



SOCIALEYES COMMUNICATIONS **WHITE PAPER**

Researched and Written by: Marly Broudie

EVOLVING CLIENT EXPECTATIONS: HOW LAW FIRMS ARE RESPONDING TO CHANGE

Change in the legal industry isn't coming, it's already here. The question is whether firms will resist it or build smarter, stronger, and more human ways to serve the people who rely on them.

Evolving Client Expectations: How Law Firms Are Responding to Change

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The legal industry is changing fast. Clients today expect more than just legal expertise - they want responsiveness, transparency, and tech-enabled solutions that make their lives easier.

Over the past few months, we spoke with 36 legal professionals across North America to dig into what clients really want in 2025 and how law firms are adapting. From solo practitioners to large firm leaders, the conversations covered everything from the impact of AI to the growing importance of trust and process.

This whitepaper brings together those insights in a practical, easy-to-digest way. It's not about trends for the sake of it, but about real shifts happening in firms of all sizes. Whether you're rethinking your tech stack or looking for ways to better connect with clients, we hope this gives you ideas and direction.

The New Client Mindset

Clients today want more than answers to legal questions - they want a complete, transparent, and responsive experience. Legal services are no longer judged in isolation. Clients are comparing their law firm experience to how they interact with Amazon, Apple, or their bank's app. Expectations are higher, attention spans are shorter, and patience is limited.

Many clients now walk into a first consultation having done their own research. They've Googled their issue, read Reddit threads, and maybe even played around with ChatGPT. This doesn't mean they don't value expertise, it means they want their lawyer to *build on* what they already know, not dismiss it.

Law firms must meet clients where they are: informed, busy, and looking for fast, clear answers. As one interviewee, [Michael Byrd](#) from [ByrdAdatto](#), put it:

“The client is expecting you to meet them where they are. That includes answering questions before they even ask them.”

This new mindset means clients expect regular updates, visibility into timelines, and clarity around costs. A slow response or vague billing language can break trust instantly. In this environment, firms that build proactive communication into their workflows are gaining the upper hand.

Clients are also looking for a sense of partnership. They want to feel heard and involved, not spoken down to. Emotional intelligence, once considered a “nice-to-have,” is now a core competency for client-facing lawyers. Active listening, transparency, and responsiveness are becoming as valuable as legal analysis.

Tech and AI: A Tool, Not a Threat

The rise of AI and legal tech is creating a wave of both curiosity and hesitation. But most of the legal professionals we interviewed don’t see AI as a threat to their jobs. Instead, they see it as a way to elevate the human side of law by removing time-consuming administrative work.

Firms are using AI tools to assist with document review, draft basic communications, automate intake processes, and even summarize legal arguments for internal team use. This allows lawyers to spend more time on strategy, client conversations, and problem-solving — areas where human judgment is still irreplaceable.

[Beth McCubbin](#) from **[Barrett & Farahany](#)** noted this balance well:

“We’re looking at where AI can add value without removing the human element. We don’t want to sound like robots...”

Still, adoption isn’t always smooth. Many firms are taking an experimental approach by testing tools internally, piloting them with a few team members, and gauging client reactions. The key is not to adopt tech for the sake of optics, but to look at whether it meaningfully improves the client experience.

[Doug Sorocco](#) from **[Dunlap Coddling](#)** shared that his firm has a “lab-like” mentality:

“We try a lot of things internally. And what works, we adopt. But we always ask — does this improve the client experience? Does it make the legal team stronger?”

In short, firms succeeding with AI are approaching it strategically; not as a replacement for people, but as a force multiplier that allows lawyers to be more present, more responsive, and more focused.

Trust and the Human Element

Despite all the digital transformation in the legal industry, trust remains the foundation of the lawyer-client relationship. It's the one thing that AI can't automate, and the thing clients value most when things go sideways.

Clients don't just hire a firm based on price or prestige. They choose the person who makes them feel confident, heard, and supported. They want someone who explains what's going on without using jargon, and who picks up the phone when things feel uncertain.

[Courtney Stillman](#), Partner at [Himes, Petrarca & Fester](#), explained:

“They want to understand how things work, how you bill, and what your strategy is before you even get started. That’s not something lawyers were used to 10 years ago.”

In many ways, the value of empathy and follow-through has *increased* in the digital era. When everything is automated, the human touches stand out even more. Firms that build strong internal cultures of communication and care are seeing the results reflected externally.

[Mitch Panter](#) from [Panter, Panter & Sampedro](#) spoke to the lasting value of connection:

“We’ve built our practice on relationships. I don’t care how smart AI gets, it’s not going to replace the call that says, ‘I’m here for you. We’ve got this.’”

[Dana Zakarian](#), attorney at [Smith, Duggan, Cornell and Gollub LLP](#), shared a similar sentiment from the frontlines of emotionally charged legal work:

“We’re not just representing clients—we’re managing emotions, fears, and expectations. If you’re not tuned into that, you lose the client even if you win the case.”

Trust also shows up internally. Firms with clear communication, transparent leadership, and aligned values are better equipped to deliver consistent service across teams. When your internal systems are strong, your client experience naturally improves.

Niching and Focused Expertise

Another clear theme that emerged from the interviews is the power of **focus**.

Firms that try to do everything often end up doing nothing particularly well. Clients, especially those in specialized industries or facing specific legal issues, are seeking out lawyers who “get” their world right away.

Niching doesn’t just help with marketing, it improves everything. Intake becomes faster. Service becomes more tailored. The language on your website resonates more. Clients feel understood without having to explain themselves.

[Phil Sever](#), from [Sever, Walker, Padgitt LLP](#) pointed out that firms should stop trying to be all things to all people:

“Specializing doesn’t limit you, it sets you apart. You become the obvious choice for the people you serve best.”

Focused firms can also develop more efficient internal systems, train teams more effectively, and build reputations as true experts. Instead of constantly reinventing the wheel for every file, they refine what works and scale that success.

In today’s market, specialization is not a risk — it’s a strategy.

Systems, Process, and the Rise of Legal Operators

Behind the scenes of every high-performing law firm is a solid operational foundation. The firms that are growing sustainably are the ones investing in structure, systems, and repeatable processes, not just more people.

From CRM tools and intake scripts to task templates and follow-up cadences, firms are building internal playbooks that allow them to deliver consistently, even as client demands increase.

[James Reid](#), Practice Group Leader for the Employment and Labour Group at [Honigman LLP](#), described how this shift has helped his clients deliver more consistent service:

“When you take the time to build out processes — onboarding, follow-ups, hand-offs — things don’t fall through the cracks. Clients feel that.”

Some firms are hiring dedicated operations leads or COOs who focus solely on streamlining workflows and implementing new technologies. Others are bringing in outside consultants to map out what’s working, what’s not, and where they can gain efficiency.

Strong systems reduce chaos. They reduce reactivity. And they free up lawyers to spend more time doing the work only they can do.

Operational maturity is no longer a luxury, it’s a competitive edge.

Conclusion

The legal world isn’t what it used to be, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. The shift in client expectations isn’t about lawyers doing *more*, it’s about doing things *differently*. Today’s clients want legal partners who are responsive, transparent, and willing to evolve. They expect clarity around pricing, updates without chasing, and service that feels personal, not transactional.

Across every conversation, one thing was clear: **the firms that are thriving are the ones leaning into change.** They’re using tech to streamline, not to replace. They’re doubling down on trust, empathy, and clear communication. They’re building teams and systems that make it easier to show up for clients consistently. And they’re getting laser-focused on the clients they serve best.

Change in the legal industry isn’t coming, it’s already here.

The question is whether firms will resist it or build smarter, stronger, and more human ways to serve the people who rely on them.