

State of Legal 2026

How Technology Is Shaping
the Future of Legal

EBOOK



Foreword

By Jon Venick, Partner, DLA Piper

The legal industry remains a discipline built on judgment, rigor and a deep commitment to solving meaningful problems for clients. That hasn't changed—and, if anything, this report makes clear just how strongly that foundation still holds.

What has changed is everything around it.

One thing in this ebook is clear: lawyers still love the work itself. They are energized by the intellectual challenge, the collaboration and the ability to make a tangible difference. While many professions are grappling with disengagement, the legal field retains a powerful sense of purpose.

Yet, beneath that enthusiasm, is a tension. Lawyers today don't lack motivation. They lack momentum.

The friction described throughout this report—manual workflows, prolonged intake processes, tool sprawl and layered security steps—doesn't diminish the quality of legal work. But it does slow it down. It creates a gap between what lawyers could deliver and what their current systems allow them to deliver efficiently.

It's a familiar story, but one that feels newly urgent.

The expectations surrounding legal work are evolving faster than the infrastructure supporting it. Clients are not just seeking expertise; they are expecting responsiveness, transparency and seamless experiences from the very first interaction. Increasingly, those expectations are being shaped not by other law firms, but by the best digital experiences anywhere.

That is where this moment becomes particularly interesting.

For years, "innovation" in legal was often framed as incremental—digitizing documents, introducing e-signatures, adding another system to the stack. But the data in this report suggests a shift in mindset. Lawyers are not asking for more tools. They are asking for better ones. Systems that remove steps instead of adding them.

In other words, the conversation is moving from technology adoption to workflow transformation. That distinction matters.

Automation and AI, which feature prominently in these findings, are not simply about doing the same work faster. They are about rethinking how work flows in the first place—how matters begin, how information moves, how decisions are supported and how value is ultimately delivered to clients.

Of course, with that opportunity comes a degree of caution. Concerns around security, governance and integration are not barriers to progress; they are signals of a profession that understands the stakes. Trust has always been the currency of legal practice, and no technological advancement will change that.

But trust and progress are not opposing forces. When thoughtfully applied, they reinforce each other.

What this report ultimately reveals is not a profession struggling to keep up, but one standing at a pivotal inflection point. The fundamentals are strong. The appetite for improvement is clear. And the path forward—while not without complexity—is increasingly well defined.

So perhaps the most important question raised here is a simple one: If lawyers already find deep satisfaction in their work, what becomes possible when the friction surrounding that work is finally reduced?

The answer will shape not just the future of legal technology, but the future of the profession itself.



Introduction

The reasons lawyers choose their profession haven't changed. Lawyers are still driven by problem-solving, intellectual challenge and meaningful client work. What has changed is the environment around the work, shaped by rising client expectations, growing complexity and rapid technological change.

Lawyers care deeply about outcomes, but many feel slowed by the processes behind the work. Manual procedures, fragmented tools and inconsistent workflows create friction at every stage, from intake to delivery. Security and compliance are essential, but when they're bolted on instead of built in, they can add even more friction. The result? Lawyers feel effective, but not as efficient as they could be.

Opportunity is everywhere—but flashy new technology isn't necessarily the answer. Lawyers want simple, easy-to-use tools that check off necessary tasks so they can return to the client-focused work they love. Could automation and AI hold the answers? Only if lawyers begin to use them to their full potential. This report explores where legal teams are succeeding, where friction remains and what will define the next phase of progress for law firms and in-house legal teams alike.

About the Survey

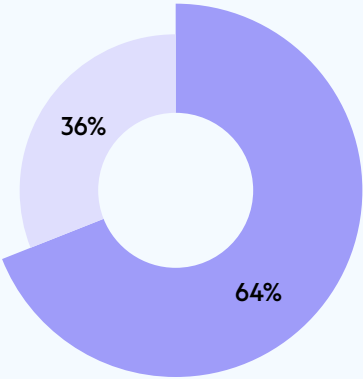
The Progress® ShareFile® team commissioned Regina Corso Consulting to conduct a survey of lawyers to better understand their thoughts on the profession, where it is going and how it is and isn't changing.

This survey is among 304 U.S.-based lawyers, with 154 who work in law firms and 150 who work in-house at corporations/companies.



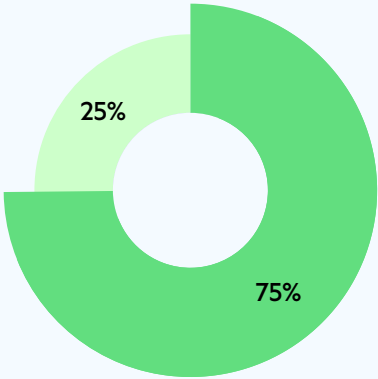
Demographics

Age



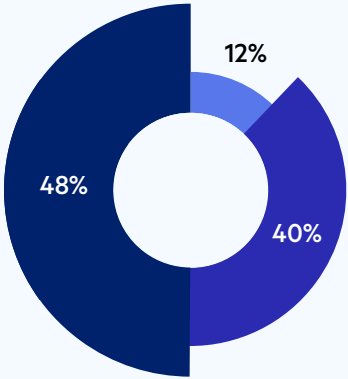
- 18-39
- 40 or older

Gender



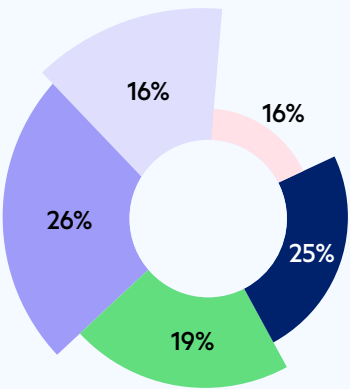
- Women
- Men

Title



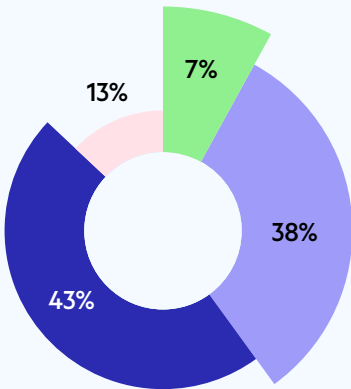
- Associate/Director
- Counsel
- Senior Executives/VPs

Size of company



- 10-49 employees
- 50-249 employees
- 250-500 employees
- 501 - 1,000 employees
- Over 1,000 employees

Time in field



- 5 years or less
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- Over 20 years

Executive Summary

Lawyers overwhelmingly love what they do: 97% say they enjoy the job and 98% get to do the work they like most each week. Most of the appeal comes from meaningful problem-solving, collaboration and helping clients. But even the most satisfied lawyers have some reservations—particularly about how the work they do gets done.

Most lawyers feel effective, but not efficient. The large majority (77%) say much of their work is still manual. The work that is automated could still be improved: 73% report having too many steps in their workflows, and 62% say there are clear opportunities to automate work they haven't already.

Nowhere is this more visible than the client intake process. Nearly half of lawyers (47%) say intake lasts four days or longer, even though most believe it should take two days or less. This leaves a bad impression that has the power to shape client relationships—before legal work even begins.

Automation and AI are already in play, but adoption is uneven. While 82% of lawyers say automation has improved their work lives, only 24% say a large portion of their daily work is automated. AI use is gaining momentum in legal, but many teams are still cautious about scaling due to integration challenges, security concerns and a lack of clear governance.

Technology should be part of the solution, but lawyers find many modern tools to be cumbersome, time-consuming and even risky. Tool sprawl and inconsistent processes remain a drag on productivity, with 84% saying workflow inconsistencies affect efficiency across their organizations.

Lawyers don't want more tools. They want better ones, without the frills. In fact, 95% of lawyers say they want tools that are simple and easy to use without a lot of bells and whistles.

By pairing secure, well-governed technology with smarter workflows, firms and in-house legal teams can move faster, serve clients better and spend more time on the work that makes the profession so rewarding in the first place.

How to Use This Report

Each section of this report showcases the positives of modern legal processes and technology. But it also highlights the current pitfalls the industry must address to efficiently keep cases moving while meeting clients' expectations for speed and data security. After seeing how your office or firm's views compare to those of hundreds of other professionals across the country, use this report to seek out technology and solutions that directly address current gaps.

Trend #1: Lawyers Are Highly Satisfied—But Not with Efficiency

Lawyers enjoy high job satisfaction and regularly get to do what they love most about the job. Yet, many feel the way the work gets done hasn't kept pace with technology or client expectations. The result is a profession that feels purposeful, but often slower and more cumbersome than it needs to be.

The Upside: Lawyers Feel Fulfilled

Job satisfaction among lawyers is remarkably high: 97% say they love the job and the work itself, and 98% say they get to do what they enjoy most each week. What drives that satisfaction is meaningful, intellectually engaging work—60% cite problem-solving as their favorite part of the role, followed by working with great colleagues (51%) and helping people or clients (50%). Others point to researching the law (48%), career stability (46%) and a strong salary (45%). Notably, 0% of respondents said there's nothing they like about being a lawyer.

The Challenge: Feeling Effective, Not Efficient

Despite this enthusiasm, inefficiency is the main sticking point. More than half of lawyers (52%) say they feel effective in their roles, but not efficient. This suggests that while outcomes are strong, the processes to achieve them are often time-consuming and fragmented. About three-quarters of lawyers (73%) say their workflow has too many steps and 77% say their workflows are still manual.

The Opportunity: Fix the Work, Not the Work Ethic

The opportunity lies in [improving daily workflows](#)—such as intake, document review and legal research—with technology that's automated and efficient, but not cumbersome or insecure.

Trend #2: Intake Sets the Tone—and the Timeline

The client experience begins long before legal work starts, and intake is where expectations, momentum and trust are first established. Yet most lawyers say intake requires more time than necessary (and clients agree), creating a bad impression right at the start of new relationships.

The Upside: Efficient Intake = Stronger Relationships

An overwhelming 94% of lawyers say that if they could speed up client intake, they could deliver results faster. And if they could automate client intake, it would allow them to take on more business (92%).

The Challenge: Intake Requires More Time Than It Should

Despite its importance, intake often drags on longer than it should. Almost half (47%) of lawyers say it takes them four days or longer, but nearly the same percentage (43%) believe it should take two to three days or just one day (37%). Those delays don't go unnoticed. Clients feel the lag before any real work begins, setting a slower pace for the entire initiative.

But lawyers aren't necessarily to blame. Over four in five lawyers (84%) say they have issues getting information from clients quickly and/or clearly. When they do receive it, 38% of lawyers say the biggest pain point is not being able to easily check for conflicts. The solution? In-house and legal firm respondents say:



“Automating client intake would save us a lot of time. Instead of asking clients to fill out paperwork manually, automation can make the intake process smoother and faster. Implement chatbots for client intake questions.”

Marsha J. Naegeli, [CEO and Founder of NAEGLI Deposition & Trial](#)

The Opportunity: Turn Intake into a Strategic Advantage

[Streamlining intake](#) is one of the most immediate ways to improve both client experience and internal efficiency. Almost all lawyers (97%) say they need to leverage technology that effectively streamlines processes and creates workflow efficiencies. Further, 92% say technology would allow them to do more of what they love about being a lawyer.

Which Technology Will Be Most Pivotal?

Ninety-seven percent of lawyers say AI and automation will be important to the future of the legal profession, along with cloud (95%) and blockchain (75%). Some even say AI (54%), automation (53%) and cloud (54%) will be very important.

By standardizing intake workflows, reducing manual handoffs and applying secure, centralized tools, firms can shorten timelines, accelerate time to value and set every new matter up for success from day one.



Trend #3: Tool Sprawl Is Quietly Draining Time

Legal professionals know what they want when it comes to tech: fewer tools, clearer workflows and systems that “just work.” This isn’t due to a lack of tech savviness or unwillingness to adopt new tools. There’s a direct correlation between legal software delays and lawyers’ ability to quickly and efficiently help clients.

The Upside: Clear Appetite for Simplicity

Lawyers broadly recognize the benefits of technology in their work. Over nine in ten (95%) say they need to use technology specifically to support an improved client experience. But effectiveness matters more to lawyers than features. Lawyers want technology that reduces complexity and lets them focus on legal practice—not system navigation.

The Challenge: Too Many Tools, Too Much Friction

Legal teams often face recurring technology challenges, including slow or outdated systems and frequent platform switching. Over four in five lawyers (84%) say inconsistent processes across the firm or company cause efficiency issues, with almost three in five (57%) strongly agreeing. What starts as minor delays or inconveniences often spirals into longer wait times for clients, resulting in tarnished relationships during intake and discovery.

The Opportunity: Consolidate and Streamline

Instead of more tools to fix the problem, an overwhelming majority of lawyers (95%) say they want tools that are simple and easy to use without a lot of bells and whistles. Reducing tool sprawl starts with consolidating core workflows, centralizing document sharing and cutting down on context switching to streamline approvals and simplify the daily work experience.

Trend #4: Automation Still Lags Behind What's Possible

Automation is widely viewed as a powerful efficiency driver in legal work. But most teams are only scratching the surface of what it can actually deliver.

The Upside: Automation Makes a Measurable Difference

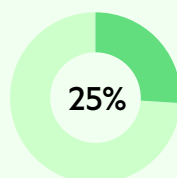
[Lawyers see clear value in automation.](#) More than four in five (82%) say it has a significant impact on their work life, and three-quarters (76%) report that at least some of their daily tasks are automated. That impact is especially felt in repetitive, process-heavy work where automation can remove friction and free up time for higher-value thinking.

The Challenge: Partial Adoption Leaves Value on the Table

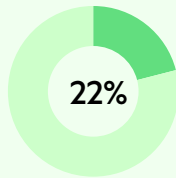
Despite the impact lawyers say automation has on their work lives, only 24% say a great deal of their daily work is automated. Why? Integration challenges (31%), budget constraints (31%) and security concerns (30%) top the list. Just 4% say they face no barriers at all.

The Opportunity: Focus Automation Where It Counts Most

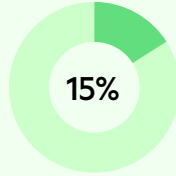
Unsurprisingly, nearly two-thirds (62%) of lawyers say there are clear opportunities to automate work they haven't already. This may include everyday tasks like:



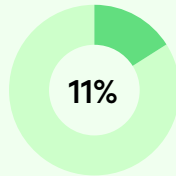
Document drafting



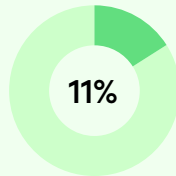
Contract review



Data collection and analysis



Automated alerts



Risk identification

By standardizing repeatable workflows and automating tasks like document collection, approvals, notifications and handoffs, firms and in-house legal teams can address the most common friction points first.



“They go automatically into a mapped-out ShareFile folder that gives everybody who needs to know a notification that the document has arrived. ShareFile automatically files it where we need it. I love the automation. It’s key to what we do and really helps the efficiency of our processes.”

Christine Cooper, [CEO of aequum and Co-Managing Partner of Koehler Fitzgerald](#)



Trend #5: Security Is Non-Negotiable, But Often Causes Friction

Security is top of mind across the profession. But it can come at a cost for some lawyers, who say additional tools and extra steps add time and frustration to intake processes. At the same time, security is a top priority for building and maintaining client trust. AI, automation and tools that natively integrate security best practices may hold the answer.

The Upside: Security Is a Shared Priority

[Data security](#) is a major concern across the legal profession. More than three-quarters of surveyed lawyers (76%) say they're concerned about protecting sensitive information, underscoring how central security is to day-to-day legal work. This is good news for clients, who voice concern by asking about security procedures for their legal data, according to 81% of lawyers.

The Challenge: A Security Tradeoff

When security controls feel layered on rather than built in, they can create workarounds that introduce additional risk. Four in five lawyers (80%) say sometimes, security issues take too long to work efficiently. Almost two-thirds (65%) say a security step and/or tool has even delayed them from assisting clients.

The Opportunity: Build Security Into the Workflow

The path forward is security by design. Embedding secure file sharing, access controls, audit trails and permissions directly into everyday workflows helps reduce friction while maintaining compliance and client confidence. Already, one-third of lawyers (32%) say they use AI to support better security practices.

Concern for Security Varies Across Roles, Tenure

Does generation play a part in security awareness? Senior leaders are more likely than junior staff to worry about data security (82% vs. 71%). At the same time, newer legal professionals (10 years or less) are more likely than those with longer tenures to say security tools or steps have slowed their ability to help clients (71% vs. 57%).



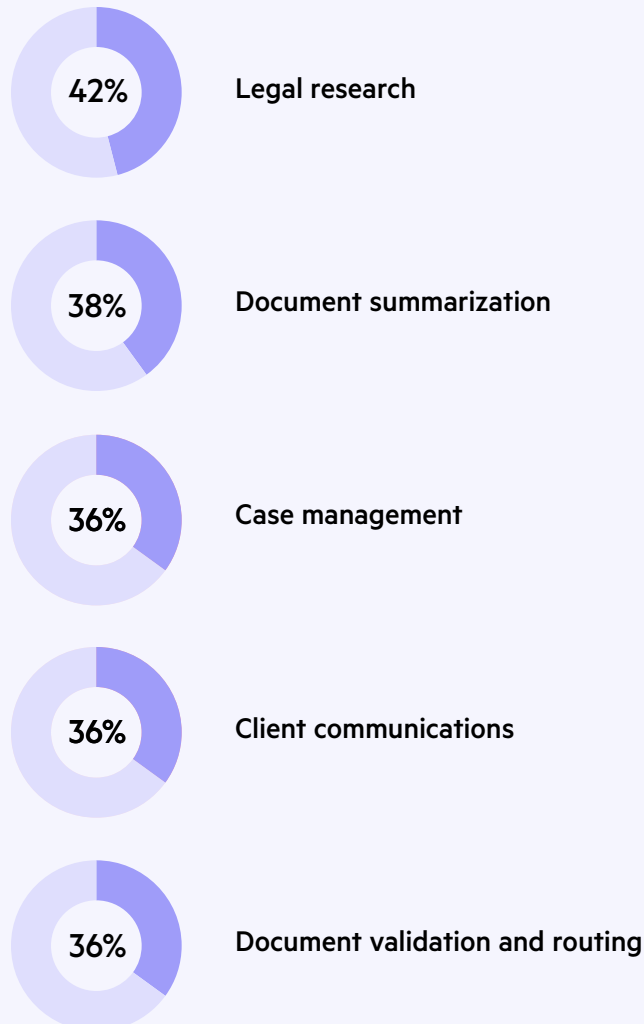
Trend #6: AI Readiness Is High, But Requires Governance

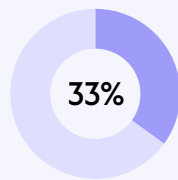
AI has rapidly embedded itself into legal workflows, moving from experimentation to everyday use. But as adoption accelerates, many firms are still working to put the right policies and controls in place to manage it responsibly.

The Upside: AI Is Already Driving Day-to-Day Work

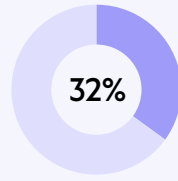
AI has already solidified its impact on everyday legal operations: 85% of lawyers say they currently use AI in the workplace. Usage, however, varies in frequency—just one-third (33%) say they use AI a great deal, while about half (51%) say they use it somewhat.

Lawyers currently apply AI across a wide range of tasks:

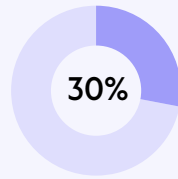




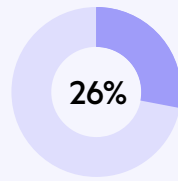
Crafting client strategies



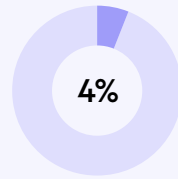
Supporting stronger security practices



Streamlining client intake



Assisting with discovery



Don't use AI at all

The Challenge: Broad Use, Limited Guardrails

The gap between “some use” and “a great deal of use” suggests many teams are still cautious, unsure where AI fits safely and reliably into their workflows. While adoption is on the rise, governance is significantly behind. Lawyers count this among their biggest technology-related challenges, as 42% say tech introduces too much data risk and 36% say there is a lack of AI governance and/or training.

The Opportunity: Match AI Momentum with Structure and Control

Lawyers expect AI to deliver meaningful value—42% say it will have the greatest impact on efficiency, followed by client experience (22%), strategy (19%) and advisory services (16%). To realize these gains, firms and in-house legal teams need governance that scales with adoption. Secure platforms provide controlled environments for sharing, reviewing and managing AI-supported work, helping firms harness AI's benefits while maintaining compliance, consistency and client trust.

Lawyers Face Similar Challenges Despite Sectors

Regardless of where they work (whether for a firm or as in-house counsel for an organization), data shows lawyers' pain points are very similar. This suggests that unsuccessful workflows, delayed processes or ineffective tools aren't just user error. Lawyers face the same technology and process issues broadly across the industry.



About Progress ShareFile Software

Efficient, Secure Workflows for Legal

Progress® ShareFile® software for legal is built to support the document-intensive, security-sensitive workflows that legal teams manage every day. It provides an all-in-one centralized platform for secure file sharing, client collaboration and workflow automation—without adding unnecessary complexity.

ShareFile tools brings efficiency to common legal workflows with automated document requests, approvals and e-signature capabilities that streamline (and accelerate) everything from intake to discovery and beyond.

Designed to integrate with existing systems such as Microsoft 365 and other business applications, ShareFile software fits into the way legal teams already work, helping law firms and in-house legal departments simplify document management, improve turnaround times and maintain the security and reliability their clients expect.



“We decided, if we are the best in the business, we better work with the best, most secure company available. We quickly realized that ShareFile was the best and we have never looked back.”

Marsha J. Naegeli, [CEO and Founder of NAEGELI Deposition & Trial](#)



Start Fixing Legal Workflow Friction Where It Matters Most

Identify inefficiencies across intake, documents and approvals—and see where automation can help.

About Progress Software

[Progress Software](#) (Nasdaq: PRGS) empowers organizations to achieve transformational success in the face of disruptive change. Our software enables our customers to develop, deploy and manage responsible AI-powered applications and personalized digital experiences with agility and ease. Businesses of all sizes get a trusted provider in Progress, with the products, expertise and vision they need to turn AI disruption into a competitive advantage. Millions of developers and technologists at hundreds of thousands of organizations depend on Progress every day. Learn more at www.progress.com

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