

2025 Legal Buyer Insights Report

Welcome Letter

To retain clients and attract new ones, legal service providers must stay informed about evolving client expectations and needs. To that end, we at ClearlyRated have again leveraged our survey capabilities and research expertise to gauge client sentiment, pinpoint key concerns and expectations, and assess their implications for the legal industry and those it serves.

This data-driven report is designed to provide legal professionals with vital insights to enhance client relationships and achieve success. Our aim is to equip you with knowledge to successfully navigate economic uncertainties, build trust, improve service delivery, and embrace technological advancements such as automation and Al.

We hope this report serves as a valuable resource on your journey to better serve your clients and to thrive in today's competitive landscape.



Sincerely,

Darreon Day

Director of Analytics & Research ClearlyRated

What's in the report?

- Executive Summary
- 2025 Legal Buyer Survey Findings
- Final Guidance for 2025
- Acknowledgements



Executive Summary

This report offers insights that can help firm leaders better attract and retain clients by developing effective marketing messages, business development strategies, and account management techniques.

After surveying nearly 150 buyers of legal services, ClearlyRated analysts reviewed the data and identified nine key insights that law firm leaders should know. For each insight, our report highlights relevant data, explores why it's important, and shares the most important takeaways for legal service providers.



Executive Summary

Part I. Economic and Technological Trends Impacting Legal Clients

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Survey Methodology

For over a decade ClearlyRated has conducted annual research to establish industry benchmarks, identify emerging trends, and analyze topics of importance in each industry we serve.

Fielded in October 2024, this study surveyed 1,155 buyers and users of B2B services, nearly 150 of which identified themselves as clients of law firms in the United States.

The survey questionnaire delved into key themes involved in legal client satisfaction: how buyers vet and select potential vendors, the current and ideal client experience (CX), perceptions of technology and AI, and others.

ClearlyRated's in-house team of data analysts and CX experts have analyzed this year's results to highlight key takeaways. Where applicable, they compared year-over-year survey responses.



Legal Buyer Survey Findings: 9 Insights

Learn more about trends in buyer behavior and expectations, and explore how these affect both purchasing decisions and client satisfaction. For each trend, get key takeaways that can guide help you earn and retain business.



Part-I Economic and Technological Trends Impacting Legal Clients

Understanding the effects of economic uncertainty and rapid technological advancements on legal clients.



Clients are struggling with economic uncertainty.

As economic uncertainty weighs on law firm clients, they're actively looking for ways to adapt.

55%

of respondents rate current economic conditions as "good" or "excellent."

45%

rate economic conditions as "only fair" or even "poor." 1

Excellent 15%

Good 40%

Only Fair 21%

Poor 24%

37%

believe the economy is getting worse, while an equal 37% believe things are getting better.²

Source

- 1 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q32.
- 2 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q33.

To counterbalance their uncertainty related to current economic conditions, many report they are adapting in the following ways:

Adaptation to current economic conditions

Investing in technology to improve efficiency

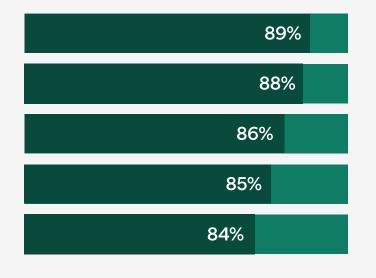
Re-evaluating existing budgets

Focusing on employee engagement & retention

Heightened attention to risk management and compliance

Reducing internal costs

% of clients



Source: 3 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q34

At the time of the survey nearly 40% of clients were either actively undertaking layoffs (11%) or anticipating layoffs (29%) due to economic uncertainty.⁴

Why it's important

Most buyers grow increasingly wary of perceived risks when they have low economic confidence. As more organizations move reduce internal costs, obtaining outside legal counsel could grow more desirable, especially when positioned as a way to mitigate emerging risks. At the same time, beware of clients' need to restrict overall budgets.

Source: 4 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q34



- As current and potential clients reduce internal costs, they may choose to downsize inhouse legal teams. This adds pressure to staff members who remain which increases the risks of mistakes. Position your firm to relieve some of this pressure by:
 - Communicating that your experts won't let anything fall through the cracks, especially while internal teams shrink and must do more with less.
 - Using a consultative approach to expand your services with current clients.
 - Acting as flexible extension of new clients' legal teams.
- When planning messaging for your marketing campaigns, take buyers' growing risk aversion into account.
 Communicate how your services help clients mitigate risk, and should economic policies shift, your experts stand ready to help them navigate those changes. You can achieve this with thought leadership content such as whitepapers and case studies.

Tip: Make the most of your content and further your reputation for helpful guidance by promoting your content via email campaigns, organic social media posts, and paid social media advertising.

• Of course, if their budgets come under further fire, buyers may need to reduce spend with external vendors. This means it's essential to position your firm to make the cut. Develop and propose evolved services for lean economic times to ensure that your services remain both affordable and too valuable for clients to cut back on them.



More clients are investing in automation.

Automation is projected to increase for many organizations—and for some, it's to reduce their headcount.

40% of legal services buyers report that their organizations are actively investing in technology to improve efficiencies. Another **49%** anticipate doing so.⁵

Q: What's being automated in relation to legal?

A: Many organizations have begun to automate portions of their internal legal processes.

Top areas where organizations are at least somewhat automated: 6

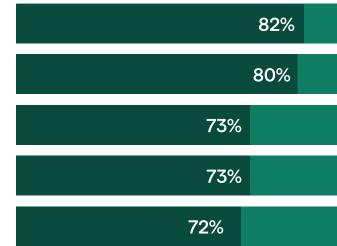
Document management

Employment documentation

Corporate filings and governance

Data privacy management

Compliance monitoring



Source



⁵ ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q34.

⁶ ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q50.

Why it's important

Many legal services clients are implementing automation, as shown by their investment in these areas. As this changes client needs, law firms must adapt by understanding where and how they can guide these organizations. At the same time, they must look forward internally, planning how their own processes and services should change to meet shifting needs as automation spreads into new areas.



- Law firms can't remain complacent, letting clients surpass their own automation prowess. Those that do risk getting replaced. Instead, legal service providers must take advantage of automation, themselves, streamlining operations and improve outcomes. If your firm fails to adopt strategic automation, you not only miss opportunities to gain efficiency but also risk losing out to other firms—or even your clients' internal teams.
- As more roles get at least partially automated, firms must be strategic about what they're known for and where they specialize. Take stock of service offerings and consider what may be fully or partially replaced as your clients implement more automation. Then plan how to adjust your business strategy and niche.
- Ask what your clients are already automating within their own processes. What will be left that your firm will still do better than their internal teams? Use this to inform your strategic plans, marketing messages, business development plans, and service delivery.
- If your firm is already ahead of this curve, consider how you can position it to act as your clients' automation experts.



AI is changing client expectations.

Al is here. While expectations are high, its impacts are often unclear.

67%

of legal buyers expect AI to help them solve problems more quickly.

65%

agree that AI will improve the accuracy of their data and reporting.

Al adoption among legal services buyers is high:

77%

claim to have adopted at least some Al into their internal legal processes. 30%

claim intermediate to advanced adoption of Al into these processes.

Yet uncertainty persists related to their ability to harness Al's potential benefits.

63%

of all buyers are at least somewhat confident in their organization's ability to use AI to solve legal challenges. 44%

agree that Al's impacts are overstated, while 56% either disagree or feel neutral.

Source:

7 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q46. 8 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q49.



Regardless of buyers' comfort with AI in their own processes, many expect expect their legal service providers to expertly wield AI to improve the following:

72%	Efficiency and speed	61%	Overall quality of outcomes	60%	Accessibility and convenience
59%	Problem solving / issue resolution	59%	Accuracy and data handling	55%	Responsiveness to calls and emails
46%	Cost of legal services	41%	Trust and reliability		

Source: 9 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q48

Why it's important

Al seems to permeate everything in today's business environment, and buyers of legal services are increasingly familiar with its implementation in their own organizations. They also expect their external partners to use Al to improve their services and CX. While these higher expectations can present a challenge to firms, innovative law firm leaders can seize the Al opportunity and act as visionaries that lead the way for their clients.



Al Impact

"In the age of AI, efficiency is the new currency that unlocks time better spent building deep, meaningful client relationships. Firms that embrace AI tools gain a competitive edge by freeing up their professionals to focus on strategic advisory services and highvalue client interactions."

Eric Gregg Co-Founder & CX Strategist, ClearlyRated



Buyers and clients will increasingly expect your firm to capitalize on Al's perceived benefits. Establish your firm's reputation for Al excellence with transparent Al usage and Al-powered operational improvements. Here's how to get started:

- If you haven't already, identify and implement AI advantages within your firm's operations.
- Ensure your marketing and intake teams stand ready to share clear examples of how your firm uses AI to reduce costs and improve communication, case management, paperwork, overall compliance, client service and legal outcomes.
- Develop messaging and plan content that transparently demonstrates how your firm employs AI—and how it improves your firm operations in ways that deliver outstanding CX and client outcomes. Share real-world examples that shed light on AI's actual effects and benefits. Client testimonials, infographics and case studies can help tell the story.



Part-II How Legal Buyers Make Decisions

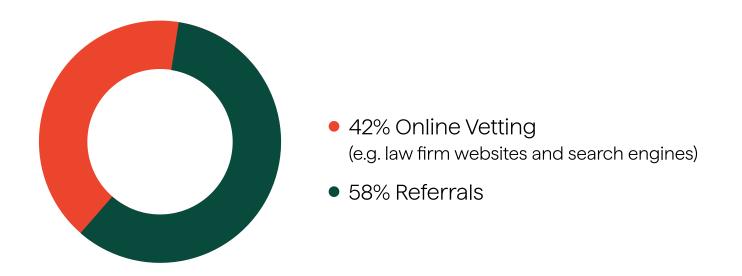
Get insights into how buyers initiate and navigate their search for legal services, including which types of information are most valuable and influential to their final purchase decision.



Buyers may start with referrals, but online reputation management helps seal the deal.

Law firms will win more business when they demonstrate expertise and specialization online while also emphasizing their positive client experience.

How legal buyers start their decision making process:



Q: What are buyers looking for online?

A: When searching online for information on law firms, most buyers are looking for:

- Firm expertise 63%
- Ratings from current clients 63%
- Firm specialization 61%
- Testimonials from clients 48%
- Information on individual legal professionals 39%

Source:

10 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q39. 11 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q40. 12 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q43.



Buyers say firm expertise and specialization stand above other criteria

Most Important Aspects of a Legal firm's website 13	Top Ranked	Total Mentions
Areas of specialization are clearly displayed	17%	60%
Expertise is clearly displayed	17%	46%
Information on individual lawyers and associates	6%	43%
Easy to navigate and find what I'm looking for	16%	39%
Information is shared in an easy way	11%	34%
Ratings and reviews from current and past clients	15%	30%
Testimonials from satisfied clients are clearly displayed	11%	27%
Intuitive and visually appealing website layout	6%	21%

Source: 13 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q43.



Why it's important

When buyers of legal services begin the process of assessing potential firms, most turn to professional referrals. Online sources, however, are not far behind and may even overtake referrals in the future. In fact, more than 2 in 5 legal buyers already begin with online sources before asking a peer or their professional network for a referral.

Whether as a first or second step, buyers of legal services extensively vet firms online. Most often, buyers search for and evaluate firms online by using search engines and reviewing specific firms' websites. Law firm brands that want to rise to the top during a buyer's consideration stage must build a strong online presence and ensure that the most important information is front and center on their website.



Highlight your firm's expertise and specialization, both its services and the industries it serves. Those two pieces of information are most likely to move the needle in your favor. Perform a website audit with close attention on how well your site helps buyers check the following boxes—and how easy the information is to find:

- Firm expertise.
- Specialization in their industry.
- Satisfaction ratings from existing clients.
- Testimonials from existing clients.
- Available services.

Look for improvements that can boost both search engine optimization (SEO) and your site's user experience (UX). Consider whether your site map is intuitive and well-organized, and ensure important information isn't buried in too many sub-sections. Make sure your homepage design makes it easy to find the key information described above and your website provides clear navigation options on both the top and side of each page. Finally, beyond featuring client testimonials, offer links to verified third-party rating sources.



Buyers want to de-risk their purchase.

Buyers want to see evidence that they're making the right purchasing decision. Leaning on referrals and reputation can do just that.

4 weeks = The typical search for a law firm

The most influential factors buyers consider while vetting law firms and making their purchase decision include:

Very InfluentialSomewhat Influential



Source: 14 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q41. | 15 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q42.



What factors least influence buyers?

Many buyers are more wary of advertising when making their purchase decision, so keep those limitations in mind.

- 54% say social media posts from a law firm do not influence their decision.
- 40% say blog posts don't influence their decision.

Why it's important

The data makes this point clear: Reputation and referrals are vital to influencing buyers and landing business. When vetting law firms, buyers want to find information that backs up their choice as a safe bet. These clients want to de-risk their buying decision to ensure success with a trusted partner. This means it's essential to demonstrate a stable, positive service delivery with consistently strong results. Additionally, establishing a strong firm reputation is a must, as it will both boost word-of-mouth referrals and your firm's online reputation.



Your firm will find more success landing new clients and expanding current accounts when you can de-risk their decision to work with you. Give them proof that they're making the right decision. This could be in the form of your overall online reputation (think star ratings), testimonial library, case studies that demonstrate strong results, and a robust referral network. Take a look at your current marketing materials, both print and digital, to see how well they would help your potential clients answer the following questions about your firm:

- Is this firm established and stable? Tips:
 - Share your firm history, client testimonials and, if possible, quantify the financial impact your services have on client outcomes.
 - Provide a clear path to help buyers review your reputation with links to third-party verified reviews.
- Can this firm help my business specifically? Tips:
 - Show evidence of industry or sector specialization on your website—and make it easy to find.
 - Make your library of case studies and testimonials sortable by industry and client type (small, medium, large), so your business development team can easily find and share relevant examples of your strong track record.
- Does this firm prove that it can deliver what it promises? Tips:
 - Gather a list of client contacts who are willing to provide references.
 - Source relevant testimonials and case studies that back up your messaging points.



"Day one firms" have the best chance of winning business. When a buyer's leadership team brainstorms its "day one list" of potential law firm partners, those on the list are significantly more likely to win the business.

In fact, according to Bain & Co. general <u>survey of B2B buyers</u>, between 80% and 90% start with a short list of potential vendors before they even begin their research—and 90% of them end up selecting a company from their initial list.

When ClearlyRated conducted a similar study specifically for legal services buyers, our analysts found similar results. More than two-thirds of organizations started their search for a legal partner with a day one list of potential firms, and nearly all chose a firm from that list.

Buyers of legal services follow this trend.

68% report starting their journey with a day one list.

96% of those buyers ultimately selected a firm from their day one list.

The typical buyer's day one list includes three brands.

Why it's important

Without earning their spot on a buyer's initial consideration set, law firms have an exponentially lower chance to prove themselves during the vetting process. This is why it's imperative to build strong brand awareness and a positive reputation that will secure a spot on many potential clients' day one list.

Source: 16 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q36 & Q38. | 17 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q37



- Having a well-known, reputable brand can achieve much during the first stages of your business development funnel. You could even say it does the early selling for you. Here are three ways to support brand awareness while promoting a strong reputation:
 - Thought leadership is a critical tool to attract attention and bolster your reputation. The most effective thought leadership combines expertise from both industry studies and your own subject matter experts. Without both, it's easy to get lost in the noise of competitors' marketing efforts.
 - Beef up online brand awareness with search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM). Doing so helps ensure that buyers who do a quick online search will see your brand near the top of their search results.
 - Manage your online reputation by asking for and responding to reviews. Nearly 9 in 10 B2B service buyers read third-party reviews prior to making purchasing decisions. They're also more likely to hire a firm that responds to reviews—both good and bad. When you respond to reviews, you demonstrate that your firm is serious about its client experience.
- Keep in mind that some buyers will ask their peers for suggestions while compiling their day one list. Enter: Word-of-mouth comments and direct referrals. These grow ever more powerful when your firm delivers a good client experience. Happy clients are more likely to suggest your firm, offer their time as references, and even make referrals. This shows how essential your CX is to sustainable success.



Thought leadership is a powerful tool for influencing prospects.

By covering the most important topics, law firms can position themselves as valuable partners.

87%

of buyers say a firm's thought leadership or industry insights influence their decision on which law firm to hire.

Top 5 Most Valuable Thought Leadership Topics

According to buyers, the legal-related topics they are most interested in are:

- Corporate governance and compliance.
- Data privacy and cybersecurity.
- Litigation trends and dispute resolution.
- Employment law and the future of work.
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) in the legal profession.

Why it's important

Relevant, high-quality thought leadership demonstrates a firm's expertise, influencing clients and buyers on whether to continue or begin partnerships with law firms. Current clients value content on a variety of legal topics, which they use for the education of their own organization. This type of content has a strong value-add effect, building awareness and trust with buyers, and impacting both buyer decisions and client loyalty.

Source: 18 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q42 | 19 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q45.



Prioritize client and buyer education as part of your marketing strategy and loyalty programs. Chances are you already have a good start. Begin with a content audit to see what you've done well and where there might be gaps. Organize your existing content by format, topic, and date. Be sure to check whether you have enough updated content on the topics listed above.

Once your content audit is complete, follow this process to make meaningful improvements:

- Repurpose thought leadership content to create varied formats which can be used in multiple ways by your business development, marketing and intake teams.
- Update and re-promote high-value thought leadership content to generate leads and support your brand reputation as experts.
- Identify where you have content gaps, either in format or topic, and create new thought leadership content to fill them in.



Part-III How Law Firms Can Improve CX and Their Bottom Line

Improving client satisfaction and retention, especially during uncertain times, is essential. To do so, firms must optimize their client journey from the start.



Communication is key to satisfaction and retention.

Clients report higher satisfaction rates when they receive consistent communication from their law firm.

There is a strong relationship between a client's satisfaction, as measured by Net Promoter Scores® (NPS), with their primary law firm and the frequency with which they interact with the firm.

Level of interaction with law firm during active engagement	Resulting NPS ²⁰
Constant / Daily	51
Regular (weekly or several times per week)	42
Semi-Regular (monthly or several times per month)	26
Rare (a few times per year)	32

Need context?

The legal industry's NPS benchmark is 37. When firms communicate with clients weekly or more, they can boost their NPS anywhere from 5 to 14 points above average. If they communicate less often than weekly, they risk seeing their client satisfaction rates drop below industry average and will likely see client retention drop too.

Learn more about net promoter scores with our **Guide to NPS for Law Firms**.

Source: 20 Proprietary ClearlyRated data and the ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q26.



Strong communication also leads to more referrals. Clients that rate their law firm's communication as effective are most likely to recommend their firm to others.

How clients rate rate the effectiveness of their primary firm's communication, on a scale of 0 – 10:

• Promoters - 9.2

Promoters: Clients who rate their firm a 9 or 10 on an NPS survey. They're not just satisfied—they're enthusiastic, and they're likely to recommend their firm to others.

Passives - 8.0

Passives: Clients who give a score of 7 or 8. They're somewhat satisfied but not wowed. If a competitor offers a better deal, they might jump ship.

Detractors - 7.0

Detractors: Clients who score their firm between a 0 and 6, indicating they're dissatisfied with their firm. These clients are most likely to leave, but worse, they can also hurt their firm's brand by sharing negative feedback with others.

Source: 21 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q22.

Why it's important

Regular and effective communication consistently leads to higher client satisfaction rates. Not only is maintaining strong communication an easy way for law firms to achieve high client satisfaction ratings, but those that fail to do so often send clients heading for the door, hurting the bottom line and damaging long-term business sustainability.



Below are five ways to improve your staff's communication – and relationships – with your clients

- 1. Define standards for when, how and how often to communicate with clients.
- 2. Create a clear map defining who is accountable for client communication. Train internal staff on these expectations.
- 3. Hold people accountable for effective client communication by including these standards in your employee feedback and review processes.
- 4. Recognize and reward great communication.
- 5. Survey your clients to ensure they're receiving optimal communication from their firm contacts. If you identify a client who's unhappy with the frequency or manner of communication, take immediate steps to improve their experience.

BONUS: Gather testimonials and reviews that mention communication. Use those in marketing materials and business development presentations to show prospects who may be unhappy with current partners that your firm is different— and better.

Learn more about tailored B2B client surveys



Effective onboarding processes lead to lasting relationships.

Clients report that poor, disorganized onboarding is common, and it can sour their relationship with law firms from the beginning.

According to clients, the most important aspects at the start of their relationship with a law firm are that the firm:

- Understands their needs and objectives 23%
- Establishes credibility and trust 20%
- Provides clear communication 18%
- Properly sets expectations on deliverables and timelines 10%
- Establishes confidentiality and security measures 9%

Failing in any of these areas is costly. In fact, here's how the most common onboarding missteps affect client satisfaction, as measured by NPS:

Onboarding Mistake (% firms that are guilty)	NPS Decline Result
Failing to leverage technology to streamline the onboarding process (16%)	-53 points
Failing to share updates throughout the onboarding process (14%)	-51 points
Failing to share timelines and/or project roadmaps (7%)	-44 points

Source: 22 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q29. | 23 ClearlyRated 2024 Legal Buyers Survey, Q26.



Why it's important

Satisfied clients are more likely to become long-term customers. In fact, a report from Salesforce shows that not only will customers who receive good service spend more, but 88% are also more likely to be retained as customers. So, how does onboarding come into play? Onboarding is one of the earliest impressions client contacts get after committing to a law firm. When firms kick off with clear, efficient onboarding, they begin client relationships with great service and can improve customer retention. Remember: Keeping customers is less costly than acquiring new ones, so firms that deliver great onboarding position themselves to protect and improve their bottom line.

Source: 16 ClearlyRated 2024 Staffing Buyers Survey, Q32, All candidates



Effective Onboarding Impact

"When I consult with our law firm partners regarding their client onboarding process, I emphasize the importance of being responsive, setting clear expectations, and truly understanding the client's needs from the start. Without this foundation, you're already falling behind.

Taking the time to connect, communicate, and align at the outset shows care and professionalism—it's the key to building trust and long-term success. Do not rush this step, document everything and communicate frequently and success (and growth) will follow."

Bridget Harper VP of Customer Success, ClearlyRated



If your firm hasn't yet established an effective, repeatable onboarding process, it's time to design one and train your staff on it. Implement a streamlined, tech-supported process that will eliminate the common onboarding mistakes highlighted above. Make sure it includes:

- Proper introductions with key team members.
- An onboarding roadmap with set timelines.
- Clear expectations about who does what and when.
- A way for your staff to track milestones, both updating and communicating with clients along the way.
- Contact information for key client-facing staff.



Final Guidance for 2025



Final Guidance for 2025

Understanding each of these trends can help law firms in three ways:

- 1. They can better prepare their own operations to adapt, getting ahead and taking advantage of emerging technologies such as automation (see Insight 2) and AI (see Insight 3) rather than being replaced by them.
- 2. They can better deliver a remarkable CX that both nurtures customer loyalty and inspires more referrals by:
 - Providing a smooth onboarding experience (see Insight 9)
 - Using AI to improve client service and outcomes (see Insight 3)
 - Educating clients on important thought leadership topics (see Insight 7)
 - Setting clear expectations—and ensuring they meet them (see Insights 5, 8 and 9)
 - Investing in automation to improve their operations and results (see Insight 2)
- 3. They can create informed marketing and business development strategies that help grow their business. Firms can inform their marketing messages and business development strategies by understanding:
 - Buyers' concerns (see Insight 1)
 - How buyers identify and vet potential staffing partners (see Insights 4, 5 and 6)
 - Which content topics buyers and clients find most valuable (see Insight 7)



Section Four About ClearlyRated & Acknowledgments



About ClearlyRated

ClearlyRated® is a leading provider of client satisfaction surveys and service quality research for professional service providers. We help law firms leverage the Net Promoter® Score survey methodology to measure their client experiences so they can improve and differentiate on service quality while building a strong online reputation. Law firms partnering with ClearlyRated have access to:

- Proprietary satisfaction survey tool, specifically designed to support survey best practices for legal firms.
- A search engine-optimized online profile featuring client testimonials and client-based ratings available to (and searchable by) the public on ClearlyRated.com.
- Real-time response data and issue tracking to ensure proper follow-up and support client retention.
- Eligibility to participate in the annual Best of Legal award program which recognizes staffing firms that have demonstrated exceptional service quality based exclusively on ratings provided by their clients and their talent.
- Segmentation of response data by client, practice area, affiliated partner, office location, etc.
- Legal industry research, benchmarks, and trends on topics including (but not limited to) client satisfaction, buyer behavior, and online reputation.

Interested in leveraging client satisfaction as a strategy for growth? Visit clearly rated.com to learn more.



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