least multi-dimensional – they can handle a range of needs for the client under one roof. They market the convenience and integrated approach: for example, a regional boutique might be great for litigation, but if the client also needs employment advice, international reach, or a capital markets deal done, the mid-market firm can do all of that, whereas the boutique cannot. Essentially, mid-market firms offer a one-stop shop appeal to clients that outgrow the capabilities of very small firms. Additionally, mid-sized firms often have **better infrastructure and geographic reach** than a boutique. They may have multiple offices in key cities (though not as many as BigLaw) or be part of international networks of firms, which they leverage to assure clients they can handle matters wherever they arise. For instance, many mid-market firms join alliances like Meritas, Lex Mundi, or Ally Law to extend their global reach via partner firms, thus matching BigLaw's footprint when needed but at mid-market cost. Compared to boutiques, mid-market firms also typically have more robust support (like specialized knowledge management, tech tools, and professional staff) that can benefit clients. They use this to compete by saying, effectively, "we have the bench strength and resources that small firms lack, so we won't be overwhelmed by your big project."

That said, mid-market firms also strive to **differentiate from each other and carve a niche**. The mid-law segment is crowded, so many successful firms focus on dominating certain industries or practice niches.

This way, they don't compete head-to-head with every firm on everything, but rather become known as *the* go-to firm for, say, middle-market private equity deals, or for labor & employment in a certain region, or for a specific industry like insurance or healthcare. By building a brand in those areas, they can fend off larger firms (because clients perceive them as equally expert or better in that niche) and smaller firms (because they have the scale to handle all aspects of matters in that niche).

In competing with larger firms, mid-market firms also highlight **lack of conflicts** and flexible conflict policies. BigLaw firms often have to turn down work due to conflicts with other large clients; mid-market firms can often scoop up good work because they have more freedom in this regard. General counsel sometimes choose a mid-sized firm specifically because "the large firms are all conflicted, but this firm can take us on and give us priority attention."

Another subtle angle is **talent retention and consistency**. Mid-market firms often tout that they have lower turnover, so the team you start with will likely be the team you keep – whereas at some large firms, associates might leave or client teams might rotate frequently. Clients appreciate continuity. Mid-sized firms also often have partners who came from BigLaw but chose a smaller platform, so they market that clients get former BigLaw expertise in a more client-focused environment.

From an offensive standpoint, we see **large firms attempting to move down-market** (e.g., opening offices in secondary cities to attract middle-market clients) and **boutiques sometimes moving up-market** (expanding services). Mid-market firms thus defend their turf by reinforcing those client relationships, staying price-competitive, and emphasizing their balanced positioning – many GCs see mid-sized firms as offering the "Goldilocks" solution: not too big, not too small, but *just right* for their needs. One managing partner quipped that midmarket clients can sometimes yield *more work across fewer relationships* than a Fortune 50 (which spreads work among many big firms), implying that a mid-market firm might actually get a bigger share of wallet from a middle-market client than a huge firm gets from a mega-client [106] [107]. The mid-market firm's challenge is to maintain that trust and keep delivering value so the client never feels the need to "upgrade" to a bigger firm.

In summary, **mid-market firms compete by playing to their strengths**: strong personal relationships, better value and flexible pricing, deep knowledge of the mid-market clients' businesses, broad service offerings (one-stop service) with sufficient scale, and a lack of bureaucratic frictions that clients might encounter with very large firms. By doing so, they can hold their own against both the global giants and the niche boutiques.

Differentiation Strategies that Work

In a crowded legal market, mid-market firms must clearly articulate **what sets them apart**. Successful differentiation strategies often revolve around a few core themes: **industry specialization, superior client service, innovative pricing, and thought leadership/recognition**. One effective strategy is for a firm to position itself as *the experts in a particular industry or sector*. For example, a firm might brand itself as "the premier mid-market law firm for the energy sector" or for technology startups, etc. This goes beyond just marketing lingo – it involves dedicating resources to truly understanding that industry (hiring people with industry in-house experience, attending industry events, publishing specific content) and building a track record of deals/cases in it. Clients in that industry then view the firm not just as lawyers but as business-savvy partners who know their space intimately. Many mid-sized firms have found rich niches in areas that

BigLaw might not focus on, like middle-market franchising companies, regional banks, or emerging cannabis businesses, and by doubling down on those, they differentiate from generalist competitors.

Another strategy is emphasizing a **client-centric service model** as a differentiator. Nearly every firm claims to have great client service, but the ones that truly differentiate make it part of their culture and processes. For instance, some firms implement a “client service pledge” – like guaranteed responsiveness times, regular client feedback surveys, free quarterly check-in meetings, etc. If a firm can credibly say, “We treat our clients like family – here’s how: we have a 24/7 on-call team, we customize our services to client preferences, we invest in knowing your business through secondments or annual workshops,” that can stand out. Awards and rankings for client service (like BTI’s Client Service A-Team) can corroborate these claims. In fact, firms that earn a spot on client service rankings often leverage that heavily in marketing – it’s tangible proof of differentiation on service quality. Another related point: some mid-market firms differentiate via **culture and stability** – projecting an image that their partnership is collegial, stable, and not prone to the high leverage or churn of bigger firms. A GC might find that attractive, thinking “my work won’t be used as training fodder; I’ll get senior attention consistently.”

Alternative fee arrangements (AFAs) and pricing innovation can be a differentiator as well. A mid-market firm might, for example, offer flexible fee deals (fixed fees, success fees, retainers) that big firms are reluctant to do. If a firm becomes known for creative pricing that aligns with client objectives (and actually delivering on budget), cost-sensitive clients will gravitate to them. In the mid-market segment, being able to say “we don’t bill by the hour, we bill for value – and X% of our matters are on alternative fee arrangements” could distinguish a firm as more modern and client-friendly.

Differentiation also comes through **visible expertise and thought leadership** (discussed earlier). A firm that has star lawyers or widely recognized experts in a certain field can market that as a unique selling point (“Our IP litigation team is led by the attorney who literally wrote the handbook on patent damages [57] ”). Having a roster of **“thought leaders”** – attorneys who speak at major conferences, who are quoted in the press, or who publish influential articles – raises the firm’s profile above similarly-sized competitors. This can be reinforced by legal rankings and directories. While clients treat things like Chambers rankings as an “icing” factor, they do have impact [87] [108]. Firms work hard to improve those rankings because being ranked (especially in Band 1 or 2) is a quick differentiator in marketing materials. A mid-market firm highly ranked in, say, **Chambers USA for its healthcare practice** will absolutely highlight that to differentiate from another firm that might not be ranked or is lower-ranked. They also encourage and trumpet individual accolades: if several of their partners are recognized as “Client Service All-Stars” or “Top 100 Lawyers in X” etc., those honors back up their differentiation story.

Another effective differentiation approach is to leverage **client testimonials and case studies**. Mid-market firms often have great stories of how they helped a client achieve a business goal or navigate a crisis. Packaging those into case studies (with client permission) – for instance, “We helped a client save $10M through an innovative defense strategy” – sets the firm apart as results-oriented and aligned with client success. Larger firms also do this, but mid-market ones can emphasize the personal touch (“we worked side-by-side with the client’s team and truly became an extension of their legal department…”). This humanizes the differentiation.

Finally, some firms differentiate on **geography or community presence** – for example, being the law firm deeply rooted in a particular region or city, with unmatched local connections. A firm that’s been in a city for

100 years may brand itself around its community leadership, which can appeal to clients in that region who prefer a firm with local prestige rather than a branch office of an international firm.

In implementing differentiation strategies, what *doesn't* work is vague marketing speak (e.g. "we partner with our clients" – everyone says that). What works is backed-up specifics: *how* do you partner? *Which* clients can vouch for it? Or *what metric* proves it (like retention rate or referrals)? As Jennifer Scalzi of Calibrate Legal pointed out, firms need to **"showcase specific and relevant expertise"** and better advocate for clients in order to differentiate in today's market [109]. In other words, differentiation must be concrete and relevant to client needs. The firms that succeed in standing out typically align their strengths with something clients care deeply about – whether it's industry knowledge, cost efficiency, service experience, or innovative problem-solving – and then relentlessly communicate and deliver on that differentiator.

The Importance of Legal Rankings and Directories (Chambers, Legal 500, etc.)

Legal rankings and directories – such as **Chambers & Partners, The Legal 500, Benchmark Litigation, and regional lists like Best Lawyers** – play a significant role in law firm reputation, especially in competitive markets. For mid-market firms, these third-party endorsements can be an equalizer against larger firms, and thus firms devote considerable effort to them. From the client perspective, **rankings do influence hiring decisions** to a notable extent. Studies have found that more than half of in-house counsel and business executives consider peer-driven rankings when evaluating law firms [87]. Chambers, in particular, is often cited by GCs as a trusted source (it's seen as a "seal of approval" from the market). So if a mid-market firm is ranked in Chambers in a practice area alongside much larger firms, that lends immediate credibility.

However, it's also true that these rankings are not usually the *primary* factor in hiring – they are, as one report put it, **"icing on the cake"** [108]. A good Chambers or Legal 500 ranking alone won't win the business, but it can reinforce a positive impression or serve as a tiebreaker. Clients may use directories as a starting list of firms to consider or to validate a firm they've heard of. For example, a GC might say, "We need a good mid-sized firm for environmental litigation in the Midwest" and then see which firms Chambers ranks in that category. If your firm is absent, you might not get considered; if present, you're in the game. So for mid-market firms trying to raise their profile, **being ranked (especially in relevant regional or practice categories) is important**.

Firms actively try to **influence these rankings through structured submissions and reference campaigns**. The typical Chambers submission involves writing detailed matter descriptions for the past year and providing client referees for researchers to interview. Marketing teams spearhead this effort, gathering success stories and coordinating with lawyers to identify clients who will speak glowingly on the firm's behalf. The process itself can improve a firm's focus on what differentiates them (since you have to articulate it in submissions). While one cannot directly "buy" a ranking – they are ostensibly independent – **consistent effort and engagement with the process definitely increase the chances of being ranked**. Firms essentially treat it as a project: assembling strong submissions, coaching lawyers on highlighting key strengths during Chambers interviews, and politely encouraging top clients to provide positive feedback when contacted by researchers. It's understood that if you don't participate or put minimal effort, you likely won't get ranked or will drop in rank. Thus, mid-market firms that want those accolades have dedicated calendar cycles for directory submissions and sometimes hire outside consultants to advise on improving their rankings.

Moreover, many firms **publicize their rankings heavily** once they get them – press releases, website badges ("Tier 1 in Legal 500 for M&A"), lawyer bios listing their individual recognitions, etc. This is because they know prospective clients (and even existing clients) notice these. There's a marketing halo effect: attorneys frequently mention to clients, "By the way, our practice was just ranked Band 2 in Chambers this year," which can reinforce the client's confidence in them.

It's also worth noting that **awards and rankings are part of internal morale and recruiting**. Partners at mid-market firms feel validated when they or their firm is ranked alongside big-name competitors. It can help retain star lawyers (who might otherwise be poached by bigger firms) by giving them recognition. And in recruiting lateral partners or associates, showing that the firm is well-regarded in independent directories can make it more attractive.

However, firms have to be strategic – chasing every ranking or vanity award isn't fruitful. The Greentarget/Zeughauser survey suggested focusing on the awards that matter to clients, possibly industry-specific ones [91]. For instance, if your clients are in healthcare, being in the American Health Lawyers Association top lists might mean more to them than a general Best Lawyers list. The advice was to *"take a purposeful approach to awards…they may not get you work on their own, but serve as a third-party seal of approval"* [108]. Essentially, pick the directories that are respected and relevant, and aim to excel in those.

In conclusion, **legal directories and rankings are quite important as a marketing and competitive tool**. They help mid-market firms bolster credibility and comparability against larger firms, and they provide an external validation that smaller or lesser-known firms sometimes need to get on a GC's radar. Mid-market firms often celebrate when they climb the rankings or win an accolade because they know it can be leveraged in pitches ("We're recognized as a leading firm in X by Chambers"). While no client hires a firm *solely* because of a ranking, these recognitions can reinforce a firm's differentiation (e.g., "award-winning litigation team") and give cautious clients comfort that an outside authority vouches for the firm's quality. As such, law firms will continue to court these rankings. As one strategy consultant humorously puts it, *lawyers care about what clients think of them, and if clients care about rankings, then by the transitive property, lawyers care deeply about rankings*. The smart mid-market firms treat directory submissions almost like RFPs – as an opportunity to sell the firm's strengths – because a good showing in Chambers or Legal 500 can be referenced in many future business development conversations.

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