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THE BUSINESS OF LAW

MODERN LAW

THE LEGAL HEATWAVE

GROWTH IS RISING. PRESSURE IS BUILDING.



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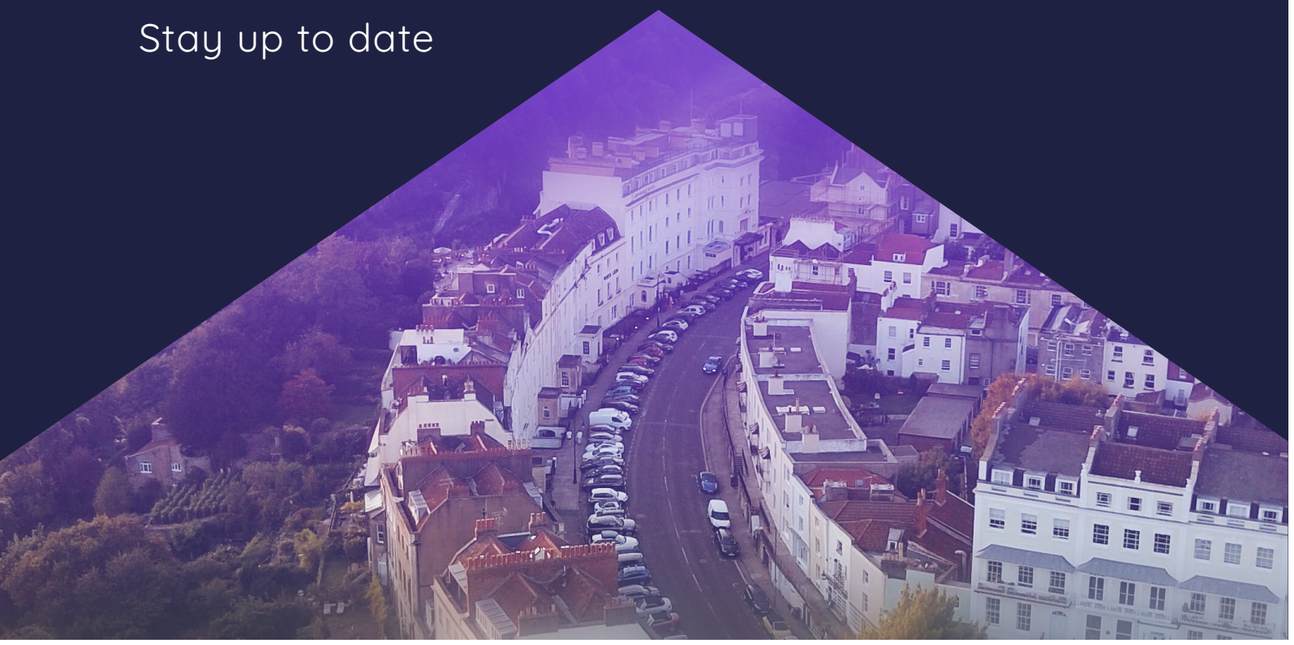

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Welcome

There is an interesting contradiction running through this issue.

On paper, the legal sector is in good health. Revenues are rising, profitability has strengthened and many firms are reporting their strongest financial performance in years. For the first time in a long time, there is genuine optimism about growth.

Yet speak to almost any managing partner, business owner or legal leader and you'll hear a very different story.

Margins are tighter. Compliance is more demanding. Technology investment continues to accelerate. Recruitment remains challenging, client expectations continue to evolve, and leaders themselves are under more pressure than ever before. Growth may be returning, but so too is complexity.

That contradiction became the inspiration for this edition.

Throughout these pages you'll discover that profitability is no longer simply about billing more hours or opening more files. Increasingly, it comes down to understanding where value is created, where it quietly disappears, and how firms build businesses that are resilient enough to thrive over the next decade rather than simply survive the next twelve months.

Our interview with Ian Johnson from Hazlewoods sets the scene perfectly. Whilst the latest benchmarking figures paint an encouraging picture, Ian reminds us that strong turnover alone is no guarantee of financial success. Cashflow, lock-up, productivity, pricing and operational discipline remain the real differentiators between firms that grow sustainably and those that merely appear successful.

That spirit of transformation was also evident at this year's Modern Law Conveyancing Conferenceour biggest and most ambitious conference to date. Bringing together hundreds of conveyancing professionals, industry leaders, technology providers and policymakers, the day reinforced something we've always believed at Modern Law: the best ideas emerge when people are prepared to share experiences, challenge convention and work collaboratively. The conference wasn't simply about discussing technology, regulation or market pressures—it was about finding solutions, challenging conventional thinking and recognising the people driving the profession forward. I'm delighted that this issue captures many of those discussions, insights and highlights from what was an incredible day. Whether you joined us in person or are experiencing it for the first time through these pages, I hope it reflects the energy, optimism and determination that continues to define this remarkable profession.

That theme continues throughout our Editorial Board, where leading voices from across the legal sector explore profitability from every angle. From hidden operational costs and financial discipline to AI, talent, leadership and client experience, one message emerges repeatedly: the firms that succeed will be those prepared to evolve.

Technology naturally features heavily throughout this issue, but not as a replacement for people. Instead, contributor after contributor reaches the same conclusion: AI, automation and data should enhance professional judgement, not replace it. The firms that combine technology with exceptional people, strong culture and commercial thinking will create the greatest competitive advantage.

We're also delighted to celebrate excellence across the profession with coverage from the Modern Law Awards, recognising the firms, individuals and innovations helping shape the future of legal services. Congratulations once again to every winner, highly commended entrant and finalist.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from this edition is that the legal profession isn't standing still. Traditional business models are being challenged. New opportunities are emerging. Leadership itself is evolving. The firms that ask better questions, embrace change intelligently and remain relentlessly focused on delivering value will be the ones leading the profession into the next chapter.

As always, thank you to our contributors, partners and readers for continuing to make Modern Law Magazine the place where the industry's biggest conversations happen.

I hope you enjoy the issue.



Hayley Dalton is Editor at Modern Law Magazine

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Law Firms Are GROWING AGAIN

But the Real Test Is Profit Quality

Revenue growth across the legal sector has reached its strongest level in more than a decade, with firms reporting rising profitability, stronger productivity and improved financial performance overall. But beneath the encouraging headline figures, significant challenges remain. In this interview, Ian Johnson, Partner at Hazlewoods, examines the key findings from the latest Financial Benchmarking Survey and explains why many firms still struggle with the gap between profit and cash, inefficient lock-up management and underutilised fee earner capacity.

He discusses the growing pressure of rising technology, compliance and salary costs, the importance of meaningful financial reporting, and why firms that fail to understand the true drivers of profitability risk losing value without realising it. Johnson also explores how changing expectations around partnership, succession and pricing are reshaping the traditional law firm model, and why the firms that embrace better data, smarter operational management and more adaptable business structures will be the ones best positioned for long-term success.

Q From your perspective, what are the most significant trends emerging from the latest Financial Benchmarking Survey, and what do they reveal about the current financial health of law firms?

A I think that the most compelling message that comes out of this survey is that, generally, the financial health of law firms appears to be improving – or at least it was for the period covered by this survey, and bear in mind that we are looking at results that fall in the 2025 year ends for most participants.

The headline statistic that most people will look at first is headline growth, and we saw a median increase of 11%, and that rate of increase has accelerated. It's actually the highest rate of increase that we have seen since we started writing this survey about 15 years ago, because it normally sits around the 5% - 6% level.

And this increase isn't just down to one or two work streams, because all work types increased – though it was residential conveyancing that increased the most. There were certain economic events that influenced that in the year of course, so it remains to be seen to what extent that is sustainable, because in the previous year, that work type fell a bit. Across the board however, all work types performed well, with some, such as private client and general litigation work, reporting double digit growth.

Profitability was up too. A statistic that we look at very closely is profit per equity partner - we refer to it as 'PEP' – and that rose by an impressive 13% year on year. However, it's more nuanced than the headline figures suggest, especially when you're trying to compare the year on year picture, because last year when we reported on this, the total of client interest received across the participants had jumped up significantly. This meant that whilst PEP rose by over 20%, when you took interest out of the numbers it had more or less flatlined.

When you take the impact of client interest out of this year's numbers, the picture is much more encouraging, because whilst that 13% headline increase in PEP does drop a bit, it only falls to around 11%. So this is a positive trend. It shows that firms are actively pushing profit growth by making underlying improvements to their core business – not by relying on interest income to drive the business.

I'm not saying that interest income doesn't play a big part in the profitability mix; it does, and If interest income disappeared overnight, it would hurt firms, but this is all about the direction of travel and this demonstrates to me that we are seeing an important improvement in the quality of PEP.

There are lots of other trends that feed into the overall profitability, and the other one that I want to highlight is chargeable hours because, although the median annual chargeable total per fee earner is still low at around 800 hours, it has risen from around 750 hours last year. That still sits notably short of the typical target of around 1,000 – 1,200 hours that many firms set, and even further away from full capacity, but given we're talking about trends, it's another step in the right direction.

Firms do need to make absolutely sure that they understand what fee earner capacity should look like in each of their teams before making important recruitment decisions, so measuring and understanding chargeable time is critical in my opinion. Many firms that I speak to are unable to tell me what their fee earners are doing with the rest of their time, and that can't be a good thing.

Q Many firms appear profitable on paper, how closely does that reflect reality? Are there underlying pressures (such as cash flow, lock-up, or cost structures) that the headline figures don't fully capture?

A As I said before, understanding profitability is more nuanced than just looking at headline figures. Whilst most firms are generally good at accurately reporting their profits, they are not always as good at understanding the difference between profit and cash.

Lockup management plays a big part in that challenge because a firm that is profitable on paper could actually be carrying a large amount of unbilled work in progress, or hard to recover client debtor balances. Alternatively, it could be funding large amounts of disbursements on behalf of clients, but on cases where they might not be seeing the cash for months, sometimes years.

So, it was encouraging to see the survey demonstrate that firms have managed to bring lockup down, from 146 days last year to 134 this year, but there are still improvements that firms can make. If you look at it another way, 134 days still means that firms are passing between three and four staff pay days before they receive cash in the bank for the work that those staff members are doing.

Q Where do you see law firms losing value most frequently, and what are the common operational or financial inefficiencies that still persist across the sector?

A Just going back to the chargeable hours statistic that I talked about before, time recording – or at least the ability to capture good quality chargeable work – is a common area of profit leakage for firms.

What we see plenty of fee earners doing is something called 'double discounting' and that means that they don't always fully record all of their chargeable time at the point of doing the work, and then they discount their time again when they come to raise a bill.

Poor lockup management and file closure hygiene are also dangerous too. They tend to cloud the picture and make it practically harder to raise bills and review WIP because good billable time can become wrapped up with old, irrecoverable amounts.

Where firms don't set or monitor targets, or where fee earners aren't aware of their billing expectations; they are the firms where we tend to see value being lost more easily.

Q How are rising costs, particularly around talent, compliance, and technology, impacting firm profitability, and are firms adapting quickly enough?

A Costs are rising across the board. Inflation has been high for the past few years and remains stubbornly so.

I think we did see salary expectations soften to some extent in this survey and more firms opted for more moderate pay increases than we saw before. This came through in the fact that salary costs as a % off fee income actually fell ever so slightly.

IT costs have been increasing on quite a steep curve for a while now, and in this survey we saw them overtake every other individual costs category, including PI Insurance, as the single biggest expense after staff costs. Whether firms are adapting quicky remains to be seen, and a lot of these rises are 'baked in' to rising subscription costs from their IT platform providers, but they should be giving serious thought to how they can extract value from their increasing outlay.

Q To what extent are firms using financial data effectively to inform decision-making? Are there areas where better use of benchmarking or financial insight could materially improve performance?

A Yes, absolutely. I should say that I don't think law firms are naturally insular when it comes to assessing their financial performance compared to others. However, I think that there's a lot more that firms should be doing around formalising their internal reporting, and then actually acting on what that financial data is telling them.

There are a lot of systems that will give a lot of information, but we have to remember that lawyers and law firm owners aren't necessarily born financial analysts. Therefore, presenting important data in a way that can be understood by everybody is important, but it can sometimes be more of an art than a science.

In my view, selecting between 5 and 10 key stats that actually have a meaning to the firm is the first step, but it is important to remember that not all metrics have the same significance between firms or, indeed, between different teams. Where a particular team deals in high volume work with cases that share similar characteristics, then file opening and closing rates will be more meaningful than it would to a team that deals in high value clinical negligence cases for example.

A good starting point for most would be to measure team contribution, or gross profit – you would be surprised at how many firms don't even understand whether different teams are even profitable, or how to take action when something doesn't look right.

Q Looking ahead, what do you think will define a financially successful law firm over the next 3–5 years, and do you believe traditional models are equipped to deliver that?

A It depends on what you mean by 'traditional', but it's safe to say we are in a time of shifting attitudes towards what people expect from a law firm – not just clients, but also those that work in those firms.

For a start, the traditional model of highly leveraged firms, where there has been a large pipeline of fee earners all looking by default to become partners, is disappearing. We see succession being a struggle for lots of firms, and those firms that can't demonstrate a healthy return on capital in order to attract the next generation will find this a particularly hard path. The survey does measure return on capital, and it was encouraging to see this stat rise strongly in the year. However, a strengthening ROCE brings challenges to the traditional model from other directions, as potential investors in law firms, including private equity backed firms and consolidators, look at this closely too.

I have talked about measuring productivity already, and I stick by my view that recording chargeable time is critically important, but so too is the need to be creative with pricing where the situation requires it. Recognising the value of work done, not just the time taken, when setting prices can be important – especially for high impact, high advisory or last minute work, where the risks (and potential rewards) can be higher.

Ian Johnson,
Partner, Hazlewoods



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Law Firms and Money

Would you believe that some law firms still manage their cashflow by 'checking their bank statements'?

It's an extreme version, but it exemplifies what we regularly encounter. The fear of change inherent in the lawyer's mentality (I know because I was one for a long time!) can lead to a chain of issues.

"Always done things this way."

"Changing technology or process will be too difficult."

When you look at such attitudes in detail, this can mean that law firms don't optimise their operations, both in relation to client work and in relation to the crucial accounts (client and office) part of their firm.

Every element of successful operation can be impacted by this- not least, the simple day to day viability of the firm from a financial performance perspective.

Is the quote for the client based on good assessment of what it will take to do the job profitably?

Is the handling and recording of client money being done efficiently, accurately and compliantly?

Is billing happening at all, or promptly?

Is credit control in place to ensure that those bills are paid?

Even when all those things are done well- is the available data being used to manage the business. Real time accurate data is invaluable, as it provides the opportunity to create meaningful cashflow calculations on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. It means the firm can understand (as per the regulatory requirement by the way!) whether they are in fact operating a viable business.

How can a firm make decisions to invest in people or tech if they don't have accurate data enabling them to assess whether they have the funds to make those moves?

If we look at the overall topic of 'money' for lawyers, it has so many connotations. It leads to regulatory thinking where client money is concerned. It comes into recruitment- are you paying the right salaries to attract and retain talent?

In the end though, the general principle that "money is important to lawyers" is a trite and unhelpful statement. Far better perhaps to pose a question to the law firms- do you understand the state of your firm's finances? Do you understand whether you are compliant and risk avoidant in your handling of client and firm money?

If in doubt on either point, it's crucial that an investment of time initially is made to look into it. Before it's too late.

Alex Holt,
Chief Revenue Officer, The Cash Room



The Hidden Cost of Manual AML Compliance

A paralegal at a conveyancing firm spends 45 minutes chasing a client for a utility bill, then another 30 minutes manually checking it against identity documents. None of this work is billable. Multiply that across hundreds of clients each month and the cost to firms in lost time, delayed onboarding and missed fraud risks becomes substantial.

This scenario is repeated daily across the legal sector. SmartSearch's Compliance Report 2026, which surveyed 1,000 compliance decision-makers across regulated industries, found that 54% of firms still complete anti-money laundering (AML) and Know Your Customer (KYC) checks manually. Teams spend hours reviewing passports and utility bills, rekeying data and chasing missing documents through fragmented workflows.

The report also found that 68% of compliance professionals waste half their time on tasks they know could be automated. For firms operating on tight margins, every hour spent on manual compliance is time lost progressing cases, advising clients or generating revenue.

Traditional document verification can take five to seven days to complete. During that time, firms cannot bill, clients cannot proceed and competitors using automated systems are already onboarding matters. In sectors such as conveyancing and private wealth, delays at onboarding directly affect client conversion.

At the same time, regulatory pressure is intensifying. The Solicitors Regulation Authority continues to increase scrutiny around AML compliance, particularly Source of Funds verification in private client work. Meanwhile, AI-generated utility bills, deepfake passports and synthetic identities are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Manual document review was never designed for this threat landscape, and a missed red flag can result in regulatory action, financial penalties and reputational damage.

Further change is coming. Amendments to the Money Laundering Regulations expected later in 2026 are likely to require more frequent rescreening, while the Failure to Prevent Fraud offence arrives in 2027, increasing accountability for senior management. The Financial Conduct Authority is also expected to assume AML supervision of legal services from 2029, bringing more rigorous oversight.

Despite this, many firms overestimate their preparedness. Legal firms rated themselves 8/10 for regulatory readiness in the report, yet only 24% described themselves as "very prepared" for upcoming changes.

Automated AML platforms can complete identity verification, sanctions screening and ongoing monitoring in seconds rather than days. For most firms, the greatest losses never appear on a balance sheet, they sit in wasted hours, delayed instructions, abandoned clients and avoidable exposure to fraud and regulatory risk.

Alex Miell,
Chief People Officer, SmartSearch

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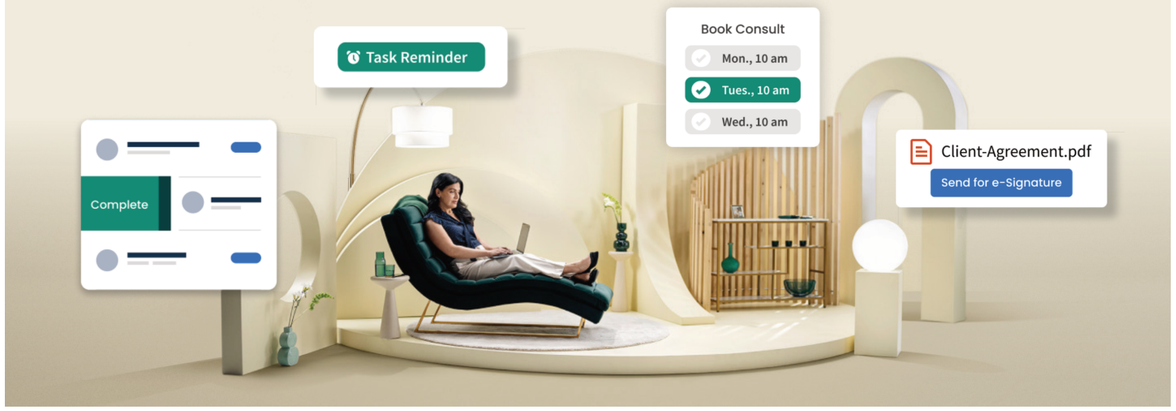



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The Hidden Costs Draining Law Firm Profitability

Most firms know exactly what they bill. Far fewer can tell you what they lose, because the biggest leaks rarely show up on a profit and loss statement.

The first is time. Our State of Legal Tech report found that half of UK lawyers lose more than six hours every week to ine icient or outdated technology, which adds up to over 44 working days a year. The revealing part is that 85% of those same lawyers say they re satisfied with their systems. Satisfaction is masking the cost. When a tool is familiar, the minutes spent re-entering data, switching between applications, and hunting for documents stop registering as a problem, even as they eat into billable capacity across the firm.

The second is cash flow. Clio's global Legal Trends Report found that 24% of firms take too long to invoice clients after completing work, and late invoices are far less likely to be paid in full. Work that has already been done becomes revenue that arrives late, or not at all. Firms using integrated billing and payment tools get paid more than twice as fast, showing just how much value sits in the gap between finishing a matter and collecting on it.

Then there s data, and this cost tends to surface at the worst time, when a firm decides to leave its software provider. The average UK firm pays £12,888 to retrieve its own data, and more than half of lawyers say extraction takes at least four weeks. Only 52% are entirely confident they actually own their client data.

Those exit costs discourage firms from reassessing systems that no longer serve them, so they keep paying for underperformance rather than face the cost of leaving.

The common thread running through all three is the assumption that staying put is the cautious, cost-free option. It rarely is. The expense of a legacy system is real, but it arrives in fragments, an hour here, a delayed invoice there, that never add up to a single visible number. That s why it often goes unquestioned.

The firms protecting their margins treat eciency as a financial metric. They track how long it takes to invoice, how much time fee earners lose to admin, and what it would cost to move providers if they had to. Once those numbers are visible, the case for change usually makes itself.

Vivian O'Brien,
Head of Marketing, Clio



From Intuition to Intelligence: The Data Shift Transforming Legal Services

Technology is fundamentally changing how legal services are delivered, but the biggest financial opportunity right now is data, and most firms are still leaving serious money on the table because they cannot see their own business clearly enough.

Law firms have historically run on instinct. Which clients to pursue, which work is profitable, where time is being lost. Instinct gets you so far, but it does not tell you which matters are quietly running over cost, which fee earners are generating real margin rather than just revenue, or where lock-up is silently destroying value.

That is the problem data solves. At Taylor Rose, we are building on Salesforce to create the kind of visibility that allows both our lawyers and leadership to answer those questions in real time. When that infrastructure is working properly, the financial impact compounds quickly. Better decisions around pricing, resourcing and client mix add up fast.

The firms investing in their data foundations now will have a much clearer picture of where they are making and losing money than their competitors. In a market where margins are already under pressure and cost challenges are not going away, that clarity is worth an enormous amount.

But firms should not think about technology investment as simply buying more tools. The return on investment depends almost entirely on mindset. Technology spending without the right culture behind it is just cost, and cost without return is something firms cannot afford.

The firms I see struggling with technology are rarely the ones that spent too much. More often, they are the firms that bought tools their people never properly adopted or invested in solutions without a clear line of sight to the financial outcome they were chasing.

The firms that will succeed financially over the next decade are the ones building a genuine technology mindset now, leadership that is curious, people who are empowered to try new things, and organisations adaptable enough to move when the landscape shifts. Nobody knows exactly how technology will change the economics of legal services, but the step change is coming, and when it does, the cost of not being ready will be far greater than the cost of investing today.

At Taylor Rose, we have made a multi-million-pound commitment to our technology infrastructure because we believe it is a safe financial bet on our own adaptability.

Lee Adams,
Chief Commercial Officer, Taylor Rose

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Rethinking the Law Firm Financial Model

For decades, the traditional law firm financial model has remained largely unchanged. Built around the billable hour, leverage and rising charge-out rates, it has historically provided a reliable framework for growth and profitability. However, today's legal market is exposing weaknesses in that model, driven by changing client expectations, technological disruption and evolving workforce dynamics.

At its core, the conventional law firm converts time into revenue. Lawyers record hours which are billed at agreed rates, while profitability depends on utilisation, recovery, leverage and pricing power. More than ever, partners and staff need a clear understanding of the commercial realities of running and growing a firm: how profitable incoming work is, whether processes are efficient and how clients perceive value. Increasingly, clients are less concerned with how long work takes and more focused on outcomes, certainty, transparency and efficiency.

This shift has placed the billable hour under sustained pressure. Hourly billing can appear opaque and misaligned, rewarding time spent rather than expertise or results. At the same time, the administrative burden of time recording, billing, compliance and debt review consumes significant non-billable time, reducing efficiency for both firms and clients.

In response, many firms are adopting alternative fee arrangements such as fixed fees, retainers and capped pricing. These models can align more closely with client expectations and strengthen relationships when managed effectively. However, without robust scoping, data-driven pricing and disciplined project management, they can also expose firms to increased margin risk.

Technology is accelerating the challenge. Artificial intelligence and automation are compressing tasks that were once billed by the hour into minutes. While this improves productivity and quality, it also weakens the traditional link between time and value. Firms now face an efficiency paradox: the better they become at delivering work, the harder it is to monetise that efficiency under an hourly model.

Internal pressures are also mounting. High billable hour targets contribute to burnout, disengagement and attrition, particularly among younger lawyers whose expectations around flexibility, wellbeing and career progression are changing.

The sector is therefore at a crossroads. Firms that invest in pricing capability, process redesign and technology-enabled delivery will be better positioned to achieve sustainable profitability in a rapidly evolving legal market.

Neil Beck,
Owner of NB Consultancy and NED & Fractional Sales Director at Aquarius Reporting



The Profit Leak in Modern Law Firms

Law firms today are losing money in ways that often go unnoticed through inefficient processes, duplicated work, poor matter management, underused technology, and time that is never properly captured or recovered. Many firms still rely heavily on manual administration, disconnected systems, and inconsistent workflows, which create hidden operational costs across every department.

The traditional law firm model can still be viable, but only if firms evolve. Rising operational costs, increased competition, fixed-fee pressures, and changing client expectations mean firms can no longer rely purely on billable hours and legacy ways of working. The firms succeeding today are those combining legal expertise with efficient systems, strong client service, and smart use of technology.

One of the biggest misconceptions in the legal sector is that technology replaces lawyers. In reality, the most effective legal technology enhances lawyers' work rather than replacing it. AI and automation are helping firms reduce administrative burdens, improve consistency, minimise risk, and free up fee earners to focus on higher-value client work.

Firms should absolutely be investing in technology, but strategically. The question is no longer whether firms should adopt technology, but whether they can afford not to. However, successful adoption depends on choosing solutions that integrate into existing workflows, are easy for teams to use, and solve genuine operational challenges rather than simply adding more systems.

Profitability is driven by a combination of people, process, and pricing, but process is often the foundation that connects the other two. Strong people remain the biggest asset in any law firm, but without efficient processes and the right tools, even the best teams struggle to work productively. Firms with standardised workflows, better visibility across matters, and streamlined operations are far better positioned to protect margins and scale effectively.

Over the next three to five years, the biggest impact on profitability will likely come from firms' ability to embrace AI-driven efficiency and operational automation. Firms that successfully reduce administrative overheads, improve client experience, and use data more effectively will gain a significant competitive advantage.

More broadly, the legal market is being shaped by increasing client expectations, flexible working, AI adoption, cybersecurity concerns, and pressure for greater efficiency and transparency. Clients now expect faster communication, clearer pricing, and more seamless digital experiences. At the same time, firms are facing challenges in attracting and retaining talent, particularly where outdated systems and excessive administrative workloads impact employee satisfaction.

Ultimately, firms that invest in people, modernise processes, and use technology to support better client outcomes will be best positioned for long-term growth and profitability.

Andrew Hitchon,
Head of Private Client, LEAP







Why Some Law Firms Cannot Scale, Even When Demand Exists

Many law firms appear successful from the outside. Work is flowing, teams are busy and revenue looks healthy, yet internally a familiar tension is emerging: growth is becoming harder to sustain, not easier.

The instinctive explanation is recruitment. Firms look for more fee earners, more experienced hires and higher salaries to compete in a tight market. Sometimes that is necessary, but it often treats the symptom rather than the cause.

More commonly, the underlying issue is a shortage of authorised person status across the business.

Too much operational responsibility is concentrated in too few individuals with the authority to carry it. As firms grow, supervision structures become stretched, sign-off processes slow and capable staff remain below the level they are ready to operate at because progression pathways are too slow or not treated as a strategic priority.

The financial impact is rarely measured properly, but it accumulates steadily. Every hour a senior solicitor, chartered legal executive practitioner or licensed conveyancer spends on supervisory administration rather than chargeable work carries a direct cost. Bottlenecks around file reviews, compliance approvals and matter progression delay timelines in ways clients notice. Vacancies in the development pipeline eventually become expensive lateral hires or resignations.

Firms that deliberately develop authorised person status internally often see benefits compound over time. When a paralegal or trainee progresses into a qualified role, the position they leave can usually be filled at lower cost and developed in turn, creating a more sustainable talent pipeline rather than one dependent on an unpredictable external market.

There is also a regulatory and insurance dimension. Firms with thin authorised person coverage relative to workload create key-person dependency and compliance exposure that may sit quietly until something disrupts it. Regulators and insurers are paying closer attention to governance and supervision structures, and operational fragility is becoming easier to identify from the outside.

Traditional qualification timelines were built for a different market, when lateral hiring was more reliable and attrition more predictable. That market has changed, but many firms have been slower to adapt. Routes to authorised person status have broadened significantly in recent years, yet many firms still underestimate the operational and commercial implications of that shift.

Sustainable growth depends on a firm's ability to develop and retain capability internally rather than relying on an external hiring market that is neither cheap nor dependable.

Demand creates revenue. Authorised person status creates the conditions for growth. The firms that understand the distinction are already ahead.

Dino Dullabh,
Law Training Centre Co-Founder



Profitability in Law Firms: Why Financial Discipline Matters More Than Revenue

From a Finance Director's perspective, profitability in a law firm is not just about generating more work but about managing the business effectively. Strong financial performance depends on disciplined billing and recovery processes, careful cost control and targeted investment in technology, people and support functions.

Law firms often lose money through write-offs, discounts and delays in billing, leaving WIP sitting too long before being converted into cash. Systems may exist to address this, but they must be used properly. Profitability comes from controlling these areas and ensuring work is consistently turned into revenue.

The traditional law firm model remains viable if income and expenditure are managed well. However, rising costs in areas such as salaries, insurance and technology, combined with increasing market competition, continue to pressure margins. Firms must strike the right balance between pricing, cost control, service delivery and investment in talent.

There is a common misconception that law firms are highly profitable with low overheads. Revenue alone does not equal profit. Write-offs, discounts and inefficient processes reduce margins significantly. People generate work and pricing determines value, but strong financial processes determine how much income is ultimately recovered. Robust billing discipline is therefore essential.

Technology has the potential to be transformative, improving efficiency and client service. AI will continue to reshape the legal sector as clients demand faster and more cost-effective delivery. However, technology is often underused, and investment must be targeted and ongoing, particularly given increasing cybersecurity risks. The key is not simply spending more on systems, but ensuring firms invest in the right tools and use them effectively to improve productivity and profitability.

In the future, competitive advantage is likely to come from investment in people, staff development and more tailored pricing strategies rather than simply increasing hourly rates. Profitability will increasingly depend on greater efficiency, wider adoption of technology and AI, stronger productivity and tighter financial control, particularly as clients continue to apply pricing pressure.

Ultimately, long-term profitability comes from getting the fundamentals right: strong billing and recovery, controlled expenditure and smart investment in people, systems and processes. Firms that successfully balance pricing, cost control and service delivery will be best placed to thrive in a competitive market.

Joanne Dalton,
Partner, MSB Solicitors







The Cost of Waiting: Rethinking the Client Experience in Estate Administration

Money may make the world go round, but in estate administration, it is the timing of money that often defines the client experience. Estates can be asset-rich but cash-poor, leaving beneficiaries and executors facing financial pressure while waiting months, sometimes years, for matters to conclude. During this time, bills still need to be paid and financial obligations continue alongside the emotional weight of bereavement. These realities increasingly shape how solicitors and the professionals who support them deliver their services.

Money may make the world go round, but in estate administration, it is the timing of money that often defines the client experience. Estates can be asset-rich but cash-poor, leaving beneficiaries and executors facing financial pressure while waiting months, sometimes years, for matters to conclude. During this time, bills still need to be paid and financial obligations continue alongside the emotional weight of bereavement. These realities increasingly shape how solicitors and the professionals who support them deliver their services.

As a result, firms are recognising that legal outcomes are only part of the estate administration journey. Greater focus is now being placed on reducing financial strain and easing administrative burden through more connected, client-centred support.

One area of change is the growing awareness of probate-aligned financial solutions designed to bridge liquidity gaps. Beneficiaries may be able to access part of their inheritance before distribution where cash flow is limited. Executors, meanwhile, can use inheritance tax loans to meet HMRC obligations that often fall due before estate assets are released, while estate expense loans can help fund testamentary costs without requiring personal expenditure. These solutions are becoming an increasingly established part of the wider estate administration landscape, helping align access to funds with when they are needed most.

Alongside financial pressures, estate administration can also place a significant administrative burden on families. Notifying organisations of a death often involves repeated phone calls, paperwork, and document requests at an already difficult time. In response, digital notification tools now allow individuals to inform multiple organisations through a single streamlined process, reducing repetition and improving efficiency.

While firms are not responsible for handling every administrative task, helping clients navigate the process by signposting them to tools and services that simplify estate administration can significantly improve the overall experience.

As firms look ahead, the impact of money extends beyond the bottom line. Working with specialist partners that address financial pressures and reduce administrative burden supports a more efficient and timely approach to estate administration. Organisations such as The Estate Registry provide digital notification tools and financial solutions that he

Phil Hickson,
SVP of Global Partnerships, The Estate Registry



The Changing Face of Law: Strategies for Growth

Are we taking AI seriously enough?

Matt Clifford, former AI adviser to the UK Government, recently warned that the UK is not taking AI seriously enough and that only the countries that do will achieve sustained economic growth. The same could be said of businesses.

Despite claims that AI has been overhyped, the technology is still in its early stages and developing rapidly. AI tools, disruptive business models and significant investment from technology companies and private equity are set to reshape the legal sector over the next decade, particularly in more commoditised areas of practice.

Adapting to change
Firms that want to remain competitive will need to adapt. Freely available AI tools are already changing the client-solicitor relationship, and some traditional services may become obsolete. The firms most likely to thrive will be those focused on delivering genuine value-added expertise and practical judgement.

Cost pressures and pricing models
Technology spend is already rising faster than many other areas of expenditure, particularly in larger firms, and this trend is likely to continue. At the same time, technology-driven firms offering faster, lower-cost services will place increasing pressure on fees and profit margins.

This is likely to accelerate the move away from time-based billing towards fixed fees and value-based pricing, where clients pay for expertise, interpretation and outcomes rather than simply time spent.

People and culture
Experienced staff who can critically assess AI-generated outputs and provide pragmatic advice will remain essential. Attracting and retaining that talent, however, remains a challenge.

Competitive salaries matter, but culture is equally important. Firms that invest in development, flexibility and work-life balance are more likely to retain skilled people over the long term.

Staying ahead of the curve
Strategic investment in technology, and in the right technology partners, will be critical to long-term success. Many firms continue to be held back by inefficient processes and poorly implemented systems, which can undermine productivity and increase risk. There is a significant opportunity for firms of all sizes to use technology to improve operations, strengthen compliance and enhance client service. Effective systems can reduce errors, improve risk management and free up time for higher-value client engagement.

Focusing solely on billable hours does not necessarily drive profitability. Doing the right work, at the right price, in an efficient way is more likely to improve service delivery, reduce overheads and increase long-term profitability.

To discuss this topic further, contact Calum MacLean, Risk Manager, or Samantha Pye, Director, Professional and Financial Risks.

Calum MacLean,
Risk Manager

Samantha Pye,
Director- Professional and Financial Risks, Miller Insurance

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The Talent and Transformation Challenge Facing Law Firms

The firms most at risk are not necessarily those with lower profits today. More often, they are firms that remain heavily reliant on hourly billing, resist technological change, undervalue their services, and struggle to attract and retain talent.

By contrast, firms that combine legal excellence with operational efficiency, technology, client-focused service, and modern talent strategies are generally better positioned for long-term success.

The traditional law firm model remains viable, but it is evolving rapidly. The key question is no longer whether firms can bill hours profitably, but whether they can deliver legal services in a way that clients, lawyers, and the wider market will continue to value over the next decade. Equally important is creating a workplace where people genuinely want to work—one that is inclusive, supportive, and places people at its heart. Employees are not simply numbers or easily replaceable resources.

Attracting talent has become increasingly challenging due to changing workplace expectations, technological advances, demographic shifts, and growing competition both within and beyond the legal profession. Law firms are no longer competing solely with each other; suppliers, legal technology companies, and other industries are also recruiting talented legal professionals.

Today's lawyers are looking for more than a competitive salary. Flexible and hybrid working, mental health support, career development, and meaningful workplace culture are increasingly important. While remote working offers benefits, it also creates challenges in maintaining support, supervision, and professional development, particularly for junior lawyers.

Generational differences present further challenges. Many younger professionals have grown up communicating primarily through digital platforms, making it more difficult to develop the face-to-face and telephone communication skills that many clients still value.

Retention remains an ongoing concern. Burnout, stress, and mental health issues continue to affect the profession, while technology makes it increasingly difficult for employees to disconnect outside working hours.

Diversity and inclusion also remain key priorities. Neurodiverse professionals, in particular, bring significant strengths to the legal sector, but greater awareness, understanding, and support are needed from colleagues, leaders, and clients alike.

Ultimately, the central challenge for law firms is not simply hiring talented people; it is creating an environment that develops, engages, nurtures, and retains them. At the same time, firms must respond to changing client expectations, which now extend beyond expert legal advice to strategic, technology-enabled, commercially focused support that delivers measurable value.

Donnamarie Sturrock,
Director/Head of Property, RLL Legal

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The Traditional Law Firm Model Under Pressure

The traditional law firm model has long been associated with strong profitability, professional prestige, and clear career progression. However, in today's rapidly evolving legal market, its financial viability is increasingly under pressure. The issue is no longer whether the model works, but whether it remains effective in a more competitive and cost-conscious environment.

One of the biggest challenges is the decline of the billable hour as the dominant pricing model. Clients are increasingly demanding fixed fees, capped costs, and greater transparency, placing pressure on firms that rely heavily on time-based billing.

Competition has also expanded beyond traditional firms. Alternative legal service providers and legal technology companies now offer scalable, cost-efficient solutions, while in-house legal teams are retaining more work that would previously have been outsourced.

Technology, particularly artificial intelligence, is accelerating this shift. Tasks such as document review, due diligence, and drafting can now be completed more efficiently or automated altogether. While this improves productivity, it also challenges firms that depend on billable hours for revenue. At the same time, clients are becoming less willing to absorb rising hourly rates, increasing pressure on profitability.

The legal market is also becoming increasingly saturated. Many firms offer similar services, making differentiation more difficult. Clients are now more likely to choose lawyers based on individual expertise and service quality rather than firm reputation alone, weakening one of the traditional partnership model's key strengths.

A growing divide is emerging across the sector. Large international firms continue to perform strongly due to their scale, global reach, and ability to invest in technology and innovation. Mid-sized and generalist firms, however, often struggle to compete against both global firms and lower-cost, technology-driven providers.

Despite these challenges, the traditional law firm is not obsolete. Financial viability now depends less on tradition and more on adaptability. Firms that modernise processes, embrace technology, and refine their strategic positioning are far more likely to remain competitive in an increasingly demanding legal market.

Neville Dinshaw,
Managing Director of Law, Mergers & Acquisitions

Law Mergers & Acquisitions

Business Facilitators to the Legal Professions with World Wide Client Base

The Business of Modern Family Law: When Lawyers Become Brands

There was a time when reputation within the legal profession was built quietly.

A well-regarded solicitor was known through referrals, longstanding professional relationships and years of consistent practice. Visibility was earned behind closed doors, not through algorithms, personal branding or carefully curated online presence.

That landscape has changed significantly.

Today, many lawyers are no longer simply operating as practitioners. Increasingly, they are becoming brands in their own right.

For some within the profession, that shift remains deeply uncomfortable. The legal sector has historically viewed visibility with caution. Personal branding is still, in certain circles, perceived as self-promotion rather than professional positioning. Yet the reality is that client behaviour has evolved far more quickly than the profession itself.

Modern clients no longer choose solicitors in the same way they once did.

Before making contact, many will already have reviewed a lawyer's LinkedIn profile, watched their videos, read their articles or formed impressions based on social media presence and online commentary. Increasingly, clients are not simply buying legal expertise alone. They are buying trust, communication style, perceived values and confidence in the individual behind the firm.

In family law particularly, this shift has become impossible to ignore.

Relationship breakdown is deeply personal. Clients are often navigating one of the most emotionally destabilising periods of their lives and, as a result, many are drawn towards practitioners who feel relatable, reassuring and human. Technical legal knowledge remains essential, of course, but technical competence alone is rarely what differentiates one lawyer from another in the eyes of the public.

People want to know who is guiding them through the process.

In many respects, this has fundamentally altered the business of modern family law.

Lawyers are now expected to be visible educators, commentators, content creators and public-facing professionals alongside their legal work. There is increasing pressure to maintain online presence, build audience engagement and consistently "show up" professionally in spaces that did not form part of traditional legal practice even a decade ago.

For smaller firms and boutique practices, the impact is particularly significant. Visibility is no longer simply a marketing tool; in many cases, it has become directly linked to commercial survival.

Yet there remains a tension within this evolution.

Whilst personal branding can create accessibility and connection, there is also a growing risk that the profession becomes performative. Social media naturally rewards certainty, simplicity and strong opinion, whereas family law itself is rarely simple. The realities of relationship breakdown, financial disputes and parenting conflict are nuanced, emotionally charged and often deeply sensitive.

The challenge for modern practitioners therefore becomes balancing visibility with professionalism.

How do lawyers remain authentic without becoming overly exposed? How do we educate without oversimplifying? How do we build recognisable public identities whilst still maintaining the professionalism and boundaries expected of the legal sector?

These are questions the profession is still grappling with.

At the same time, however, I believe there is value in acknowledging that visibility itself is not inherently negative. In many ways, the rise of personal branding within law reflects a broader shift towards accessibility within professional services more generally. Clients increasingly want transparency. They want to understand the person behind the title. They want reassurance that their lawyer not only understands the law, but understands people.

Perhaps this is particularly true within family law, where emotional intelligence and communication often matter just as much as technical legal expertise.

In my own experience, it was this evolving role - combining strategy, communication and modern client expectations alongside legal practice, that ultimately led to me becoming known professionally as The Family Law Strategist®Not as a marketing exercise, but as a reflection of how significantly the role of the modern family lawyer has evolved.

Because increasingly, clients are not simply seeking somebody to progress a case.

They are seeking guidance, clarity, reassurance and strategic direction through some of the most significant transitions of their lives.

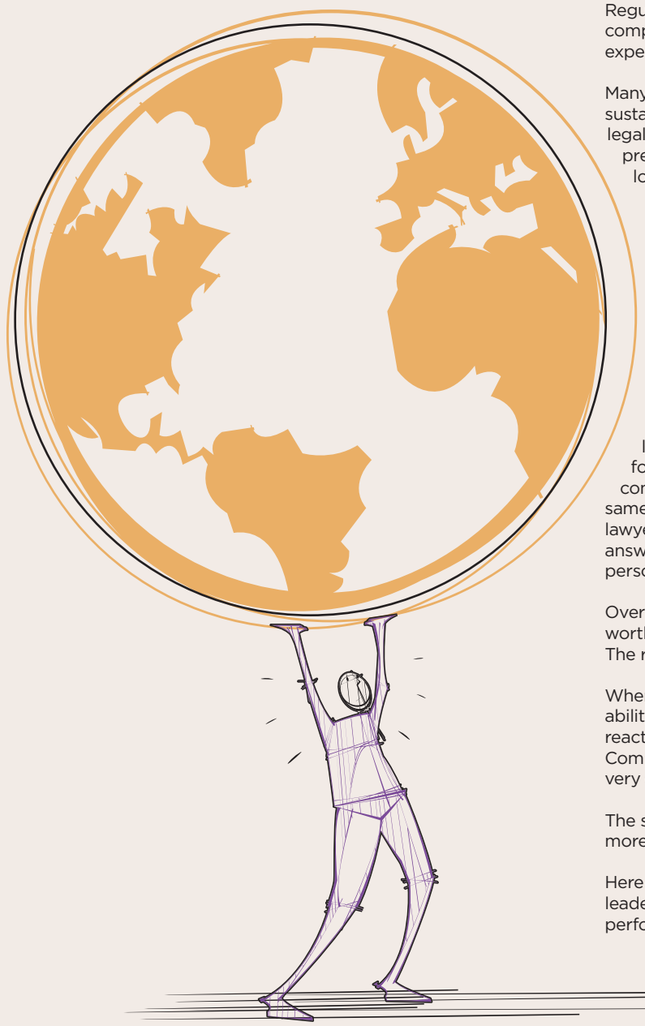
That evolution is changing not only how family law is practised, but how family lawyers themselves are perceived.

The profession may still be adjusting to that reality. But it is difficult to deny that the business of modern family law now extends far beyond the law alone.

Sana Saddique
The Family Law Strategist, Managing Director of Collective Law Solicitors®and Director of Birmingham Law Society



HOW BUSY LEGAL LEADERS CAN CREATE MORE TIME TO BREATHE, SPACE AND FREEDOM



At 11:14pm, the managing partner finally closed their laptop.

The client issue had escalated. The regulator had requested additional information. Two fee earners were in conflict. A key lateral hire was reconsidering their move. Tomorrow's board paper still needed reviewing. And somewhere amongst all of that, there was also a family, a body running on caffeine and adrenaline, and a mind that had not properly switched off in months.

This is now the reality for many senior legal professionals.

The legal sector has always been demanding, but the pressure facing modern legal professionals has intensified. Managing partners are expected to lead strategy whilst remaining commercially productive. Senior lawyers are balancing complex client demands with growing internal leadership responsibilities. Legal operations leaders are being asked to modernise systems, improve efficiency, manage risk and support profitability, often with limited capacity.

At the same time, the emotional demands of legal work continue to rise. Clients arrive stressed, anxious, frustrated or facing life-changing decisions. Teams need support through uncertainty, burnout and changing expectations of work. Regulators continue to increase scrutiny. And all whilst competition is becoming fiercer, margins are tighter, and expectations never seem to slow down.

Many firms now openly discuss wellbeing, resilience and sustainable leadership. Yet behind closed doors, many senior legal professionals still feel trapped in a cycle of constant pressure and permanent responsiveness – wellbeing is a lovely concept, but not a lived reality.

Facing such an unrelenting context, the challenge is that burnout in law rarely arrives dramatically. It creeps in slowly. It starts with working slightly later. Checking emails more often. Carrying tension home and feeling mentally occupied even during downtime. Sleep becomes lighter. Patience shortens. Decision-making becomes harder, and eventually, even high performers begin operating in survival mode.

What makes this more difficult is that many legal leaders unintentionally create additional pressure for themselves. The profession attracts intelligent, conscientious and high-achieving people. But those same traits can quietly become destructive. Many senior lawyers feel they must always be available, always have the answer, always protect the client, always solve the problem personally and always maintain exceptionally high standards.

Over time, this creates a dangerous equation where self-worth becomes tied to constant output and responsiveness. The result is not just exhaustion. It's cognitive overload.

When leaders operate in a constant state of urgency, their ability to think strategically deteriorates. They become reactive rather than intentional. Creativity narrows. Communication becomes transactional and they lose the very clarity and perspective that leadership requires.

The solution is not simply "better wellbeing" – it is creating more focus, more intentionality and more space.

Here are three practical shifts that can help busy legal leaders regain breathing room without compromising performance.

1. Stop treating every request as equally important

One of the biggest hidden drains on legal leaders is the inability to distinguish between what feels urgent and what actually matters.

In many firms, everything becomes a priority and every request receives the same level of attention and detail. But not every issue deserves the same cognitive investment.

Many senior legal professionals spend large portions of their week solving problems that either do not require their involvement or do not materially affect outcomes. This often happens because lawyers are trained to minimise risk, anticipate issues and demonstrate thoroughness. Whilst these are valuable professional strengths, they can also create unnecessary complexity and overwork.

The key question becomes:

"What is the real problem we are actually trying to solve here?"

Not the noise surrounding the issue or exploring every possible scenario and every hypothetical risk.

Often, once leaders identify the core issue, they realise far less work is required than they initially assumed. Where the irony is that many legal leaders create pressure through over-processing and adding layers of analysis, meetings, and involvement that provide diminishing returns.

More effort does not always create more value. The best legal leaders are not those who involve themselves in everything. They are the ones who remain focused on what matters most.

2. Create decision-making space before your brain forces it upon you

Many legal professionals operate as though capacity is infinite - it is not.

The brain under sustained pressure begins to narrow its capabilities. Focus weakens, memory declines and emotional regulation becomes harder. Here strategic thinking deteriorates, eventually resulting in being less effective despite working harder.

This is where many senior professionals get trapped. They believe the answer to pressure is more effort, more hours and more availability. But beyond a certain point, every additional hour worked produces lower-quality thinking. This is particularly dangerous in leadership roles where judgement, communication and clarity matter more than pure output.

Creating space is therefore not indulgent – it is operationally necessary and not only. Therefore, rather than wait until they physically or emotionally have no choice but to slow down or stop, leaders need to become more intentional about protecting cognitive recovery before burnout arrives.

That may mean creating uninterrupted thinking time during the week or reducing unnecessary meetings. It may mean setting clearer communication boundaries and delegating earlier instead of waiting until overwhelmed. Most importantly, it means recognising that constant availability is not the same as effective leadership.

Many firms unknowingly reward visible busyness rather than meaningful contribution. Yet the leaders who create the greatest long-term value are often those who think more clearly, prioritise better and remain emotionally steady under pressure. This requires recovery, recognising that no elite performer in any field can operate at maximum intensity permanently.

3. Let go of the belief that leadership means carrying everything yourself

The final trap many senior legal professionals fall into is believing they must personally hold everything together. This becomes especially common amongst managing partners, senior equity partners and operational leaders carrying responsibility for firm performance, people issues, client relationships and culture.

Over time, many begin absorbing more and more emotional weight whilst showing less and less vulnerability themselves. Externally they appear composed, yet internally they are exhausted because the problem is that leadership isolation quietly amplifies pressure.

Many legal leaders struggle to delegate because they fear standards dropping. Others avoid difficult conversations because they believe they should shield teams from pressure. Some continue firefighting because they no longer trust the wider system around them. But sustainable leadership cannot rely on one person carrying the emotional, operational and strategic burden of an entire business.

Strong leadership teams create shared ownership, healthy challenge and collective responsibility. That means empowering people properly rather than retaining hidden control. It means trusting others to solve problems. It means building systems that reduce dependency on individual heroics.

The firms that will thrive over the next decade are not the ones driven by exhaustion disguised as commitment. They are the firms that create environments where leaders can sustain high performance without sacrificing themselves in the process. Because ultimately, success in modern legal leadership is not about surviving relentless pressure.

It is about creating enough clarity, focus and space to lead well whilst still having the capacity to enjoy the life you are building outside the office too.

Rob Cross is the author of Ask 3 Questions: How to Live Well in a Distracted World, and an experienced leadership development coach who works with senior leaders and organisations to build high performance through clarity, purpose and effective leadership. Over the past two decades, he has advised and developed leaders across some of the world's most respected organisations, including BT Group, SIG, LexisNexis, Prudential, PwC, Sainsbury's and Deloitte.

Rob Cross,
founder and CEO of Muru Leadership



THE FUTURE OF **UK LAW FIRMS 2026**

Are UK Law Firms Ready for What's Next?

The legal sector is undergoing significant change.

From evolving partnership models to new investment structures and consultant-led firms, the way law firms operate is shifting.

Our new report explores what the future holds.

Unlock the full insights at
dyedurham.co.uk/report-2026/

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Explore more at
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Talent or Technology? For UK Law Firms, It Has to Be Both

Over the past several months, our whitepaper research and the roundtable conversations that followed it have made one thing increasingly clear to us: the pressures on UK legal firms are only growing, with many struggling to keep up. For those looking to find the answer to those pressures, the conversation often focuses on a dichotomous question; do firms need to adopt more technology or are they better off investing more in talent?

Our answer (and one that may be surprising coming from a legal software company) is that the firms who succeed will be those who embrace both. Far from being a replacement for human labour, the best technology for any law firm is the one that frees firms up to focus on freeing up their people's time.

Pressures of modern working
As our research and conversations with the UK legal sector show, time pressures and stresses are not going away any time soon. That was something we heard clearly in our recent AI and AML and conveyancing roundtables, from some of the most experienced professionals in the sector.

During the course of those discussions, we heard much about the pressures legal professionals are under – compliance obligations that have reshaped entire working days, and lawyers who entered the profession to help clients but who are now spending significant portions of their time chasing bank statements and navigating documentation requirements that feel disconnected from the risks they were designed to address.

As one of our AI roundtable participants expressed it, "There's only so much time in the day" to complete everything required of a lawyer. Or, as Amy Bell, Director at Teal Compliance, put it more boldly: "AML is wagging the dog."

Tech or talent as a solution?
These increased requirements and time constraints are coming at a moment when the wider market is shifting beneath firms' feet, with private equity, alternative business models, and the consultant model adding increased strains and opportunities for law firms. The sector may already be seeing the cost of these pressures: in our whitepaper research, 45% of the 200 UK law firm leaders we surveyed said talent recruitment and retention is already their single biggest barrier to growth.

Participants in the compliance session noted this strain too, including that fewer young lawyers appear drawn to conveyancing as the role increasingly feels dominated by process. This can't be fully answered with technology. In the AI session, Simon Black, Technical Property Director at Taylor Rose, asked directly whether future conveyancers will develop the analytical instincts that experienced practitioners depend on if AI is absorbing the early-stage work through which those instincts have traditionally been built.

What the UK legal sector can agree on, and what Dye & Durham agrees on too, is that the benefit of technology is not to replace human work. Instead, what it can and should be used for is to free lawyers up from the monotonous and time-consuming work that prevents them from doing what they trained to do.

This is where we recommend embracing technology. In the roundtables, the legal professionals who spoke described using AI and other technology to do the work that takes up too much time – to identify bottlenecks, streamline audits, and reduce the administrative burden that is driving burnout across the sector. At the same time, every participant stressed that professional judgement, client communication, and emotional intelligence remain irreplaceable.

That is the balance firms need to find. While the market may be changing and while client expectations and compliance obligations are rising, the firms that will thrive will not be those who choose between investing in technology and investing in people. Instead, they will be the ones who recognise how people and technology need to work efficiently, intelligently, harmoniously together.

As our research and roundtables have shown, the best technology does not replace legal professionals. It gives them back the time to do what they do best.

"The Future of UK Law Firms 2026: Changing Leadership, Capital, and Operating Models is available at dyedurham.co.uk

Natasha Malhotra,
Customer Success Manager,
Dye & Durham



THE FUTURE OF CONVEYANCING: PEOPLE, PROCESS & PROGRESS

Modern Law Magazine was delighted to partner with Dye & Durham to host a series of roundtable discussions exploring the key challenges, opportunities and priorities shaping the future of conveyancing.

Held throughout April across four locations – York, London, Manchester and Birmingham – the roundtables brought together leading conveyancers, industry experts and award-winning professionals from across the sector. The discussions provided a valuable opportunity to share experiences, exchange ideas and examine the evolving demands facing conveyancing firms in an increasingly complex and competitive market.

Across the series, participants explored a range of topics impacting modern conveyancing practice, including compliance, client expectations, operational efficiency, technology adoption and the growing influence of artificial intelligence. While each session reflected the unique perspectives of those in the room, common themes emerged around the importance of innovation, resilience and maintaining exceptional client service in a rapidly changing landscape.

The discussions highlighted that successful transformation is rarely driven by technology alone. Rather, meaningful progress comes from the expertise, judgement and leadership of the professionals responsible for delivering legal services every day. Participants shared practical insights into how firms are refining processes, embracing new ways of working and preparing for the future while continuing to meet the high standards expected by clients and regulators alike.

Designed to encourage open and honest conversation, the roundtables created a forum for industry leaders to discuss what is working well, identify areas for improvement and consider how the profession can continue to evolve. The collaborative nature of the discussions reinforced the value of sharing knowledge and experiences across the sector.

The following pages capture the key themes, insights and perspectives that emerged from these conversations, offering a snapshot of how conveyancing professionals across the country are responding to the opportunities and challenges ahead, and what the future may hold for one of the legal profession's most dynamic sectors.

ABOUT DYE & DURHAM

Dye & Durham brings together some of the UK's most trusted legal technology and service providers, all under one roof.

For decades, the brands at the heart of our business have supported thousands of law firms with tools they knew and trusted. But as the legal industry evolved, so did the needs of legal professionals.

Firms don't need more software — they need smarter software.

That's why we brought our tools and expertise together: to simplify the tech lawyers already rely on, streamline everyday workflows, and deliver one connected experience that just works.

That knowledge and experience now live in the Unity® product suite.

It's everything firms need to work smarter, proudly built on a foundation of trusted solutions with decades of experience supporting the legal profession.

Attendees



Ian Quayle
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AI VS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: WHY CONVEYANCING'S HUMAN TOUCH STILL MATTERS

Artificial intelligence is no longer a future consideration for the conveyancing sector. Across the market, firms are already integrating AI-driven tools into onboarding, title reporting, workflow management, compliance monitoring, client communication and operational analysis. For some firms, the technology is transforming productivity and helping reduce administrative pressure in ways that would have seemed unrealistic only a few years ago.

Yet while automation promises efficiency, scalability and consistency, it also raises increasingly complex questions around professional judgement, training, liability and client relationships. As conveyancing becomes more technology-enabled, many within the profession are beginning to ask whether the industry risks losing some of the very human qualities that clients still value most.

Those tensions formed the basis of this Modern Law roundtable discussion, chaired by property law trainer and consultant Ian Quayle and hosted by Dye & Durham. Bringing together conveyancers, operational leaders, legal technologists and property specialists from across the sector, the discussion explored where AI is genuinely improving outcomes, where concerns remain, and why emotional intelligence may become even more commercially important as technology evolves.

The session featured contributions from Rebecca Fletcher, Chartered Legal Executive and Senior Associate at Stephensons; Rachel Maxwell, Partner and Head of Conveyancing at Smith Partnership Solicitors; Brad Armstrong, Partner and Head of Real Estate at MSB Solicitors; Matt Gillies, Managing Director at RG Law; Gina Padmore, CEO of FDR Law; Simon Black, Technical Property Director at Taylor Rose; Donna Richardson, Conveyancer at Smith Partnership; Bethany Hudson, Director of Hudson Conveyancing; Hannah Edgley, Partner at Foys; Russell Foley, Director of Product – Search at Dye & Durham; Sarah Fancourt, Operations Director of UK Real Estate at Dye & Durham; and Ian Quayle, Chief Executive of IQ Legal Training.

What followed was less a debate about whether AI is coming and more an exploration of how firms can embrace technological change without losing the human skills that still sit at the heart of conveyancing.

AI Is Already Embedded in Modern Conveyancing

One of the clearest themes to emerge from the discussion was that many firms are already using AI far more extensively than they perhaps publicly acknowledge. While much of the wider market conversation still frames AI as an emerging trend, participants around the table described technology that is already deeply embedded into their operational processes.

For some firms, that means workflow automation, task tracking and internal reporting. For others, it means AI-assisted title reports, onboarding systems, complaint analysis or audit support. What became apparent very quickly was that the line between "automation" and "artificial intelligence" is becoming increasingly blurred within modern conveyancing operations.

Sarah Fancourt, Operations Director of UK Real Estate at Dye & Durham, noted that much of the current evolution still sits within robotic process automation rather than fully autonomous AI, but stressed that both are contributing to a significant operational shift across the sector.

"What we're looking at is actually robotic process automation or automation," she said. "We're automating processes and I see that as the starting point."

She described using AI internally to help analyse operational data, structure workflows and simplify large volumes of information that would otherwise require considerable manual review. Tasks that previously consumed hours of resource can now often be processed within minutes.

"We might get hundreds and hundreds of queries," she explained. "You can feed that data in and say, what is the general gist within that?"

Others around the table described similarly practical applications. Matt Gillies explained that RG Law is increasingly using AI to support internal compliance reviews, file audits and complaint handling processes. Rather than replacing people, the technology is helping remove repetitive administrative burden, allowing fee earners and operational teams to focus their attention elsewhere.

"We use it more extensively reviewing files as part of the audit process," he said. "It's really useful."

Bethany Hudson described how her firm had effectively developed its own AI-assisted tracking systems to compensate for limitations within existing case management software. Rather than manually reviewing spreadsheets or monitoring workflow stages one by one, her team can now instantly identify bottlenecks, outstanding search reports or operational delays.

"We can literally go, right, how many files have we got search reports to do on?" she explained. "For us that is such a time saver."

Hannah Edgley similarly noted that the firm's AI-enabled property reporting tools had significantly increased capacity within her workload, reducing the time spent preparing reports and allowing her to take on more files.

"I've managed to double my intake on files by the software that we have got because it's doing half of the work for me," she said.

Yet despite those efficiencies, very few participants appeared willing to place complete trust in automation without human oversight. That caution became one of the defining characteristics of the discussion. While nobody denied that AI can improve operational efficiency, there was widespread reluctance to assume it can replicate professional judgement.

Donna Richardson perhaps best captured the mood around the table. While recognising the value of AI-assisted systems, she remained cautious about relying on them entirely for legal interpretation.

"I personally check that," she said of AI-generated title reports. "Would it actually pick up the key things that you need with an eye looking at Rightmove, looking at the street map?"

That distinction between administrative efficiency and legal judgement became one of the defining themes of the afternoon.

Efficiency Is Not the Same as Judgement

Throughout the discussion, participants repeatedly returned to the idea that conveyancing still depends heavily on contextual understanding, practical interpretation and instinctive professional judgement developed through experience.

While AI may increasingly streamline process-driven work, several participants questioned whether technology can genuinely understand nuance in the way experienced lawyers do. The concern was not necessarily that AI tools are ineffective, but that they may struggle to identify issues that fall outside structured parameters or rely upon wider contextual awareness.

On solicitor described himself as "old school" in some respects, explaining that despite Taylor Rose's investment in technology, he still believes strongly in maintaining a human-centric approach to conveyancing.

"I still like that human-centric link," he said.

Others echoed similar concerns. Rebecca Fletcher explained that while she regularly uses AI tools for procedural reminders, research support and marketing tasks, she remains cautious about relying on them for substantive legal analysis.

"Half the answers will be brilliant," she said. "Half the answers will be nonsense."

That concern prompted a wider discussion around instinctive legal judgement, something Ian Quayle repeatedly referred to as the "sniff test".

"You can smell a file," he said, describing the way experienced conveyancers often instinctively recognise when something about a transaction feels wrong before identifying the precise issue itself.

Several participants agreed strongly with that observation. Experienced conveyancers, they argued, frequently identify problems not because of one isolated technical point, but because something about the overall picture appears inconsistent, incomplete or unusual. That kind of intuitive pattern recognition remains difficult to codify within automated systems.

For many around the table, this is where the limits of current AI become most obvious. Technology may assist with process, but judgement still requires context, instinct and experience. There was also concern that firms could become overly focused on speed simply because technology allows work to move faster.

Several participants stressed that quicker output should not automatically be confused with better legal work. Conveyancing remains a highly nuanced area of practice where small details can have significant consequences. The fear, some suggested, is that increasing automation may unintentionally encourage firms to prioritise throughput over careful legal scrutiny.

That tension between efficiency and judgement quietly underpinned much of the discussion.

The Rise of the AI-Informed Client

While firms themselves are rapidly adapting to AI internally, participants also noted that clients are evolving just as quickly externally.

Increasingly, clients are using ChatGPT and other generative AI tools to analyse reports on title, interpret legal terminology and question advice received during transactions. In some cases, clients are effectively engaging in parallel conversations with AI throughout the conveyancing process.

Brad Armstrong described one recent example involving a complex Building Safety Act issue where the client repeatedly fed legal explanations into ChatGPT before returning with increasingly technical follow-up questions generated by the platform.

"I'm now engaged in a conversation with an AI," he said.

That observation resonated strongly because it highlighted how AI is changing not only internal legal processes, but also client behaviour and expectations. Firms are no longer simply advising clients; they are increasingly responding to AI-assisted interpretations generated elsewhere.

Several participants noted that AI-generated questions often sound highly technical and authoritative, even where the underlying analysis may be flawed or incomplete. That creates additional pressure on fee earners, who must now spend time unpicking or contextualising information clients have sourced independently online.

Quayle referenced several widely publicised examples of lawyers and judges facing criticism after relying on hallucinated AI-generated authorities or case law that simply did not exist.

"AI hallucinates," he warned.

The concern, participants suggested, is that clients may struggle to distinguish between confident language and accurate legal advice. Rebecca Fletcher raised the broader commercial implication of that shift.

"Why am I paying this amount of money for AI to do this when I can just do this myself?" she asked.

That question lingered throughout much of the discussion because it goes directly to the future value proposition of legal services themselves. If clients increasingly perceive AI as something that can generate legal information instantly and freely, firms may need to work harder to demonstrate the value of professional judgement, contextual advice and emotional reassurance.

Interestingly, several participants suggested that this could actually increase the importance of emotional intelligence within conveyancing rather than reduce it. If legal information itself becomes increasingly accessible, then the differentiator between firms may become less about pure technical process and more about trust, communication and client experience.

Accountability, Regulation and the 'Black Box' Problem

As the conversation moved further into compliance and governance, the tone became noticeably more cautious.

Participants repeatedly acknowledged that while AI may improve efficiency, responsibility still ultimately sits with regulated professionals. That creates a difficult imbalance. Firms may increasingly rely on systems they do not fully control or fully understand, while still remaining entirely accountable for outcomes.

Quayle repeatedly referenced what regulators describe as the "black box" problem, the reality that many AI systems operate in ways users themselves cannot fully explain.

"You can't just say we use this provider and that's it," he said. "You've got to say we've audited that and checked what they do."

The discussion explored concerns around client confidentiality, supplier oversight, cybersecurity, data ownership and professional indemnity exposure. Participants acknowledged that many firms are still in the relatively early stages of understanding how AI changes their risk profile.

Several participants also raised concerns about firms potentially using AI tools without fully understanding where client data is being stored or processed. Others questioned whether firms are genuinely scrutinising suppliers carefully enough before integrating systems into operational workflows.

At the same time, several also pointed out that human error itself remains a significant source of negligence claims within conveyancing. Gina Padmore observed that if AI ultimately proves more accurate than the average human operator, firms may eventually have little choice but to embrace it more fully.

That comment prompted one of the most thought-provoking discussions of the afternoon: whether the next generation of conveyancers risks losing foundational technical skills if AI increasingly absorbs junior-level work.

Are Firms Creating a Future Skills Gap?

One of the clearest anxieties expressed during the session centred not around current conveyancers, but future ones.

If AI increasingly handles repetitive, process-driven tasks traditionally undertaken by junior fee earners, how will the next generation develop the technical understanding and judgement that experienced practitioners rely upon today?

One solicitor questioned whether future conveyancers might become overly dependent on systems without fully understanding the legal reasoning underneath them.

"Are those next generation conveyancers going to be able to do that?" he asked. "Or are we just going to be relying on AI?"

Sarah Fancourt agreed, warning that firms risk creating a generation of lawyers who know how to operate systems without fully understanding the underlying principles themselves.

"If you don't learn the basics," she said, "how are you going to be that amazing mathematician?"

That concern surfaced repeatedly in different forms throughout the discussion. Participants worried that junior lawyers may become increasingly reluctant to make independent decisions or engage directly with clients if technology continually acts as intermediary and safety net.

Several also observed that younger professionals may already feel less comfortable with spontaneous client conversations than previous generations, particularly where difficult questions arise.

"There are a large group of people where picking up the phone or seeing a client in person just scares them to death," One solicitor observed.

Others noted that communication itself is becoming more fragmented and transactional. Quayle reflected on how many younger staff now prefer messaging and digital communication over telephone conversations, even when speaking directly would resolve issues more quickly.

That matters because several participants argued that much of conveyancing still depends heavily on nuanced communication, emotional reassurance and interpersonal judgement, skills that are difficult to develop without direct experience.

There was also wider concern that if junior staff become overly reliant on AI-generated summaries or recommendations, they may lose confidence in developing independent analytical thinking. Several participants suggested that the profession must remain careful not to create environments where technology becomes a substitute for learning rather than a support mechanism alongside it.

At the same time, some participants acknowledged that the role of the conveyancer itself may evolve significantly over the next decade. Rather than purely technical processing, future roles may increasingly centre around client management, communication and interpretation.

Conveyancing Is Not an Emotionally Neutral Service

Although the discussion began around artificial intelligence, it gradually evolved into something far more reflective about the emotional realities of conveyancing itself.

Participants repeatedly stressed that property transactions are rarely purely transactional experiences. They often involve financial pressure, family tension, probate matters, relationship breakdowns, uncertainty and stress. As a result, conveyancers frequently find themselves acting not only as legal advisers, but also as mediators, translators and emotional support figures.
Hannah Edgley described the breadth of situations conveyancers routinely navigate.

"You're dealing with people from all walks of life," she said. "You're a mediator as well as everything else."

Rebecca Fletcher argued strongly that emotional intelligence remains central to good conveyancing.

"It's not an emotionally neutral area of law," she said. "You have to be empathetic."

Several participants noted that clients often remember how a conveyancer made them feel far more than the technical legal work itself. That creates a difficult balancing act for firms operating within increasingly cost-sensitive and commoditised markets.

On one hand, the sector faces constant pressure to improve efficiency and increase capacity. On the other, clients still expect reassurance, empathy and accessibility during what is often one of the most stressful transactions of their lives.

Brad Armstrong made the point that firms frequently provide significant emotional support that is not commercially reflected within conveyancing fees. Yet despite that pressure, many participants argued that emotional intelligence may actually become more commercially valuable as technical processes become increasingly automated elsewhere.

In many ways, the discussion suggested that technology may elevate the importance of human interaction rather than reduce it. If administrative tasks increasingly become automated, then the moments where clients speak directly to a conveyancer may become even more significant.

Why Human Contact Still Matters

One of the most revealing discussions of the afternoon centred around client onboarding and communication strategies.

Several firms described implementing structured onboarding calls, Teams meetings and scheduled touchpoints specifically designed to improve trust and reduce complaints.
Interestingly, many participants admitted they had initially underestimated the value of those conversations before seeing the impact in practice.

Matt Gillies explained that RG Law now mandates introductory Teams or Zoom calls with clients early in transactions.

"We do find that if you've seen someone, you've got a little bit more respect for them," he said.

Bethany Hudson described a similar approach, admitting she was initially sceptical before seeing how significantly it improved client relationships and communication flow.

"We talk them through the key stages," she explained. "The amount of time we spend talking to clients now is more scheduled in."

Brad Armstrong recalled one senior conveyancer reluctantly trialling welcome calls before returning with what he described as a "lightbulb moment".

"She came off the phone and said, I wish I'd done this before," he explained.

Participants repeatedly linked those early touchpoints directly to reduced complaint levels, stronger client trust and better online reviews. Gina Padmore noted that fee earners who take time to build personal relationships consistently receive stronger client feedback.

"The ones that do initial calls get better feedback," she said. "They get far more Trustpilot reviews."

That observation became increasingly significant as the discussion turned toward competition and differentiation within the conveyancing market.

Several participants suggested that firms may increasingly need to rethink how they structure client interaction altogether. Rather than clients simply calling repeatedly throughout the day for updates, some firms are moving toward scheduled communication models, online booking systems and more structured contact points.

The intention is not to reduce human contact, but to make it more meaningful and manageable.

Complaints, Reviews and Communication in the AI Era

Complaints handling emerged as another major theme throughout the session, particularly in relation to evolving client expectations.

Several participants observed that AI is already changing the nature of complaints themselves. Brad Armstrong described seeing increasingly sophisticated complaint correspondence generated with obvious AI assistance.

"They'll come out with this AI-generated pro forma email," he said.

Others noted that clients can now produce lengthy technical complaints within minutes, regardless of whether they fully understand the underlying legal concepts involved.

Yet despite that shift, participants repeatedly stressed that many complaints still stem primarily from communication failures rather than substantive legal mistakes. Often, they argued, clients simply want reassurance, clarity and visibility throughout the transaction process.

Simple human interaction therefore remains one of the most effective complaint prevention tools available.

"If you've seen someone, you've got that little bit more respect," Gillies observed.

Participants also discussed the importance of communication around exchange and completion, particularly because clients often misunderstand what those milestones legally mean. Several firms represented around the table still mandate personal completion calls despite growing automation elsewhere.

"That emotional connection," Gillies said, "goes in the back of the brain for the next time."

The group also explored the growing importance of online reviews within the AI era. Gina Padmore pointed out that as consumers increasingly use AI-driven search tools or online recommendation systems, feedback and reputation become even more commercially important.

"The first thing you do is go to Google reviews," Matt Gillies added.

Several participants noted that clients are increasingly choosing firms based not only on fees, but also on perceived accessibility, personality and service quality. That shift may further increase the importance of emotional intelligence within the profession.

Social Media, AI Search and the Future of Client Acquisition

The discussion also highlighted how rapidly client acquisition itself is changing.

Bethany Hudson described receiving instructions from clients who had discovered her firm through ChatGPT recommendations rather than traditional Google searches.

"You came up as the second-ranked firm," she recalled one client saying.

Participants also discussed the growing role of TikTok and other social media platforms within legal marketing. Hudson explained that a significant proportion of her firm's work now originates through TikTok content that showcases the personalities behind the legal process.

"It shows the human behind the lawyer," she said.

That prompted wider discussion around authenticity, visibility and personal branding. Several participants argued that firms able to combine technological efficiency with visible human personality may ultimately outperform firms focused solely on automation and scale.

In many ways, that observation perfectly encapsulated the broader theme of the roundtable itself.

Technology may increasingly handle process, administration and operational support. But trust, reassurance and emotional connection remain fundamentally human qualities.

A Profession Balancing Two Futures

As the session drew to a close, there was little disagreement around the table that conveyancing is entering a period of profound transition.

Participants acknowledged that many existing systems remain fragmented, inefficient and heavily manual. Few doubted that AI and automation will continue reshaping the sector rapidly over the coming years. At the same time, there was equally little sense that the human conveyancer is disappearing anytime soon.

Instead, the discussion suggested that the role itself may evolve significantly.

Technology will increasingly handle repetitive tasks, workflow administration and operational processing. But emotional intelligence, communication and judgement may become even more important as technical work becomes more automated.

Clients may accept AI-generated reports, automated onboarding and digital workflows as standard. But when chains collapse, deadlines slip, transactions become stressful or emotions rise, many will still want reassurance from another human being.

That distinction may ultimately become the defining challenge for the profession over the next decade.

The firms most likely to succeed will not necessarily be those that resist AI, nor those attempting to remove humans from the process entirely. They will be the firms that understand how to combine technological capability with genuine emotional intelligence.

Because while conveyancing may become increasingly automated, the emotions surrounding property transactions remain deeply human.

And in a market shaped more and more by technology, that human edge may ultimately become the profession's most valuable asset of all.

Attendees



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Gareth Fullbrook
Partner, Dutton Gregory Solicitors



Juliet Burtrand
Head of Compliance, Attwells



Sarah Sams
Partner- Head of Residential Property, Dutton Gregory Solicitors



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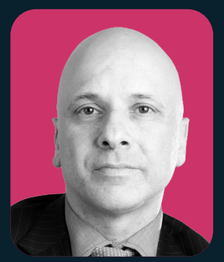
Customer-Focused Growth Leader, Dye & Durham



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Liz Ramsden
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Sarah-Louise Green
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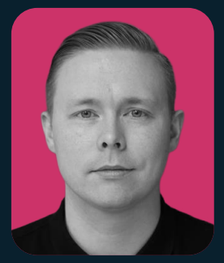

Chris Shingler
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WHEN COMPLIANCE STARTS DRIVING THE BUSINESS

Anti-money laundering obligations have become an unavoidable part of modern conveyancing practice, but across the sector there is growing concern that compliance processes are becoming increasingly disconnected from the risks they were originally designed to prevent.

For many conveyancing firms, anti-money laundering compliance has become one of the defining operational challenges of modern legal practice. What was once viewed as an important but manageable regulatory obligation is now consuming increasing amounts of fee earner time, creating growing pressure on operational teams and fundamentally reshaping the way firms manage risk.

Across the profession, lawyers are navigating increasingly complex source of funds checks, evolving regulatory expectations, enhanced due diligence obligations, lender requirements and mounting pressure to evidence decision-making processes in ever greater detail. At the same time, firms are trying to balance those obligations against client expectations, commercial realities and already stretched workloads.

That tension formed the basis of the second Modern Law roundtable discussion, hosted by Dye & Durham and chaired by Teal Compliance Director Amy Bell. The discussion brought together conveyancers, compliance professionals, operational leaders and legal technology specialists from across the sector, including Gareth Fullbrook, Partner at Dutton Gregory Solicitors; Juliet Burtrand, Head of Compliance at Attwells; Sarah Sams, Partner and Head of Residential Property at Dutton Gregory Solicitors; Angelo Piccirillo and Tony Piccirillo, Senior Partners at AVRillo LLP; Laura Everitt, Head of Property at Elite Law Solicitors; Christine McClenaghan, Associate Director and Head of Property at Thorneycroft Solicitors; Liz Ramsden and Sarah-Louise Green, Partners at Knights PLC; Rameysha Khan, Compliance and Audit Manager at Dye & Durham; Natasha Malhotra, Customer-Focused Growth Leader at Dye & Durham; and Chris Shingler, Product Manager at Dye & Durham.

What emerged was an unusually candid discussion about fear, fatigue, professional pressure and the growing sense that compliance itself is beginning to dominate operational life within conveyancing firms.

Unlike the first roundtable in the series, which centred heavily around emotional intelligence, client communication and the role of AI in the client journey, this discussion carried a noticeably different tone. There was less optimism around innovation for innovation's sake and far more focus on operational strain, regulatory anxiety and the practical realities of managing compliance in already pressured environments.

Yet despite the difference in emphasis, many of the same themes continued to surface. Participants repeatedly returned to the challenge of balancing technology with human judgement, efficiency with proportionality and operational process with client trust. If the previous discussion explored how technology might reshape conveyancing relationships, this session focused more directly on the pressure firms now face trying to keep pace with regulation itself.

"The Point of AML Has Got a Bit Lost"
One of the strongest themes to emerge throughout the session was a growing concern that anti-money laundering compliance is becoming increasingly process-driven rather than genuinely risk-driven.

Amy Bell repeatedly returned to the idea that many firms are now focused less on identifying criminal behaviour and more on evidencing compliance activity in anticipation of potential regulatory scrutiny.

"The point of AML has got a bit lost," she said early in the discussion.

That observation immediately resonated around the table. Participants described an environment where firms increasingly feel compelled to gather more documentation, create larger audit trails and implement ever-expanding compliance procedures, not necessarily because they believe those measures improve crime prevention, but because they fear the consequences of failing to demonstrate enough activity if challenged later by regulators.

Bell argued that this fear-driven approach is gradually distorting the original purpose of anti-money laundering obligations.

"It's nothing to do with preventing money laundering," she said at one stage. "It's to do with chasing down the regulator's perception of what effectiveness is."

That distinction became one of the defining themes of the afternoon. Participants repeatedly questioned whether the profession risks confusing administrative evidence gathering with actual risk assessment.

Several attendees described situations where lawyers were collecting huge volumes of information from clients without necessarily feeling any clearer about the underlying risk itself. Bell shared one particularly striking example involving elderly parents gifting funds to assist a property purchase. Because the matter triggered several technical "risk markers", third-party funding, no mortgage lending and large sums held across multiple accounts, the transaction escalated into enhanced due diligence.

What followed, Bell explained, became an increasingly disproportionate exercise in document collection. The clients were asked not only for bank statements and share sale evidence, but eventually for historical proof of income dating back more than a decade to justify how they originally acquired the shares.

"Now can I see your P60s from when you were working so I can see that you earn enough?" she recalled. "Fifteen years ago to prove it."

The story became one of the most powerful examples of the day because it illustrated the wider frustration many firms are experiencing. Lawyers are often collecting hundreds of pages of documentation not because they genuinely suspect criminal activity, but because they feel unable to justify where the line should reasonably stop.

"I have this rule," Bell explained. "Does that extra piece of paper help you get comfortable they're not a money launderer? Because that's the right question."

That question lingered throughout much of the discussion and became symbolic of the wider debate taking place across the sector. Participants repeatedly suggested that firms are now operating in an environment where caution continually escalates because nobody wants to be the person accused of not doing enough.

Several noted that this creates a cycle where firms continuously add layers of process without necessarily reassessing whether those additional checks meaningfully improve outcomes. Over time, participants suggested, this risks creating compliance structures that are increasingly difficult to manage operationally while offering diminishing practical value.

Fear, Regulation and the Pressure on Lawyers
As the conversation developed, it became increasingly clear that compliance pressure is having a significant emotional and operational impact on lawyers themselves.

Several participants spoke openly about the culture of fear that now surrounds AML within many firms. The fear of regulatory investigation, reputational damage, fines or professional consequences is increasingly shaping behaviour at every level of practice.

Christine McClenaghan described the effect this has on lawyers entering the profession.

"It puts the fear of God into them," she said.

Bell agreed, explaining that many firms are becoming paralysed by the fear of getting AML wrong. In some cases, she suggested, firms are creating excessively cautious internal processes simply because nobody feels comfortable making proportionate judgement calls anymore.

"We're being led down a path," she said. "People are terrified."

That fear is also changing the day-to-day experience of conveyancing work itself. Participants described fee earners spending increasing amounts of time chasing documents, reviewing source of wealth evidence and responding to compliance queries, often at the expense of substantive legal work or client communication.

Several participants acknowledged that while AML obligations are clearly necessary, the sheer volume of process involved is becoming operationally overwhelming.

"There's only so much time in the day," one participant observed.

Others noted that much of this work is commercially unrecoverable. Firms are expected to absorb growing compliance obligations without corresponding increases in legal fees, despite the significant resource required to complete enhanced due diligence properly.

That pressure has become particularly acute within conveyancing, where margins are already tight and fee earners are often managing extremely high caseloads.

At several points during the discussion, participants questioned whether firms are reaching a stage where compliance itself is beginning to drive operational behaviour more than the legal work.

Bell summed the issue up bluntly.

"AML is wagging the dog," she said.

That line became one of the defining observations of the session because it captured a concern shared by many around the table. Compliance was originally intended to support safe legal practice. Increasingly, however, participants suggested that firms are restructuring entire workflows, staffing models and operational processes around regulatory obligations that continue expanding year after year.

Several participants questioned whether the profession is reaching a point where lawyers risk becoming administrators of compliance systems rather than legal advisers.

When Process Becomes the Priority
One of the most thought-provoking aspects of the discussion centred around the difference between collecting documents and actually assessing risk.

Participants repeatedly returned to the idea that many firms now operate within a culture where demonstrating process completion has become more important than applying judgement.

Bell argued that lawyers are increasingly focused on proving that steps were followed rather than asking whether those steps meaningfully reduce the risk of money laundering itself.

"What are you actually trying to prove?" she asked repeatedly throughout the session.

That question became central to the wider debate around proportionality. Several participants described situations where lawyers continue requesting documents simply because systems or internal policies require it, even where the additional information no longer materially changes the risk assessment.

Others pointed out that many firms remain heavily reliant on checklist-driven processes because they provide a sense of protection if files are later scrutinised by regulators.

Yet participants questioned whether this approach risks removing critical thinking from the process entirely.

Bell warned that there is a growing danger of firms becoming more concerned with evidencing compliance than understanding behaviour.

"You can have 400 pages of source of wealth documents and still not understand the client," she said.

That observation resonated strongly because it captured one of the profession's growing frustrations. The volume of paperwork involved in modern AML processes is increasing dramatically, but many lawyers remain unconvinced that this automatically translates into better risk management.

Several participants suggested that the profession is drifting towards a position where lawyers feel safer over-checking everything rather than applying professional judgement to determine what is genuinely proportionate.

Juliet Burtrand noted that compliance can easily become disconnected from the practical realities of running a law firm if processes are implemented without sufficient operational consideration. She stressed the importance of balancing regulatory obligations with workable systems that staff can realistically manage day to day.

That operational reality surfaced repeatedly throughout the discussion. Participants acknowledged that many firms are trying to navigate increasingly complicated obligations while simultaneously dealing with recruitment pressures, rising client expectations and constant commercial strain.

The danger, several suggested, is that compliance can gradually become something lawyers "perform" rather than something they actively understand.

KYC Duplication and Industry Frustration
Another major theme to emerge was the industry's ongoing frustration with repeated KYC duplication.

Participants questioned why clients are still routinely required to repeat identity and source of funds checks across multiple firms and organisations during the same transaction, despite advances in digital verification technology.

Several noted that clients themselves increasingly struggle to understand why identical documents must be provided repeatedly throughout the process.

"There has to be a better way," one participant observed.

The discussion explored the concept of "KYC once", an idea that has circulated within the legal and financial sectors for years but remains operationally difficult to implement in practice.

Participants acknowledged that while the concept sounds attractive, the reality is considerably more complicated. Data ownership, liability concerns, differing risk appetites and supplier limitations all create barriers to widespread adoption.

Chris Shingler noted that even where firms use the same technology providers, they may still apply completely different risk thresholds and internal policies.

Others pointed out that firms are understandably reluctant to rely entirely on another organisation's checks if they remain fully liable for compliance failures themselves.

Natasha Malhotra highlighted the practical challenges involved in creating systems that work consistently across multiple organisations with varying risk profiles and operational requirements. While technology providers can simplify processes significantly, she acknowledged that no single system can remove firms' underlying regulatory responsibilities.

Nevertheless, there was broad agreement that the current system creates substantial inefficiency for both firms and clients.

Several participants argued that the duplication itself may ultimately undermine public trust in AML processes because clients increasingly perceive them as repetitive bureaucracy rather than meaningful crime prevention measures.

Participants also discussed the growing frustration clients feel when repeatedly asked for sensitive personal financial information throughout transactions. Several noted that many consumers struggle to understand why lawyers require such extensive documentation, particularly where the source of funds appears relatively straightforward.

That places additional pressure on fee earners to explain increasingly complex compliance requirements while maintaining positive client relationships.

AI Is Becoming a Necessity Rather Than a Luxury

Unlike the first roundtable in the series, where AI was often discussed in terms of efficiency and client experience, this session positioned technology in far more operationally urgent terms.

For many around the table, AI and automation are no longer simply innovation opportunities. They are increasingly viewed as essential tools for operational survival.

Participants repeatedly returned to the growing pressures facing conveyancing firms, including recruitment shortages, rising compliance obligations, burnout, mental wellbeing concerns, unrecoverable administrative work and increasing client expectations.

Against that backdrop, several participants argued that firms may ultimately have little choice but to adopt more sophisticated automation simply to remain sustainable.

Angelo Piccirillo framed the issue particularly starkly, suggesting that technology may be the only realistic way to prevent fee earners becoming overwhelmed by process-heavy administrative work.

The discussion repeatedly returned to the idea that lawyers did not enter the profession to spend their days chasing bank statements, uploading documents or repeatedly reviewing procedural checklists.

Instead, participants argued that technology should ideally remove low-value administrative burden so lawyers can focus on legal analysis, communication and client management.

Tony Piccirillo noted that operational burnout is becoming one of the biggest long-term risks facing the sector. If firms continue layering additional compliance processes onto already stretched teams without improving operational efficiency, many questioned whether the current model remains sustainable at all.

That concern linked closely to broader recruitment pressures discussed throughout the session. Several participants observed that fewer young lawyers appear attracted to conveyancing careers, particularly where the role increasingly appears dominated by administration and regulatory process.

This observation closely echoed themes emerging throughout the wider roundtable series. Across multiple sessions, participants have consistently returned to the idea that technology works best when supporting human expertise rather than attempting to replace it entirely.

The Risk of Losing Human Judgement

Despite broad agreement around the benefits of automation, participants repeatedly stressed that human oversight remains critical.

Several warned against overreliance on systems that may create the illusion of certainty while still requiring professional interpretation underneath.

Bell argued that effective AML ultimately depends on behavioural judgement as much as procedural completion.

“It’s about understanding people,” she said.

Others agreed that experienced lawyers often identify risk not because of individual documents, but because something about a transaction simply feels inconsistent or unusual.

That instinctive judgement remains difficult to automate.

Participants also raised concerns about whether younger lawyers entering the profession will develop the same analytical instincts if technology increasingly performs much of the early-stage compliance work traditionally carried out by junior staff.

Several worried that excessive dependence on automated systems may gradually weaken independent thinking and reduce confidence in making judgement calls.

This concern mirrored themes that emerged strongly during the first roundtable discussion in the series around AI and emotional intelligence. Across both sessions, participants repeatedly returned to the idea that technology may support legal work, but human judgement remains central to professional decision-making.

Rameysha Khan noted that while technology can improve consistency and reduce administrative pressure, firms still need experienced professionals capable of interpreting risk properly and understanding wider behavioural context.

Participants broadly agreed that systems can assist lawyers, but cannot yet replace the practical judgement developed through years of professional experience.

Compliance Fatigue and Training Challenges

Training emerged as another major discussion point throughout the session.

Several participants acknowledged that many lawyers have become fatigued by repetitive annual AML training programmes that are often viewed as time-consuming box-ticking exercises rather than meaningful professional development.

Bell argued strongly that firms need to rethink how compliance training is delivered if they want people to engage with it properly.

“People switch off,” she said.

The discussion explored more interactive approaches to training, including scenario-based learning, behavioural examples and even gamification techniques designed to improve engagement and retention.

Bell referenced “Duolingo-style” concepts where learning is delivered in shorter, more practical formats rather than through lengthy annual compliance sessions.

Participants broadly agreed that compliance training works best when people understand the reasoning behind obligations rather than simply memorising procedural steps.

“If people understand the why, they make better decisions,” Bell observed.

That point became increasingly important as the discussion evolved because it reflected a wider frustration running throughout the session. Many participants felt that compliance culture has become increasingly procedural without always helping lawyers develop confidence in practical risk assessment itself.

Several participants also stressed the importance of respecting staff time. Lawyers already operating under significant workload pressure are far less likely to engage meaningfully with training that feels disconnected from practical reality.

Instead, participants suggested that training must become more relevant, more accessible and more closely aligned with the real situations fee earners actually encounter during transactions.

Building Safety Act Pressures and Expanding Risk Exposure

As the session moved into broader conveyancing risk issues, discussion turned towards the ongoing impact of the Building Safety Act and the increasing complexity surrounding high-rise transactions.

Liz Ramsden highlighted the growing uncertainty many firms still face when navigating BSA-related matters, particularly around lender expectations, liability exposure and specialist expertise requirements.

Participants acknowledged that the legislation has created significant additional pressure for conveyancers, particularly where guidance remains complex or continues evolving.

Several noted that some firms are becoming increasingly cautious about taking on certain types of work because of uncertainty around risk exposure and professional indemnity implications.

That caution reflects a wider trend emerging throughout the discussion. As compliance obligations increase across multiple areas simultaneously, firms are being forced to reassess not only operational processes, but also wider business models, risk appetite and staffing structures.

Participants suggested that this growing complexity may contribute further towards market consolidation, with smaller firms potentially struggling to absorb the increasing operational and regulatory burden associated with highly specialised areas of work.

Communication Still Sits at the Centre

Despite the heavy compliance focus of the discussion, participants repeatedly returned to the importance of communication and client reassurance.

Several observed that many clients do not object to AML checks themselves, but become frustrated when processes feel repetitive, unexplained or disproportionate.

That places additional pressure on fee earners to explain increasingly complex compliance requirements in accessible and empathetic ways.

As with the first roundtable in the series, participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of balancing process with human interaction.

Clients still want reassurance. They still want explanations. They still want confidence that someone understands their situation beyond the documents being requested.

That becomes particularly important when clients are already stressed, frustrated or confused by the property transaction process itself.

Several participants noted that many complaints still stem less from the existence of compliance requirements and more from poor communication surrounding them. Where clients understand why information is required and feel the process is being handled proportionately, they are often far more cooperative.

Technology may streamline administration, but participants consistently argued that communication and judgement remain fundamentally human responsibilities.

A Profession Searching for Balance

As the session drew to a close, there was broad agreement that anti-money laundering compliance will only become more significant in the years ahead.

Few participants argued for reducing compliance obligations altogether. Most accepted that robust AML controls are both necessary and important. The concern instead centred around proportionality, sustainability and whether the profession risks losing sight of the original purpose behind the process.

Across the discussion, participants repeatedly questioned whether firms are being encouraged to think critically about risk or simply collect ever-growing volumes of evidence in order to demonstrate compliance activity.

At the same time, there was recognition that technology will inevitably play a growing role in helping firms manage increasing operational pressure. AI and automation may become essential not simply for efficiency, but for maintaining sustainability within already stretched conveyancing teams.

Yet despite the discussion around technology, automation and compliance systems, one message remained remarkably consistent throughout the session.

Human judgement still matters.

Whether assessing suspicious behaviour, explaining compliance requirements to clients, interpreting context or making proportionate decisions, participants repeatedly returned to the idea that effective conveyancing still depends heavily on professional experience, communication and trust.

As regulation becomes more complex and operational pressures continue increasing, the challenge for firms may not simply be how to become more compliant.

It may be how to remain commercially sustainable, operationally human and professionally confident at the same time.

Attendees



Michelle O'Shea
Retired Licensed Conveyancer



Lee Gaddes
Solicitor, Arch Law



Helen Hutchinson
Partner & Chartered Legal Executive, Irwin Mitchell



Gareth Jones
Associate Solicitor, Napthens LLP



Rebecca Robinson
Head of Conveyancing, Evolve Law



Richard Wollacott
Operations Director, Knights



Andrea Louise Fairweather
Partner, Birchall, Blackburn Law



Clare Yates
Owner, Clare Yates Training



Marcus Walker
Senior Associate Solicitor - Head of Coventry & Rugby, Davidsons



Liaquot Ali
Head of Conveyancing, Batley Law



Eddie Goldsmith
Managing Director, You Convey



Colin Bohanna
Managing Director, Dye & Durham



Sarah Fancourt
Operations Director of UK Real Estate, Dye & Durham

REDEFINING SUCCESS IN MODERN CONVEYANCING

As technology, client expectations and operational pressures continue to reshape the legal sector, conveyancing firms are increasingly reassessing what success actually looks like. At this roundtable, industry leaders from across the profession came together to discuss whether traditional measures of success still apply, how AI and automation are changing working practices, and why communication, culture and sustainability may now matter more than ever before.

For years, success in conveyancing was often measured in relatively straightforward terms. Firms looked at completions, profitability, caseloads and growth. Bigger teams, larger volumes and faster transactions were widely seen as indicators of a successful business model.

But across the profession, that definition is beginning to shift.

Rising client expectations, recruitment challenges, burnout concerns, evolving technology and increasing operational pressure are forcing firms to reconsider not only how they work, but what they are actually working towards. Many firms are now asking deeper questions about sustainability, culture, client experience and staff wellbeing, alongside more traditional commercial metrics.

That changing definition of success formed the basis of the third Modern Law roundtable discussion, chaired by Michelle O'Shea, Retired Licensed Conveyancer. The discussion brought together conveyancing professionals, operational leaders and legal technology specialists from across the sector, including Helen Hutchison, Partner and Chartered Legal Executive at Irwin Mitchell; Rebecca Robinson, Head of Conveyancing at Evolve Law; Gareth Jones, Associate Solicitor at Napthens LLP; Andrea Louise Fairweather, Partner at Birchall Blackburn Law; Richard Wollacott, Operations Director at Knights; Clare Yates, Owner of CY Training Works; Marcus Walker, Senior Associate Solicitor and Head of Coventry and Rugby at Davisons; Eddie Goldsmith, Managing Director of You Convey; Lee Gaddes, Solicitor at Arch Law; Colin Bohanna, Managing Director at Dye & Durham; and Sarah Fancourt, Operations Director of UK Real Estate at Dye & Durham.

What followed was a wide-ranging and remarkably honest discussion about leadership, burnout, communication, recruitment, technology and the growing feeling that the future success of conveyancing firms may depend less on pure volume and more on balance.

Success Is No Longer Defined by Volume Alone

One of the clearest themes to emerge throughout the discussion was that many firms are actively moving away from the idea that success simply means handling more files. Instead, participants repeatedly returned to the importance of sustainable growth, manageable caseloads and creating environments where both staff and clients have positive experiences.

Marcus Walker spoke openly about how his own perspective had evolved over time. Earlier in his career, success was heavily linked to financial performance and growth targets. Increasingly, however, he has become more focused on culture, retention and staff wellbeing, recognising that healthier teams often perform better commercially in the long term.

“If employees are happy at work and enjoy their working environment, they’re naturally more motivated to perform well. A positive workplace encourages staff to work harder, and they’re more likely to seek career progression within the Firm,” he observed.

That comment reflected a much wider shift taking place across the industry. Several participants suggested that firms are beginning to recognise that long-term profitability is closely connected to staff retention, operational stability and client trust rather than simply pushing for ever-increasing transaction numbers.

Richard Wollacott described how his own business has deliberately moved towards a premium service model with lower caseloads and higher fees. Rather than chasing volume, the focus has shifted towards communication, client experience and sustainability. That prompted broader discussion around whether low-fee, high-volume conveyancing models remain commercially or operationally sustainable in the long term.

Several participants argued that the sector has spent years undervaluing itself, often competing aggressively on price while simultaneously expecting lawyers to manage unrealistic caseloads. Michelle O’Shea reflected on her own experience managing teams and the constant pressure associated with file volumes.

“I was constantly keeping an eye on caseload,” she explained. “Have we all got too many files?”

That concern surfaced repeatedly throughout the session. Participants acknowledged that while technology can improve efficiency, there remains a practical limit to how many matters lawyers can realistically manage well while still maintaining communication, supervision and quality standards.
Eddie Goldsmith summarised the issue bluntly.

“If you’ve got more than 80 files or so, you can’t provide the service,” he said.

That observation triggered further debate around the sustainability of traditional volume conveyancing models. Some participants argued that the market still requires lower-cost, higher-volume providers in order to maintain accessibility for consumers. Others questioned whether the industry has normalised operational structures that are ultimately damaging both staff wellbeing and client experience.

Several participants noted that the profession has become increasingly willing to discuss burnout and operational strain more openly than it may have done historically. Success, they suggested, can no longer simply be measured by turnover alone if firms are simultaneously struggling with retention, stress and poor morale internally.

Communication Has Become the Real Competitive Advantage

Throughout the discussion, one message emerged with remarkable consistency. Clients may expect efficiency and speed, but what they value most is communication. Participants repeatedly argued that client satisfaction is now driven less by legal technicalities and more by whether clients feel informed, reassured and in control during what is often one of the most stressful periods of their lives.

Clare Yates used one of the strongest analogies of the session to describe the client experience during conveyancing.

“It’s like sitting blindfolded in the back of a car,” she said.

That image resonated strongly around the table because it perfectly captured the uncertainty many clients experience throughout the transaction process. Several participants observed that clients rarely complain about the legal complexity itself. Instead, frustration usually stems from silence, uncertainty or lack of clarity around progress and timelines.

As a result, communication is increasingly becoming a core differentiator between firms. Eddie Goldsmith argued that firms should be focusing on the client’s emotional experience as much as the legal process itself.

“How do you make that stressful experience less stressful?” he asked. “That will be a measure of success.”

The discussion repeatedly returned to the importance of proactive updates, expectation management and keeping clients informed before anxiety escalates. Goldsmith suggested that reactive communication often indicates a failure earlier in the process.

“If the phone is ringing, that’s a bad sign,” he observed.

Several firms described implementing structured communication strategies, including weekly updates, outbound calls, video meetings and more personalised client contact. Lee Gaddes highlighted the growing importance of relationship quality and repeat business, arguing that long-term success increasingly depends on trust and client loyalty rather than pure transaction numbers.

“Speed’s not everything,” he said. “It’s more about the value of those relationships.”

Sarah Fancourt introduced another important perspective by linking communication directly to stress reduction.

“One of the biggest causes of stress is the lack of control,” she explained. “Communication is all about empowering the customer.”

That observation became one of the strongest conceptual points of the discussion. Clients often feel anxious not because problems necessarily exist, but because they do not understand what is happening or feel unable to influence the process. Good communication, participants argued, restores a sense of visibility and control.

The conversation also explored the increasing pressure created by modern communication habits themselves. Several participants noted that clients increasingly expect instant responses and constant accessibility, influenced heavily by broader digital consumer culture. Clare Yates referenced research suggesting some conveyancers now receive an average of six inbound calls per transaction each week, while others discussed the growing expectation for real-time updates and immediate answers.

Participants acknowledged that while communication is critical, firms also need sustainable structures in place to manage client expectations realistically without overwhelming staff.

Technology Is Reshaping the Industry, But Humanity Still Matters

AI and automation featured heavily throughout the discussion, but unlike many technology debates, the conversation remained notably balanced. Very few participants argued that AI would replace lawyers entirely. Instead, the overwhelming consensus was that the future lies in combining automation with human advice, judgement and reassurance.

Eddie Goldsmith discussed his involvement in a new AI-driven conveyancing venture and argued that successful firms will likely adopt hybrid models where automation handles process-heavy work while lawyers focus increasingly on client relationships and advisory support.

“The perfect mix,” he said, “is AI-driven automation and the advisor role.”

Participants broadly agreed that technology has enormous potential to improve operational efficiency, reduce repetitive administrative work and accelerate certain stages of transactions. Several examples were discussed, including AI-assisted lease reviews, automated workflows, document analysis and AI-powered operational support.

Lee Gaddes explained how his own business is already using AI agents to handle repetitive and administrative tasks.

“We’re not trying to change the whole industry,” he said. “But there’s certain things that we can get AI to do that unfortunately a human would do.”

Importantly, however, participants consistently stressed that technology still requires human oversight. Clare Yates strongly pushed back against the idea that AI could replace human empathy or emotional understanding.

“AI cannot express empathy,” she said. “We’re dealing with death, divorce and debt.”

That phrase became one of the defining moments of the discussion because it reinforced a recurring theme emerging throughout the wider roundtable series. Conveyancing is not simply an administrative process. It is deeply emotional work involving major life events, financial pressure and personal stress. Several participants argued that clients still fundamentally want human reassurance during those moments, regardless of how advanced technology becomes.

“We need human beings in charge of the machine,” Yates added.

That balance between automation and humanity became one of the central themes of the session. Participants also acknowledged that AI adoption is no longer theoretical. Firms are already integrating automation into everyday operational processes, meaning the debate is rapidly shifting from whether AI should be used to how it can be implemented responsibly and effectively.

The Risk of Deskilling the Next Generation

While participants broadly welcomed the efficiencies technology can bring, there was also growing concern about the potential long-term impact on training and knowledge development. Several attendees questioned whether younger lawyers will still develop strong technical instincts if AI increasingly handles foundational legal tasks.

Sarah Fancourt raised one of the most important concerns of the day.

“If somebody’s not learning the 1-2-3s and the ABCs,” she asked, “how do they become able to deal with everything else?”

That observation triggered a much wider discussion around training, supervision and the future pipeline of talent entering the profession. Several participants worried that remote working, automation and increasingly process-driven environments may be weakening opportunities for junior lawyers to learn organically through observation and experience.

Historically, many conveyancers developed confidence by sitting alongside experienced colleagues, overhearing difficult conversations and gradually building practical judgement over time. Participants questioned whether that environment still exists consistently within modern firms.

Michelle O’Shea expressed concern about inexperienced staff being pushed into senior roles too quickly because of recruitment shortages and operational pressure.

“There are too many people doing the work with insufficient experience and insufficient supervision,” she said.

Others agreed that training quality has become one of the profession's biggest long-term challenges. Rebecca Robinson stressed that AI should support training rather than replace learning entirely.

"I wouldn't want them touching anything AI until they've almost earned the right to," she said.

At the same time, participants also explored whether AI itself could become a useful training support tool, helping junior staff check work or identify issues while still allowing them to complete the tasks themselves. That discussion highlighted the increasingly nuanced way firms are beginning to think about technology. The question is no longer whether AI should be used, but how it should be integrated responsibly without weakening professional development.

Colin Bohanna raised wider questions around knowledge transfer within organisations, particularly as firms continue adapting to remote and hybrid working structures.

"How do you pass knowledge through the organisation?" he asked.

That question resonated strongly because several participants acknowledged that some of the profession's most valuable learning traditionally came from informal observation and spontaneous office interaction rather than formal training programmes alone.

Recruitment, Retention and Burnout Remain Major Concerns

The conversation repeatedly returned to staffing pressures and the growing difficulty of attracting and retaining experienced conveyancers. Several participants acknowledged that conveyancing still struggles with perception issues, particularly compared with other areas of law viewed as more prestigious or commercially attractive.

Helen Hutchison described conveyancing as "a labour of love", while others noted that many young lawyers entering the profession initially aspire towards litigation, corporate or commercial work rather than residential property.

Yet despite those challenges, participants were keen to challenge the idea that conveyancing should be viewed negatively. Clare Yates argued strongly that the profession itself often contributes to the perception problem by focusing too heavily on stress and operational pressure rather than highlighting the positives.

"We moan about it a lot," she said.

Instead, she suggested the sector needs to become much better at promoting itself, engaging with schools and universities and communicating the opportunities available within conveyancing careers.

Several participants highlighted apprenticeships and alternative qualification routes as important ways of widening access into the profession. Rebecca Robinson discussed her own non-traditional route into law and noted that many successful conveyancers entered the profession through practical experience rather than university pathways. That accessibility, participants argued, should be viewed as a strength rather than a weakness.

At the same time, however, burnout remains a very real issue. Michelle O'Shea spoke openly about her own experience of reaching the edge of burnout before ultimately deciding to step away from practice.

"I fell out of love with it," she admitted.

That honesty reflected wider concerns about operational pressure across the sector. Several participants acknowledged that excessive workloads, constant client demands and growing administrative obligations are pushing many experienced professionals towards exhaustion.

Again, the discussion returned to sustainability. Success, participants increasingly suggested, cannot simply mean growth at all costs if firms ultimately lose experienced staff in the process.

Different Firms Will Define Success Differently

Another important theme throughout the session was the recognition that success may increasingly look different depending on firm size, structure and business model. Michelle O'Shea noted that smaller High Street firms often face very different operational realities compared with larger national businesses with greater access to technology investment and infrastructure.

Several participants questioned whether smaller firms will be able to compete effectively as compliance costs, cyber security requirements and technology investment continue increasing. Clare Yates suggested that many smaller firms may eventually struggle to remain commercially viable because of rising operational costs.

Others disagreed.

Eddie Goldsmith argued that predictions around the "death of the High Street firm" have existed for decades and yet smaller practices continue surviving and evolving.

"The High Street is still living and still vibrant," he said.

That debate became one of the most interesting parts of the discussion because it exposed the variety of models currently operating across the market. Lee Gaddes discussed the growing popularity of consultancy-based models, where lawyers operate with greater flexibility under larger umbrella brands while avoiding the risks associated with running traditional firms themselves.

For some, those models represent greater freedom and work-life balance. For others, they reflect a wider structural shift happening across the legal sector. Participants broadly agreed that there is unlikely to be a single definition of success going forward. Instead, firms may increasingly differentiate themselves through different combinations of premium service, specialist expertise, technology adoption, relationship-driven work, operational efficiency, flexible working, culture and scalability.

The Industry Still Struggles With Recognition

One of the most striking themes towards the end of the discussion centred around how residential conveyancing is perceived both internally and externally. Several participants suggested that conveyancing is still too often treated as a secondary discipline within larger legal businesses despite the complexity and responsibility involved.

Richard Wollacott argued strongly that residential property teams deserve equal recognition alongside corporate or commercial departments.

"It needs to be respected equally," he said.

Others agreed that conveyancing is frequently undervalued despite sitting at the centre of some of the most important financial transactions clients will ever undertake.

Gareth Jones also suggested that the industry itself often fails to promote its achievements strongly enough.

"We don't talk about how good we are," he said.

That observation linked closely to the earlier discussion around recruitment and perception. If firms want to attract talented people into the profession, participants argued, the industry needs to become far better at communicating the value, complexity and importance of conveyancing work.

Andrea Louise Fairweather added that the profession should do more to showcase the breadth of skills involved in modern conveyancing, particularly the combination of technical expertise, emotional intelligence and operational management required on a daily basis.

Rethinking What Firms Measure

Towards the end of the session, discussion shifted towards performance metrics and whether firms are currently measuring the right things. Several participants questioned the industry's continued focus on raw caseload numbers and billing targets.

Helen Hutchison suggested that firms should stop measuring pure case volumes altogether. Rebecca Robinson agreed that while data remains useful operationally, firms need to be careful about which metrics become formal performance targets.

"It's not all about billing," she said.

Instead, participants argued that firms should increasingly focus on client experience, communication quality, staff wellbeing, pipeline progression, manageable caseloads, training quality, retention and operational sustainability.

Michelle O'Shea explained that her own priority as a business owner was often ensuring workloads remained manageable rather than maximising transaction numbers. That approach reflected a wider shift emerging throughout the discussion.

Success is increasingly being defined not simply by how much work firms can take on, but by how sustainably and effectively they can deliver it. Several participants suggested that firms are beginning to recognise that healthier cultures and more manageable workloads ultimately create stronger long-term commercial performance as well.

A Profession Searching for Balance

As the discussion drew to a close, there was broad agreement that conveyancing is entering a significant period of transition. Technology will continue reshaping workflows. AI will increasingly automate repetitive tasks. Client expectations will continue rising. Recruitment pressures are unlikely to disappear quickly.

Yet despite those changes, participants repeatedly returned to the same core themes. Communication matters. Culture matters. Training matters. Human judgement matters.

The firms most likely to succeed in the coming years may not necessarily be the ones processing the highest volumes or adopting the most technology the fastest. Instead, success may increasingly belong to firms capable of balancing efficiency with empathy, automation with expertise and commercial performance with operational sustainability.

As one participant observed during the discussion, the future of conveyancing may ultimately depend on building businesses where both clients and staff genuinely feel supported.

And in an industry increasingly shaped by technology, pressure and constant change, that balance may become the most valuable competitive advantage of all.

Attendees



Nicky Heathcote
Non-Executive Chair, Conveyancing Association



Laura Catania
Partner & Head of Conveyancing, Attwells Solicitors LLP



Kate Forsdike
Senior Partner & Licensed Conveyancer, PCS Legal



Samanth Ingram
Director- Head of Conveyancing Department (Firm Wide), Davisons Law



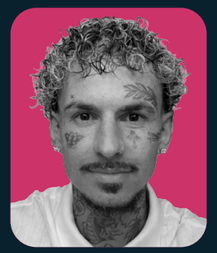
Laura Cartwright
Partner - Head of Residential Property, Bell Lamb & Joynson Solicitors



John Moore
Senior Associate Solicitor and Conveyancing Lead, CJCH Solicitors



Francis Lloyd-Cummings
Senior Conveyancer, Jury O'shea



Connor O'Dell
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Tom Parkinson
Director & Solicitor, Rowlinsons Solicitors



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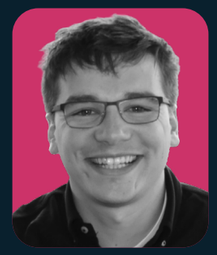

Joe Rapoport
Lead Account Manager, Dye & Durham



Samantha Burrows
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Ruth Edwards
Account Manager, Dye & Durham

THE FUTURE OF CLIENT CARE IN CONVEYANCING

As client expectations continue to evolve and technology increasingly reshapes the conveyancing process, firms across the sector are facing a difficult balancing act. Clients expect faster updates, greater visibility and instant communication, yet conveyancing remains a deeply human process built on trust, reassurance and expertise. At the final Modern Law roundtable chaired by Nicky Heathcote, Non-Executive Chair, Conveyancing Association, industry professionals came together to discuss what great client care now looks like, whether technology is improving or harming relationships, and why communication remains the defining factor in the client experience.

For years, client care in conveyancing was often viewed as an extension of the legal process itself. If the transaction completed successfully, many firms considered that a positive client outcome had been achieved. But increasingly, the profession is recognising that clients judge conveyancers on far more than legal competency alone.

Today's clients expect responsiveness, visibility, reassurance and accessibility throughout the transaction. They want updates, explanations and certainty in what is often one of the most stressful financial and emotional experiences of their lives. At the same time, firms are operating under growing pressure from workload demands, rising compliance obligations, evolving technology and changing consumer behaviour.

The discussion brought together conveyancing professionals, operational leaders and legal technology specialists from across the sector, including Laura Catania, Partner and Head of Conveyancing at Attwells Solicitors LLP; Kate Forsdike, Senior Partner and Licensed Conveyancer at PCS Legal; Samantha Ingram, Director and National Head of Conveyancing Department at Davisons Law; Tom Parkinson, Director and Solicitor at Rowlinsons Solicitors; Laura Cartwright, Partner and Head of Residential Property at Bell Lamb & Joynson Solicitors; John Moore, Senior Associate Solicitor and Conveyancing Lead at CJCH Solicitors; Francis Lloyd-Cummings, Senior Conveyancer at Jury O'Shea; Connor O'Dell, Conveyancing Manager at Taylor Rose; Samantha Burrows, Head of Growth and Development at Gilson Gray LLP; Joe Rapoport, Lead Account Manager at Dye & Durham; Ruth Edwards Account Manager at Dye & Durham and Daniel O'Sullivan, Account Manager at Dye & Durham.

What followed was a candid and highly practical discussion covering communication, client psychology, AI, onboarding, social media, training, technology and the growing pressure firms face in managing modern client expectations.

Communication Still Defines the Client Experience
One of the strongest and most consistent themes throughout the discussion was that communication remains the single biggest factor influencing client satisfaction.

While technology, turnaround times and legal complexity all matter, participants repeatedly returned to the idea that clients primarily judge conveyancers on how informed, reassured and supported they feel throughout the process.

Clear and consistent communication, participants argued, has become far more important than simply delivering legal updates. Increasingly, clients expect visibility and reassurance even when no material progress has occurred.

Tom Parkinson highlighted one of the key challenges facing firms today when he explained that clients often interpret silence as inactivity.

Clients, he suggested, frequently assume that if they have not heard from their solicitor, nothing must be happening behind the scenes. Yet conveyancers know that much of the work within a transaction involves waiting on third parties, reviewing documents, progressing enquiries or managing issues that are not always immediately visible to the client.

That disconnect between what is happening operationally and what clients perceive emerged as one of the defining themes of the discussion.

Laura Cartwright stressed the importance of clarity when dealing with clients navigating stressful transactions.

“Clients want clarity,” she explained. “It’s a stress purchase.”

That phrase captured one of the key realities facing modern conveyancers. For lawyers and professionals working within the industry every day, conveyancing processes may feel familiar and routine. For most clients, however, buying or selling a property represents one of the largest financial and emotional commitments they will ever make. Delays, uncertainty and lack of communication can therefore quickly escalate stress levels.

Themes from earlier roundtables around emotional intelligence and communication resurfaced strongly throughout the discussion. Once again, participants repeatedly emphasised that conveyancing is not simply an administrative or procedural exercise. It is an emotionally charged experience involving stress, uncertainty and significant financial commitment.

That emotional dimension, many argued, is what makes communication so critical.

Several participants described implementing more proactive communication strategies, including regular progress updates, outbound calls, text notifications and onboarding conversations designed specifically to manage expectations early in the process.

The group broadly agreed that firms who communicate well are often perceived more positively even when transactions encounter delays or complications. Clients may not always expect perfection or speed, but they increasingly expect transparency and acknowledgement.

The First Phone Call Sets the Tone
A particularly strong theme throughout the session centred around the importance of the initial client conversation.

Multiple participants described the first phone call as one of the most important stages of the entire transaction because it creates the foundation for trust, expectation management and relationship building.

Tom Parkinson described the opening conversation as an opportunity for firms to “take control of the situation” early, while others explained that those early interactions often determine how smoothly the remainder of the transaction progresses.

Participants suggested that many client frustrations later in the process can be traced back to unclear expectations at the outset. If clients enter the transaction with unrealistic assumptions around timescales, communication frequency or process complexity, problems often emerge later when reality does not match those expectations.

John Moore explained that initial conversations often help identify how much a client understands about the process and what level of support they are likely to require throughout the transaction.

“You can gauge from an initial discussion with a client their level of understanding and needs,” he explained.

That insight led into broader discussion around tailoring communication styles to different clients. Some clients want regular updates and reassurance, while others prefer minimal contact unless something significant changes. Understanding those expectations early was seen as critical to maintaining positive relationships throughout the transaction.

Joe Rapoport highlighted another important aspect of modern client care when he described clients wanting to feel that their solicitor was genuinely “on their side” during the process.

That point resonated strongly because it reinforced one of the wider conclusions emerging throughout the entire roundtable series. Increasingly, clients judge service quality not purely by legal outcomes, but by how supported and reassured they feel emotionally throughout the journey.

The discussion also explored the importance of visibility during the process. Clients often struggle because they cannot see the legal work taking place behind the scenes. Participants suggested that regular contact helps bridge that visibility gap and prevents clients feeling disconnected or ignored.

Several attendees acknowledged that these introductory conversations require time and investment from firms, particularly at a point where many conveyancing teams

are already under significant pressure. However, the overwhelming consensus was that strong onboarding and early communication ultimately reduce problems later in the transaction.

Participants repeatedly argued that a fifteen-minute conversation at the beginning of a transaction can often prevent weeks of frustration, repeated chasing and misunderstandings further down the line.

Modern Consumer Behaviour Is Reshaping Expectations
Throughout the discussion, participants repeatedly reflected on how dramatically client expectations have evolved in recent years.

Several attendees observed that modern consumers increasingly expect conveyancing to operate with the same immediacy and visibility as other digital services. Amazon-style convenience, instant communication and on-demand updates are increasingly shaping client expectations, even though conveyancing remains a highly complex legal process involving multiple third parties and unavoidable delays.

Samantha Burrows noted that many clients now underestimate the complexity of conveyancing work, often viewing the process as more administrative than legal.

Participants discussed how social media, online advice forums and digital consumer culture have contributed to that shift. Clients increasingly arrive armed with information gathered online, often from unreliable or incomplete sources, while also expecting instant access to progress updates and responses.

The conversation around social media proved particularly interesting. Participants discussed the rise of chain WhatsApp groups, TikTok legal advice and online forums where buyers and sellers share frustrations about the conveyancing process.

Several participants noted that clients now regularly communicate directly with other parties in the chain, sometimes escalating tensions or creating unrealistic expectations around timescales and progress.

This changing environment, attendees suggested, has significantly altered the pressure placed on conveyancers.

Clients are no longer simply comparing their legal experience against other law firms. Increasingly, they are comparing it against every digital service they use elsewhere in daily life.

That shift has profound implications for communication expectations, responsiveness and visibility.

Connor O’Dell observed that many clients now expect real-time information as standard because that is the norm across so many other industries. Yet conveyancing still relies heavily on third parties, lenders, searches, chains and manual processes that cannot always move at the same speed clients expect elsewhere.

Participants acknowledged that this creates a difficult balancing act for firms. They must provide modern levels of communication and accessibility while also explaining that the legal process itself still contains unavoidable delays and uncertainties.

AI Is Creating New Challenges as Well as Opportunities
Artificial intelligence and automation featured heavily throughout the discussion, although the tone remained balanced and pragmatic rather than overly optimistic.

Participants broadly agreed that technology has enormous potential to improve efficiency, reduce administrative burden and streamline operational tasks. Digital onboarding, ID verification systems, automated updates and workflow management tools were all discussed positively.

However, participants also highlighted new challenges emerging as AI becomes more accessible to consumers.

One of the most interesting themes involved clients increasingly using tools such as ChatGPT to interpret legal documents, raise enquiries or challenge advice they have received from their solicitor.

Several participants described situations where clients had copied AI-generated responses into emails or relied on chatbot explanations which misunderstood legal nuances entirely.

Francis Lloyd-Cummings explained that while AI can sometimes be useful, it also frequently creates confusion and additional work for conveyancers who must then explain why the information generated is inaccurate or incomplete.

The group agreed that AI currently lacks the nuance, judgement and contextual understanding required for many areas of conveyancing work.

Importantly, though, participants did not dismiss technology altogether. Instead, the conversation repeatedly returned to the idea that technology should support professionals rather than replace them.

Kate Forsdike suggested that over the next five years, AI and automation will likely reduce much of the administrative workload currently handled by support staff, allowing conveyancers to focus more heavily on technical legal work and client relationships.

Others agreed that automation will increasingly assist with repetitive tasks, onboarding and document management. Yet there was broad consensus that clients will still want human interaction, particularly during stressful or complicated transactions.

“People still want to deal with people,” Samantha Ingram observed.

That statement became one of the clearest conclusions of the discussion.

Participants also acknowledged that technology itself is not the problem. The real challenge lies in how technology is implemented and whether it enhances or weakens the client relationship.

Technology Must Support Relationships, Not Replace Them

As the discussion progressed, a more nuanced debate emerged around whether technology is genuinely improving client relationships or, in some cases, weakening them.

Participants acknowledged that digital systems can improve visibility, accessibility and convenience. Online onboarding, portals and text updates all help reduce friction and improve efficiency.

At the same time, however, many attendees stressed that over-reliance on technology risks removing the human connection clients still value deeply.

Francis Lloyd-Cummings described using WhatsApp with clients, where initiated by the client, to explain enquiries in more accessible and conversational language. However, he noted that WhatsApp conversations cannot form part of the official file or be used for audit purposes.

“If a client comes back to you and says, what does this mean?” he explained, “you can explain it to them like a person.”

That observation reflected a wider concern emerging throughout the discussion. Legal terminology, process-driven communication and automated messaging can often make clients feel more confused rather than reassured.

Several participants argued that the firms most likely to differentiate themselves in the coming years will be those able to combine technology with genuine human service.

Joe Rapoport suggested that many firms are understandably investing heavily in technology, but warned that this may create opportunities for firms who continue prioritising personal relationships alongside digital efficiency.

“There’s always a big push and everybody moves very quickly down the technological route,” he explained. “That actually leaves a space in the market for firms to keep that personal service.”

That point tied closely back to themes explored throughout earlier roundtables in the series. Once again, the discussion repeatedly returned to the idea that technology alone cannot replace empathy, trust or emotional reassurance.

Several participants also warned that firms risk damaging relationships if communication becomes overly automated or impersonal. Clients may appreciate convenience, but they still want reassurance that someone is personally overseeing their transaction and understands their situation.

Capacity, Caseloads and Service Quality

Another major theme throughout the session involved the connection between workload pressure and client care.

Participants repeatedly acknowledged that communication problems and service issues are often rooted in capacity challenges rather than lack of effort or professionalism.

Francis Lloyd-Cummings spoke openly about the dangers of individuals or firms taking on more work than they can realistically manage.

“When they’re taking on too much work,” he explained, “that’s a problem.”

Several attendees linked excessive caseloads directly to slower response times, reduced communication quality and increased client frustration.

The group also discussed the growing tension between commercial pressures and service quality. Low fees, volume models and operational demands can create environments where lawyers struggle to maintain the level of communication and personal service clients increasingly expect.

Nicky Heathcote noted that workload and fee pressure regularly emerge as central issues within wider industry discussions around complaints and client care.

Participants broadly agreed that maintaining excellent service becomes extremely difficult when teams are stretched beyond realistic capacity.

At the same time, the discussion acknowledged that different firms manage this challenge differently. Larger firms may have more resources and support structures, while smaller firms often rely more heavily on personal relationships and direct accessibility.

Again, the conversation returned to balance.

Successful firms, participants suggested, will increasingly be those able to balance operational efficiency with sustainable workloads and meaningful client interaction.

The discussion also touched on the reputational risks created when firms become overloaded. Poor communication, delayed responses and stressed staff not only affect current clients, but increasingly shape online reviews, referral rates and long-term brand reputation.

In a market where clients are highly vocal online and heavily influenced by reviews and recommendations, participants argued that client care now has direct commercial implications far beyond individual transactions.

Training and Soft Skills Remain Essential

One of the most interesting discussions during the latter stages of the session centred around training and the potential risk of deskilling within the profession.

Several participants expressed concern that increasingly fragmented workflows and heavily process-driven models may prevent younger conveyancers from developing deeper technical understanding.

John Moore used a particularly strong analogy when discussing workflow dependency.

“It’s like a sat nav,” he explained. “You follow it but you don’t learn how to get there.”

That observation resonated strongly around the table because it reflected wider concerns about professionals following checklists or automated processes without fully understanding the legal reasoning behind them.

Participants worried that over-specialisation and segmented case handling may weaken long-term professional development.

Samantha Burrows discussed efforts within her own business to move away from highly fragmented operational structures where staff only handled isolated stages of transactions without understanding the broader process.

“It’s such a broken system,” she said.

The group repeatedly returned to the importance of training, soft skills and professional understanding. Technology can improve efficiency, attendees agreed, but firms still need technically skilled professionals capable of exercising judgement, communicating clearly and handling unusual or complex matters confidently.

Tom Parkinson stressed the importance of investing in soft skills training alongside legal and technical education.

“It’s actually focusing on those soft skills,” he said, “that some firms forget about.”

That linked directly back to one of the strongest themes running across the entire roundtable series: emotional intelligence remains critically important within conveyancing.

Laura Catania also highlighted the importance of younger staff hearing conversations and learning through direct exposure to experienced professionals. Several participants expressed concern that remote and hybrid working environments may reduce opportunities for informal learning and confidence-building.

Again, the conversation repeatedly returned to the human side of the profession.

Technology may improve systems and workflows, but participants stressed that empathy, judgement and communication remain skills that must still be learned and developed through experience.

Personal Relationships Remain the Industry’s Biggest Advantage

Towards the end of the discussion, participants reflected on what will ultimately differentiate firms over the next five years.

While technology, onboarding systems and automation will continue evolving rapidly, the overwhelming consensus was that relationships will remain the profession’s greatest competitive advantage.

Several participants argued that firms who maintain personal interaction, strong communication and emotional intelligence alongside technological efficiency will be best positioned for long-term success.

John Moore explained that he still insists on either face-to-face meetings or video calls with clients on purchases because those interactions help build trust, identify misunderstandings and strengthen relationships early in the transaction.

Others agreed that while digital tools are valuable, they cannot entirely replace the reassurance clients gain from speaking directly with experienced professionals.

The conversation also touched on the growing challenges facing smaller traditional firms. Participants acknowledged concerns around succession planning, rising operational costs and increasing consolidation within the market.

Yet many attendees also suggested that smaller firms often excel precisely because they deliver more personalised service and stronger client relationships.

There was a clear sense throughout the discussion that the profession does not want conveyancing to become fully commoditised.

Instead, participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of preserving the human elements of the process even as technology becomes increasingly embedded within operational workflows.

The Future of Client Care

As the session drew to a close, several consistent themes had clearly emerged.

Communication remains the defining factor in client satisfaction.

Clients increasingly expect visibility, reassurance and accessibility throughout the process.

Technology will continue transforming conveyancing operations, but it is unlikely to replace the importance of human interaction, emotional intelligence and trust.

AI and automation may remove administrative friction, but clients still want relationships with professionals who understand their concerns, explain issues clearly and guide them through complex and stressful transactions.

Perhaps most importantly, the discussion reinforced a wider conclusion emerging across all four Dye & Durham roundtables.

The future of conveyancing is not about choosing between technology and people.

It is about using technology to support better human service.

The firms most likely to succeed over the coming years may not necessarily be those with the most automation or the fastest systems alone. Instead, success may increasingly belong to firms capable of balancing efficiency with empathy, scalability with personal service and digital convenience with genuine human connection.

Because ultimately, as this discussion repeatedly demonstrated, conveyancing remains a people business operating within an increasingly digital world.

“InTouch is **single handedly the best case management system** we have ever used.”

– Marc Lansdell, Director, Evolve Law

InTouch

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Process, Platforms and Practical AI: Dale Rounce on the Future of Legal Practice

As Co-Founder of InTouch, Dale Rounce has spent more than a decade helping law firms streamline operations, strengthen compliance and improve the client experience through technology. Founded in Nottingham in 2015, InTouch has grown into a leading case management platform serving firms across the UK and Australia, combining workflow automation, client engagement tools, open integrations and embedded AI. In this exclusive interview with Modern Law, Rounce discusses what truly defines a modern legal technology platform, why process flexibility and connectivity matter more than ever, how firms can balance efficiency with client service, and where AI is likely to deliver the greatest value over the next five years.

Modern Law spoke with Dale Rounce, Co-Founder of InTouch, about the evolving role of legal technology, the growing importance of automation and workflow design, and why the firms that take process seriously will be best placed to thrive in an increasingly digital and competitive legal landscape.

Q1: InTouch has positioned itself as a modern, cloud-based case management platform. From your perspective, what truly defines a "modern" system for today's law firms?

For us, it's not about having a slick interface or being cloud-based - those are baseline expectations now. A truly modern system has to do six things well.

First, it has to be configurable without being complicated. Law firms don't all do the same work the same way, and they shouldn't have to adapt their processes to fit the software. They should be able to build workflows, add fields, and change forms without raising a support ticket or waiting for a developer. No-code configuration isn't a nice-to-have - it's what makes a system actually usable over the long term.

Second, it has to treat your data as yours. Too many platforms lock in their customer's data. A modern system gives you open access to your own data - to export it, connect it, analyse it, and build on top of it however you need to.

Third, it has to operate as a platform, not a silo. The best firms run a stack of specialist tools - ID verification, e-signature, accounting, search & data providers - and they expect their case management system to be the connective tissue. An open API ecosystem is what makes that possible.

Fourth, it has to have AI capability that's genuinely useful day-to-day, not bolted on as a premium add-on. Things like extracting data from documents automatically and helping fee earners draft communications. We made a deliberate decision to include AI on every plan, not just enterprise tiers.

Fifth, compliance has to be built in, not checked at the end. SRA obligations, GDPR requirements, AML steps - these can't be optional stages that fee earners skip when they're busy. Modern systems encode compliance into the workflow itself.

And sixth - and I'd argue most importantly - it has to be easy to use. Not just for the partners who signed the contract, but for the paralegal at 9am who has twelve matters to progress. If the people doing the work don't find it genuinely helpful, you've failed regardless of what the feature list says.

Q2: Law firms are under increasing pressure to improve efficiency and client experience simultaneously - how does InTouch help firms balance these priorities in practice?

The interesting thing about that tension is that we don't think it's a real tension - at least not at the level of the client portal.

InTouch launched in 2015 with a specific frustration in mind: conveyancing firms were still managing client communication through ad hoc phone calls, emails, and letters that had no connection to what was actually happening in the matter. Clients were being kept in the dark not because firms didn't care, but because the tools made proactive communication into a separate task that had to be remembered and executed manually. Under the pressure of a busy caseload, that task gets deprioritised - and clients only find out when they chase.

The insight that shaped InTouch from the beginning was that client experience and operational efficiency are the same lever. When you automate the communication that used to require manual effort - when a client automatically receives an update when a key milestone is hit, when they can check their matter status from the portal at 10pm without calling the office - you've simultaneously reduced the admin burden on the fee earner and improved what the client experiences.

The client portal is the thing that makes this concrete. It gives every stakeholder - clients, estate agents, lenders, third parties - a single real-time view of where a matter stands. That removes the "no news" gap that drives a significant share of client complaints and most of the progress-chasing calls that interrupt a fee earner's day.

Document automation amplifies this further. When a fee earner hits a stage in the workflow, the right letter or form is generated automatically from the matter data. That's time saved and consistency guaranteed - both at once.

Q3: Workflow flexibility is becoming increasingly important. How critical is it for firms to be able to tailor their case management system to their own processes, rather than adapting to rigid software structures?

It's essential - and for three reasons: improvement, innovation, and compliance. If you want to improve, you need to be able to adapt your systems and processes. A firm that can't change how it works is standing still. Full stop.

But if the firm doesn't care about improvement & innovation, then the compliance argument alone should settle it: a firm that can't encode its own compliance steps into its workflow is relying on individual fee earners to remember them. That's a risk register entry waiting to become a disciplinary matter - or worse. When the workflow itself prompts the right action at the right time - and won't let a stage complete until the required steps are done - compliance becomes a by-product of doing the work, not a separate discipline.

Beyond compliance, configurable workflows are what make a system genuinely consistent. Every firm has built competitive advantage in how they handle specific matters, how they communicate with clients, how they structure their onboarding. That's intellectual capital. A rigid system erases it. A configurable one lets firms encode it.

And practically: the ability to change workflows in-house, without calling a developer, is what makes a system sustainable. Legal practice changes. Regulation changes. Client expectations change. A firm shouldn't have to raise a support ticket every time it wants to reflect that in how work gets done.

There's also a less-discussed benefit: reporting. When workflows are standardised and configurable, the data that flows through them is standardised too. That means management information that's actually useful - turnaround times, SLA tracking, bottleneck identification - as well as real visibility into where each individual matter stands. Partners can see at a glance which matters are on track, which are stalled, and where the team's attention needs to go, rather than relying on a fee earner to remember to flag it.

Q4: Client communication is a key differentiator for many firms. How does technology - particularly portals and automation - reshape the client journey in a modern law firm environment?

Client expectations have been reset by every other service they use. They can track a mortgage application in real time. They can see exactly where a bank transfer stands. They expect the same visibility from their solicitor.

What technology does is shift the communication model from event-driven to status-driven. The old model is: we contact you when something happens. The new model is: you can see where things stand whenever you want. That shift removes the "no news" gap - the silence between milestones that drives the calls asking "what's happening?" - and it removes them at scale, not through more staff.

Automation turns client communication from a task someone has to remember into a by-product of doing the work. When a fee earner completes a stage, the client is informed automatically. The fee earner doesn't have to think about it. The client isn't waiting. Both outcomes happen simultaneously.

Self-service is the next dimension. Digital ID verification, e-signature, in-portal document exchange, online forms - these remove the slowest steps from most matters. Waiting for a client to print, sign, scan, and return a document is days of dead time in an otherwise progressing matter. Remove that step, and you've not just improved the client experience - you've shortened the matter.

What this adds up to is that the firms that are winning on client experience right now aren't necessarily the biggest or the best-resourced. They're the ones that have structured their systems so that good communication is automatic, not aspirational.

Q5: Integration and connectivity are now expected as standard. How important is an open, API-driven ecosystem in ensuring case management systems remain relevant and future-proof?

The legal tech market moves fast. The tools that are best-in-class today won't all be best-in-class in three years - and firms shouldn't be punished for wanting to evolve. An API-driven ecosystem is what makes that possible. It means a firm can change one component - switch their search provider, adopt a new AI tool, integrate a new compliance service - without rebuilding everything around it. It's the difference between a platform and a prison.

A case management system with closed APIs forces firms to use whatever integrations the vendor has decided to build. A system with open APIs lets firms adapt as the market evolves - and as their own needs change.

At InTouch we've made the open API a deliberate architectural principle, not a feature. We compete on product quality, not lock-in. If a firm can leave easily, we have to make sure they don't want to.

Q6: AI is rapidly becoming embedded in legal tech. How is InTouch incorporating AI into day-to-day casework, and where do you see it delivering the most value for firms?

We've been careful about this - and I think that care has actually made our AI more useful, not less.

There's a lot of noise in legal tech AI right now. Systems that claim to "do the work" for you. We've taken a different view: AI in a regulated professional context should support the fee earner's judgment, not replace it. Every AI output in InTouch is designed to be reviewed before it acts.

In practice, that means two things right now. First, AI Data Extraction - the ability to take a document or photo and automatically pull the relevant data into the matter fields for a fee earner to check and confirm. For something like a conveyancing title pack, this eliminates significant manual keying - saving 5 to 10 minutes per use, with greater accuracy than retyping - without removing the human in the loop. Second, AI Matter Assistant - the ability to generate a draft summary, email, or checklist from the matter data. A fee earner gets a first draft in seconds; they review and send.

The value here isn't dramatic. It's incremental. But incremental, every day, across every fee earner, adds up to something significant in terms of matter throughput - which is ultimately what we're trying to move.

What we're building toward is agentic capability - but always within clear boundaries. The fee earner remains in control at every step. AI doesn't send anything to a client, doesn't generate and send a contract to the other side, and doesn't commit to anything on the firm's behalf without a fee earner reviewing and approving it first. What it can do is handle the mechanical work - drafting the chase, flagging the risk, prompting the next action - so that the fee earner's attention is focused on the decisions that actually require a qualified professional. The AI prepares. The fee earner decides.

Q7: Looking ahead, how do you expect the needs of law firms to evolve over the next 3–5 years, particularly as AI and automation become more dominant across the sector?

The bottleneck shifts. Right now, for most firms, the constraint is execution - doing the work. Over the next three to five years, as AI absorbs a meaningful share of drafting, review, and data extraction, the constraint moves to judgment: which matters to take, how to price them, where to deploy human attention.

Once firms sort that, the bottleneck shifts again - to acquisition. Getting the business. And here's something the legal sector doesn't talk about enough: right now, demand genuinely outstrips supply for many firms. Work walks in the door regardless of how well the business is run. That won't last.

As AI raises the baseline of what's possible operationally, the firms that have coasted on technical competence alone will find it harder to compete. Clients will have more choice, more visibility, and higher expectations. Firms will have to compete on the client-service side of their business - not just the legal side. Marketing becomes a genuine competitive lever in a way it hasn't been for most law firms historically.

Ultimately, I think end clients are going to benefit enormously from this - better service, faster outcomes, and firms that are genuinely competing on the quality of the experience they deliver.

The firms that will win are the ones that have built systems capable of surfacing that decision-making - not just systems that execute tasks. That means better management information, better risk flagging, better visibility across the whole pipeline. The case management system becomes less of a workflow tool and more of a decision-support system.

There's also a regulatory dimension. The incoming transfer of AML supervision to the FCA will put structural pressure on firms to have better data - more structured, more reportable, auditable in real time rather than reconstructed after the fact. Firms that have invested in configurable, compliance-native systems will be better placed. Firms that have been running on systems where compliance is an afterthought will face a difficult and expensive catch-up.

The other shift I'd highlight is client expectations continuing to accelerate. The standard of "we'll keep you informed" is being replaced by a standard of "you can see everything in real time." Firms that aren't building toward that will find it harder to attract the quality of client they want.

Q8: Finally, what is your long-term vision for InTouch, and how will it continue to support firms navigating an increasingly digital, client-centric, and competitive legal landscape?

InTouch was built around a specific belief: that a law firm shouldn't have to choose between doing excellent legal work and running a well-managed, client-centric business. The systems should make both possible at once.

Our north star is simple: matters completed per month across all the firms we work with. Not active matters, not users, not logins - completions. Because completion is the value moment for a law firm. It's when the matter closes, when the client gets their outcome, and typically when the firm gets paid. Everything we build is tested against whether it moves that number.

The long-term vision is one platform for the entire practice - every matter type, every stakeholder, every workflow - with the flexibility to work the way each firm works, whatever that looks like. Built on an open ecosystem so firms can add the tools that are right for them. With AI capability embedded throughout, but always with a human in the loop.

We're also deeply committed to the markets we serve. InTouch was built in Nottingham for UK law firms, and we understand the specific demands of SRA regulation, conveyancing protocol, and UK client expectations in a way that platforms built for other markets simply don't. The same is true in Australia, where we're building a genuinely local presence rather than retrofitting a UK system.

The firms navigating this landscape successfully - now and in five years - will be the ones that took process seriously.

Dale Kime,
Director, InTouch





EVOLVING SOURCE OF FUNDS EXPECTATIONS — AND THE ROLE OF LEGAL TECH

Armalytix Executive Chairman Mike Ward explains how conveyancers can meet rising regulatory expectations around source of funds checks by moving beyond document gathering to building clear, evidence-backed financial narratives, using technology to reduce admin, improve risk visibility and strengthen AML compliance.

Q. Regulators are shifting toward more narrative-led, risk-based assessments of source of funds. How is Armalytix adapting its technology to help conveyancers move beyond document collection to evidencing the "story" behind funds?

As regulators move toward more narrative-led, risk-based source of funds (SoF) assessments, firms need clear, evidence-backed stories rather than a tick-box exercise. Armalytix supports this by structuring financial data into easy-to-review reports that show the origin, timeline, and risks behind client funds, helping firms build a coherent understanding without specialist financial training.

By automating evidence collation and initial analysis, Armalytix helps firms:

Build a clearer story of funds using reliable evidence rather than fragmented documents.

Analyse data consistently to identify risks and gaps more efficiently.

Produce auditable narratives that demonstrate understanding of the client's financial position.

This reduces admin, allowing conveyancers to focus on complex, higher-risk cases where professional judgment is most valuable.

Q. What are the biggest challenges your clients are facing in meeting these evolving expectations, and how is legal tech helping to bridge the gap between compliance and practical workflow?

Conveyancing firms face three major challenges: operational burden, increasingly complex finances, and client friction. Modern property purchases often involve multiple funding sources, with around 30% involving gifted funds, making checks more time-consuming.

Fee-earners are still spending significant time chasing documents, reviewing bank statements, and piecing together fragmented evidence to create a defensible SoF narrative. At Leading Property Lawyers Limited (LPL), this meant experienced staff handling repetitive admin rather than legal work requiring professional expertise.

Introducing Armalytix replaced fragmented paper-based checks with automated analysis through Open Banking connectivity and bank statement scanning, creating a stronger audit trail and speeding up the client journey. LPL's Head of Operations, Louise Stephens-Panoja, said the platform "took away the whole admin burden" and enabled the team to better use their skills.

Client friction is another key issue. SoF requests can feel intrusive, particularly when clients must share sensitive financial data or involve giftors. Armalytix reduces this friction by streamlining the process and offering reassurance through its FCA-registered status. At PSR Solicitors, SoF checks were reduced from weeks to as little as one day, with 98% of clients completing the process successfully.

Q. How does Armalytix balance automation with the need for human judgment in assessing complex or higher-risk source of funds cases?

Armalytix uses automation to support, not replace, professional judgement. Karl Lewis, Solicitor and Head of Conveyancing at PSR Solicitors, described it as a tool that "puts us in the right direction and helps us delve deeper into any gaps in the evidence."

The platform highlights gaps and risks while reducing manual admin, enabling lawyers to focus their expertise where it matters most. It provides the structure and information needed to make faster, better-informed decisions without removing the lawyer's responsibility for risk assessment.

Q. Looking ahead, how do you see source of funds checks evolving over the next few years, and what role will technology providers like Armalytix play in shaping best practice?

The future of SoF checks will be shaped by greater speed, connectivity, and effectiveness. Initiatives such as the UK's first fully digital homebuying service with Lloyds Banking Group, involving Armalytix, show how checks may move earlier into the transaction process and become more collaborative.

Regulators are increasingly focused on whether firms' AML controls are genuinely effective rather than whether processes were simply followed. This will bring greater accountability for firms and senior leaders, requiring stronger governance, clearer escalation routes for high-risk cases, and more centralised oversight.

Technology providers like Armalytix will support this shift by helping firms collect, analyse, and evidence financial data more effectively. The aim is to allow property professionals to focus on assessing risk rather than chasing paperwork and manually building audit trails.

Mike Ward,
Executive Chairman of Armalytix



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Progress and Partnership is Key

Suggested standfirst: Warren Wander, CEO and founder of LawWare, discusses what modern case management means for today's law firms, why usability and integration matter, and how practical innovation will shape the next generation of legal technology.

From your perspective, what are the defining characteristics of a "modern" case management system in today's legal landscape?

A modern case management system has to be much more than a place to store matter details and documents. It needs to sit at the centre of how a firm works day to day. For me, the key characteristics are usability, reliability, security, integration and flexibility. A good system should bring together matters, documents, accounts, emails, compliance and reporting in a way that feels joined up. It should reduce duplication, make information easier to find and give firms better control over what is happening across the business.

But it also has to be practical. Law firms are busy places. Fee earners and support teams do not want technology that gets in the way or creates another layer of administration. The best systems support the way people actually work. They guide users, prompt the right actions and make routine tasks easier without making the process feel complicated.

Security and resilience are essential too. Firms hold highly sensitive client information, so data protection, access control and business continuity must be treated seriously. A modern system also has to evolve as regulation, client expectations and working practices change. That thinking is behind New LawWare: a modern Microsoft-based platform, built for the future, but still grounded in legal practice.

How have the needs and expectations of law firms evolved in recent years, and how has LawWare adapted to meet those changes?

Firms expect far more from their technology than they did even a few years ago. Practice management software was once seen mainly as an administrative tool. It helped with matter management, accounts, documents and time recording. Those things are still vital, but firms now expect technology to help them run better businesses.

Clients expect faster communication and a more professional experience. Firms are under pressure to protect margins, manage compliance and make better use of their people. Partners and managers want clearer information about performance, workload, billing and risk. Staff are also used to better software in everyday life, so they expect business systems to be more intuitive and connected.

LawWare has adapted by focusing on practical improvement. We are not interested in adding features simply because they sound impressive. We look at what will make a real difference in a busy legal practice. With New LawWare, we have rebuilt key areas of the system, including a completely rewritten accounts module, and we continue to develop around speed, usability, security and integration.

Improvements such as easier document handling, drag and drop from Outlook and Windows folders, email auto-filing, document previewing, dual-screen support, smarter workflows and better access to matter information may sound like small things, but they remove everyday friction. Across a firm, that can make a significant difference. LawWare has always been shaped by the firms using it, and that client relationship continues to guide our development.

Many firms are looking for greater efficiency and visibility across their operations. How should a case management system support this without adding complexity?

Efficiency should not mean forcing people through more screens or more procedures. A good system should remove friction. It should help users get to the right information quickly, complete common tasks more easily and avoid unnecessary duplication.

Visibility is just as important. Firms need to know what is happening across matters, teams and finances. They need to see key dates, workloads, progress, billing status, client balances and potential risks. If that information is difficult to access, management becomes reactive rather than proactive.

The challenge is to provide visibility without overwhelming people. Not every user needs the same view. A partner, cashier, fee earner and support team member may all need different information. Good design gives each user what is relevant without clutter.

That is where sensible workflows, prompts, templates and reporting matter. They should support users, not interrupt them. At LawWare, we try to balance control with usability. Firms need structure, especially around compliance and financial management, but users also need software they can simply get on with. If users can preview a document quickly, file an email to the right matter or pick up a recent matter, the working day becomes easier. Those small gains, repeated across a firm, are where much of the value is found.

Integration is becoming increasingly important. How critical is it for case management systems to connect seamlessly with other tools, and where do you see the biggest opportunities here?

Integration is critical. Law firms use a wide range of systems and services, from Microsoft 365 to search providers, compliance services, identity checks, payment solutions and reporting platforms. If those tools do not connect properly, the gaps are usually filled manually. People rekey information, save files in different places, switch between systems or duplicate work. That wastes time and increases risk.

The case management system should act as the operational hub of the firm. That does not mean it has to replace every specialist application. In many cases, specialist tools do a very good job. The key is making sure they connect securely and simply.

Microsoft 365 is one of the biggest opportunities because it is already central to how many firms work. Outlook, Word, Excel and Teams are part of daily life in most practices. The more naturally case management works with that environment, the easier it becomes to manage documents, emails and communication properly.

There are also major opportunities around property searches, client onboarding, digital identity, compliance, payments and reporting. If data can be taken from the matter record and used securely in another service, then the result filed back automatically, that is a real benefit. It saves time, reduces rekeying and improves the audit trail. The future is connected systems working together properly.

User experience is often cited as a barrier to adoption. What role does usability play in ensuring systems are actually embraced by fee earners?

Usability is vital. You can have a very powerful system, but if people find it difficult, they will avoid it, work around it or use only the parts they have to use.

Fee earners are under pressure. They are dealing with clients, deadlines, documents, emails, calls and compliance obligations. If software feels like an extra burden, it will not be embraced. It has to help them do their work, not make the day more difficult.

Good usability is not just about how a screen looks; it is about whether the system feels logical. Can users find the right matter quickly? Can they see what needs to happen next? Can they produce documents without unnecessary effort? Can they file emails properly? Can they trust that information is where it should be?

Ease of use has always been important to LawWare. We work with a wide range of firms and users. Some are confident with technology; others simply want to get their work done without fuss. The system has to support all of them. Training and support are part of that as well. Adoption does not happen just because software has been installed. Firms need guidance and a provider that understands the pressures they are under. In the end, usability determines whether the firm gets real value.

With AI rapidly gaining traction in legal tech, how do you see it enhancing, or challenging, the role of case management systems?

AI has huge potential, but it needs to be approached sensibly. In the legal sector, accuracy, confidentiality and professional judgement are critical. We cannot treat AI as a novelty or simply add it because it is fashionable.

The most useful applications, certainly in the near term, are likely to be around reducing administrative effort and helping people work with information more efficiently. AI may help summarise communications, search across matter information, support document drafting, identify missing details, suggest next steps or highlight patterns that might otherwise be missed.

Law firms hold a great deal of information, but it is not always easy to extract insight from it. If AI can help users find the right information more quickly, or reduce routine work, it can make a real difference.

But AI should support professional judgement, not replace it. Lawyers remain responsible for the advice they give and the decisions they make. There are also important questions around data security, governance and trust. Firms need to know where their data is going, how it is being used and whether outputs can be relied on.

The case management system has an important role to play as the trusted environment in which AI is used safely and in context. At LawWare, we are looking at AI practically, particularly in relation to Microsoft technologies and Copilot. We are interested in where it can genuinely help firms, not in overclaiming.

Looking ahead, how do you anticipate law firms' needs will change over the next 3–5 years, and how should technology providers prepare for that shift?

Over the next three to five years, firms will need to be more agile, more data-aware and more efficient. The pressures on law firms are not going away. Costs are increasing, client expectations are rising, regulation is becoming more demanding and competition remains strong.

Firms will need better information about how their business is performing. They will want to understand workload, profitability, matter progress, billing, risk and resource use in much more detail. Reporting and analytics will become increasingly important.

Client service will also continue to evolve. Legal work is often complex and personal, but clients still expect clear communication and timely updates. Firms that can combine strong legal advice with a smoother client experience will be in a better position.

Compliance and risk management will remain central. Firms need systems that help them evidence good processes, maintain audit trails and reduce the chance of things being missed. We will also see continued demand for secure cloud-based and flexible working. Hybrid working is now part of normal business life, but firms still need consistency, control and security.

For providers, the answer is to invest in modern platforms, better integrations, stronger security and easier user experiences, while staying close to clients. Technology should help firms modernise at a realistic pace. Not every firm wants to change everything overnight. Providers need to support progress in a way that is manageable, commercially sensible and aligned with how legal practices actually operate.

Of course, legal practices considering changing practice management technology should ask which systems best suit their work types and people. They should also ask themselves which systems best suit their clients' needs.

Finally, what is your vision for the future of LawWare, and how will it continue to support firms navigating an increasingly tech-driven and competitive market?

My vision for LawWare is to continue being a trusted, independent technology partner for law firms that want modern software, practical support and a long-term relationship with their provider.

We have been working with law firms for many years and that experience matters. We understand that changing systems, upgrading technology or altering working practices is a big decision. It affects people, processes, clients and the wider business. Firms need to know their provider understands that.

With New LawWare, we have made a major investment in the future. It gives us a modern platform on which we can continue to build, improve and innovate. That includes better workflows, deeper integrations, stronger reporting, improved usability and, in time, carefully considered use of AI and automation.

But the future of LawWare is not just about technology. It is also about how we work with our clients. We want to remain close to the firms we support, listen to their feedback and develop software that reflects the real needs of legal practice.

The legal market is becoming more competitive and more technology-driven, but that does not mean firms want impersonal, one-size-fits-all systems. Many firms want progress, but they also want a provider that knows them and understands how they work. That is where LawWare has an important role to play. For me, the future is about combining modern technology with genuine partnership. That has always been one of LawWare's strengths, and it will continue to guide us as the market evolves.

Warren Wander,
CEO and founder, LawWare Ltd.



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Clio Modern Law Awards 2026

Sponsor Interview

with Vivian O'Brien, Head of Marketing, Clio

Q. What does it mean for Clio to continue as headline sponsor of the Modern Law Awards, and why is supporting the legal sector so important to you?

Continuing as headline sponsor reflects our commitment to the firms driving meaningful change in the legal profession. Clio's mission is to transform the legal experience for all, and the Modern Law Awards recognise the firms already making that happen through innovation, client focus, and a willingness to challenge traditional ways of working.

The firms shortlisted here have chosen to put clients first and embrace new approaches to delivering legal services. Recognising that work helps raise standards across the profession by showing what's possible when firms innovate with purpose.

Supporting the sector also aligns closely with our commitment to improving access to justice. When firms operate more efficiently and provide better client experiences, legal services become more accessible. Celebrating the firms leading that progress is one way we can help accelerate positive change across the industry.

Q. The legal industry has seen huge change over the past year. What trends or challenges do you think firms are focusing on most in 2026?

The firms succeeding in 2026 understand that technology, talent, and client experience are interconnected. Those that struggle often treat them as separate challenges.

AI is the clearest example. The conversation has moved beyond whether firms should adopt it. Our UK and Ireland Legal Insights Report found that nearly nine in ten legal professionals now use AI in some capacity, with 70% adopting it within the past year. The challenge now is moving from isolated use cases to firm-wide integration. Only 27% of firms have achieved broad AI adoption so far, which highlights where much of the remaining opportunity lies.

At the same time, pricing models continue to evolve. Fixed or flat fees now account for 53% of matters across UK and Ireland firms, while hourly billing has fallen to 32%. As AI reduces the time needed for many legal tasks, firms are reassessing how they demonstrate value and structure pricing. The most successful firms are simplifying their technology stacks, connecting systems, and rethinking long-held assumptions about how legal services are delivered.

Q. Clio has long been associated with innovation in legal technology. How are client expectations changing, and how is technology helping firms meet those demands?

Client expectations have risen significantly. Today, clients compare their legal experience with every other service they use, whether that's banking, retail, or hospitality. They expect transparency, convenience, and proactive communication.

For most clients, uncertainty is the most stressful part of a legal matter. They want clear pricing, regular updates, and confidence about what happens next. Technology plays an important role in delivering that experience. Digital intake, secure client portals, automated communications, and AI-assisted workflows help firms provide greater visibility without increasing administrative burden.

When routine processes are handled efficiently, lawyers can focus on the work that requires expertise, judgement, and empathy. Those human interactions are what clients remember and what drive long-term loyalty and referrals. Firms that fail to meet rising expectations increasingly find themselves competing primarily on price.

Q. The Modern Law Awards celebrate some of the best talent and businesses in the profession. In your view, what qualities define a modern, successful law firm today?

A successful modern law firm is not defined by a single piece of technology. It is defined by how effectively it combines technology, culture, and client experience into a single strategy.

It starts with connected infrastructure. When billing, case management, and AI-powered insights work together, lawyers spend less time on administration and leaders gain better visibility into performance. Fragmented systems create inefficiencies that ultimately affect both profitability and client experience.

Equally important is a client-centred mindset. The strongest firms use technology to reduce friction, improve communication, and make legal services easier to navigate. Clients should feel informed and supported throughout the process, not just during key milestones.

Finally, leadership is critical. Firms achieve the greatest return on technology investments when leaders focus on people as much as platforms. Successful firms create environments where teams can adopt new ways of working confidently and effectively. Sustainable growth comes when technology, culture, and client service all move in the same direction.

Q. Beyond technology, how important is collaboration across the legal industry in driving progress, improving access to justice, and creating better outcomes for clients?

Collaboration is essential. While innovation can give individual firms a competitive advantage, lasting progress happens when firms, technology providers, and industry organisations work together.

Collaboration is also one of the most powerful ways to improve access to justice. Legal services have traditionally been expensive and difficult for many people to access. When firms share best practice, embrace innovation, and advocate for change collectively, legal support becomes more efficient, transparent, and accessible.

That is one of the reasons events like the Modern Law Awards are so valuable. They highlight excellence, create benchmarks for success, and encourage firms to learn from one another. When outstanding client service or operational innovation is recognised, it helps inspire wider adoption across the profession.

The conversations that begin at events like these extend well beyond a single evening. Over time, that exchange of ideas contributes to a stronger, more innovative profession that continues to improve outcomes for both firms and the clients they serve.

Vivian O'Brien,
Head of Marketing, Clio



Clio Modern Law Awards 2026

The Clio Modern Law Awards 2026 once again brought together the very best of the legal profession for an unforgettable evening celebrating excellence, innovation, and achievement across the industry. Hosted at The Belfry, the event welcomed outstanding law firms, chambers, legal professionals, and service providers from across the UK for a night dedicated to recognising those shaping the future of the legal sector.

The Clio Modern Law Awards is one of the legal sector's most prestigious celebrations, recognising the outstanding achievements of law firms, legal professionals, chambers, and industry leaders across the UK. Judged by an esteemed panel of respected experts from across the profession, the awards celebrate those making a lasting impact through innovation, leadership, client service, and excellence within the legal industry.

Since launching in 2013, the Modern Law Awards has become a standout event within the legal calendar, bringing together the legal community to celebrate the talent, dedication, and innovation driving the profession forward. This year's shortlist once again showcased the very best of the industry, highlighting firms and individuals leading the way in an increasingly competitive and evolving landscape.

The evening commenced with a glamorous champagne reception, proudly sponsored by Cashroom, where guests gathered to network and celebrate ahead of the ceremony. Attendees, dressed impeccably for the occasion, enjoyed a vibrant atmosphere as anticipation built for the evening ahead.

As guests took their seats, Clara Henry at Clio, welcomed attendees and reflected on the exceptional talent and innovation showcased across the legal profession. Chair Judge Dr Trevor Sterling, Senior Partner at Moore Barlow LLP, also addressed the audience, recognising the commitment and achievements of all those shortlisted, while Vice-Chair Barbara Mills KC helped lead this year's exceptional judging process alongside an esteemed panel of industry experts.

Following a spectacular evening of dining and celebration, acclaimed barrister, broadcaster, and television personality Rob Rinder MBE took to the stage as host for the evening, bringing humour, energy, and charisma to the awards ceremony.

The evening saw an incredible range of firms, individuals, and organisations recognised for their achievements across a wide variety of categories. Highlights included Irwin Mitchell winning Law Firm of the Year – Large (250+), HCC Solicitors being named Law Firm of the Year – Medium (50–249), Cleveland & Co taking home Law Firm of the Year – Small (0–49), and Pogust Goodhead winning both Litigation Team of the Year and International Law Firm of the Year.



Other standout winners included Jade Gani of Circe Law Ltd, who received both Lawyer of the Year and Female Trailblazer of the Year, InfoTrack UK winning both Innovation of the Year and Best Service Provider, and Woodstock Legal Services receiving the Business Growth Award.

The awards also recognised exceptional achievements from firms including HTF Legal Ltd, Olliers Solicitors, Napthens LLP, Brachers LLP, Fletcher Longstaff, New Park Court Chambers, Magara Law, and many more outstanding finalists and highly commended recipients.

A special congratulations also goes to Briana McCory, recipient of the Outstanding Achievement Award, and Dr Victoria McCloud, who was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of her exceptional contribution to the legal profession.

Of course, the awards would not be possible without the support and dedication of our outstanding judging panel. We extend our sincere thanks to all judges for contributing their time, expertise, and insight to ensure the integrity and prestige of the Clio Modern Law Awards.

A heartfelt thank you also goes to our incredible sponsors and partners, particularly headline sponsor Clio, alongside Cashroom, Stewart Title, and all sponsors whose continued support helped make the evening such an unforgettable success.

As the formal celebrations concluded, guests continued the festivities late into the evening, reflecting on another fantastic year for the legal profession and celebrating the achievements of those recognised on the night.

Please join us in congratulating all the 2026 winners, highly commended recipients, finalists, judges, sponsors, and attendees. Your passion, dedication, and achievements continue to inspire the legal sector and shape the future of the profession.

Modern Law Awards 2026









Modern Law Awards 2026











Wills & Probate Team of the Year
Highly Commended: Circe Law Ltd
Winner: HTF Legal Ltd

Family Team of the Year
Highly Commended: Burgess Mee
Winner: IMD Solicitors LLP

Clinical Negligence
Highly Commended: 1 Crown Office Row
Winner: Coodes

Personal Injury Award
Highly Commended: HCC Solicitors
Winner: Irwin Mitchell

Conveyancing Team of the Year
Highly Commended: Thomas Flavell & Sons
Winner: Napthens LLP

Employment Law Team of the Year
Highly Commended: HF Limited
Winner: Magara Law

Criminal Team of the Year
Highly Commended: Lawtons Solicitors
Highly Commended: Bell Lamb & Joynson
Winner: Olliers Solicitors

Litigation Team of the Year
Highly Commended: Level
Winner: Pogust Goodhead

Operations Team of the Year (front of house, finance, HR, marketing etc)
Highly Commended: Murrells Law
Winner: Brachers LLP

Best Company Culture
Highly Commended: Myerson Solicitors
Highly Commended: Murrells Law
Winner: Irwin Mitchell

Law Firm – Small (0 – 49)
Highly Commended: Astraea
Winner: Cleveland & Co

Law Firm – Medium (50 – 249)
Highly Commended: Myerson Solicitors
Winner: HCC Solicitors

Law Firm – Large (250+)
Highly Commended: Stephens Scown LLP
Winner: Irwin Mitchell

International Law Firm of the Year
Highly Commended: Asserson
Winner: Pogust Goodhead

Boutique Law Firm of the Year (1-10 employees)
Highly Commended: Kings Court Law
Winner: HTF Legal Ltd

Boutique Law Firm of the Year (11+ employees)
Highly Commended: Level
Highly Commended: Samartin and Friends
Winner: Olliers Solicitors

Chambers of the Year
Highly Commended: 1 Crown Office Row
Winner: New Park Court Chambers

Managing Partner of the Year
Highly Commended: Gilva Tisshaw - Tisshaws Family Law Solicitors
Winner: Joanna Worby - Brachers LLP

Partner of the Year
Highly Commended: Hollie Muckley - HCC Solicitors
Winner: Laura Daly - Irwin Mitchell

Lawyer of the Year
Highly Commended: Helen Forster - HTF Legal Ltd
Winners: Jade Gani TEP - Circe Law Ltd

Consultant Lawyer of the Year
Highly Commended: Catherine Haworth - Haworth Family Law
Winner: Alastair Campbell - Level

Costs Lawyer of the Year
Highly Commended: Adam Fox - NWL Costs Lawyers
Highly Commended: Steven Green - Irwin Mitchell
Winner: Victoria Morrison-Hughes - Integral Legal

Rising Star of the Year
Highly Commended: Danile Moreton - Irwin Mitchell
Winner: Annie Leach - Bindmans

Female Trailblazer of the Year
Highly Commended: Shahrzad Seifi - Magara Law
Winner: Jade Gani TEP - Circe Law Ltd

Innovation Award
Highly Commended: Perfect Portal
Winner: InfoTrack UK

Client Care Award (0-100 employees)
Highly Commended: Olliers Solicitors
Highly Commended: Magara Law
Winner: Fletcher Longstaff

Client Care Award (100+ employees)
Highly Commended: HCC Solicitors
Winner: Napthens LLP

Business Growth Award
Highly Commended: Bell Lamb & Joynson
Winner: Woodstock Legal Services

Best Service Provider
Highly Commended: Cashroom
Highly Commended: Perfect Portal
Winner: InfoTrack UK

Best Use of Technology
Highly Commended: Cleveland & Co
Highly Commended: Latitude Law
Winner: Highfive

Outstanding Achievement of the Year
Winner: Briana McCrory

Lifetime Achievement Award
Winner: Dr Victoria McCloud

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Profit Under Pressure: Where Conveyancing Firms Are Losing Revenue – and How Technology Can Help

In this issue, our Conveyancing Panel, Angela Hesketh, Head of Market Development at PEXA, Natalie Summers, Director & Head of Conveyancing at CJCH Solicitors and Rob Gurney, Managing Director at Ochresoft, explore where firms are unknowingly losing money, whether the high-volume model remains viable, and how technology, process improvement and smarter resource management can help firms protect margins and improve efficiency in an increasingly competitive market.

This issue's opinions are from:



Angela Hesketh,
Head of Market Development at PEXA



Rob Gurney,
Managing Director at Ochresoft



Q. Where are conveyancing firms losing money in the transaction process without realising it?

Rob Gurney
A. Many conveyancing firms are unknowingly losing money through inefficiencies in transaction management, particularly in the time taken to progress cases and the increasing complexity of communication. Prolonged transaction times, often driven by fragmented processes and coordination between stakeholders, directly erode profitability by tying up resources for longer than anticipated – something reflected in market sentiment, with 42%1 of residential conveyancers identifying the length of time to complete a transaction as their biggest frustration.

A key issue is the imbalance between administrative workload and genuine case progression. Fee earners can spend a significant proportion of their time on low-value, repetitive administrative tasks. In our market research, conveyancers stated they spend 41%2 of the average working day chasing or responding to updates from stakeholders.

This not only impacts productivity but also reduces the effective margin per case.

Firms that fail to recognise and address this imbalance will continue to experience hidden cost leakage across their operations.

Angela Hesketh
A. Much of the cost in conveyancing doesn't sit in the legal work itself. It builds up in repetition, chasing, and the effort required to keep transactions moving between multiple parties.

As transactions move through the process, information is often rechecked, rekeyed and revisited as it moves between lender, conveyancer and HM Land Registry. This isn't about errors; it reflects a process made up of separate systems that rely on handoffs and repeated validation.

The impact becomes most visible towards completion and beyond. On completion day, teams spend time chasing funds, confirming receipt, and relying on calls or emails to track progress. This work is essential, but largely invisible to clients. It's part of the job but it is also where a lot of effort goes that clients never see.

Post-completion work can quietly absorb a huge amount of time. Requisitions, many of them avoidable, mean files are picked back up, reviewed again, and worked on long after the transaction is assumed to be finished. Monitoring registration and responding to queries adds further effort that is not always reflected in how work is priced.

Overlaying all of this is the need to manage risk. With multiple touchpoints and limited visibility, firms build in checks and safeguards particularly around AML and source of funds adding considerably more time and cost into the process.

So it's not that firms are "losing" money in an obvious way. It's that a significant amount of resource is tied up managing uncertainty.

That's where the opportunity sits: not in working harder, but in reducing the need for repetition, rework and chasing, particularly in the final stages and beyond.

Q. Is the high-volume, low-margin conveyancing model still sustainable?

Rob Gurney
A. The high-volume, low-margin model has always been challenging, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain in today's market. Consumer expectations are higher than ever, with clients demanding speed, transparency and regular communication. When these expectations are not met, firms face increased complaints, reputational risk and in some cases compensation payments, all of which further erode already tight margins.

For this model to remain viable, firms must have a predictable and well-managed pipeline of work, allowing them to plan resources effectively. Workforce strategy also plays a critical role; firms need to invest in training their own talent while finding ways to retain experienced staff in a highly competitive market.

Operational efficiency is equally important. The use of process automation, alongside carefully considered offshoring or outsourcing models, can help reduce cost per transaction. However, these approaches must be implemented thoughtfully to ensure quality and client experience are not compromised.

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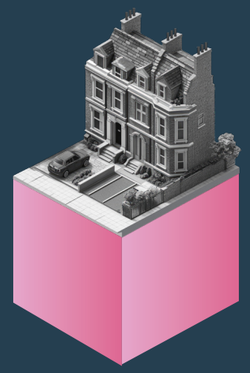

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"The use of process automation, alongside carefully considered offshoring or outsourcing models, can help reduce cost per transaction."

Angela Hesketh
A. Most firms don't need data to tell them this. They feel it day to day.

When a transaction that might once have taken 6–8 weeks stretches to 20 weeks or more, the impact on cash flow is immediate. Fees are tied up for longer, work in progress builds, and teams are touching the same file multiple times as things progress in stages or the situation changes.

What's easy to overlook is how much of that delay sits in the later stages of the process. As transactions approach completion, coordination becomes more complex, communication increases, and there's often a need to double-check information or wait for confirmation from other parties.

And even after completion, the work doesn't stop. Post-completion activity, dealing with requisitions, progressing registration and resolving queries can extend the lifecycle of a transaction well beyond the point at which revenue is recognised, continuing to draw on resource in the background.

Mitigating this isn't about trying to control the whole market. That's not realistic. But there is an opportunity to look closely at where time and effort are most concentrated, particularly towards the end of the transaction.

Targeted use of technology can help here. Not as a wholesale overhaul, but in ways that improve visibility, reduce the need for rechecking, and bring more certainty to completion and post-completion. When firms have greater confidence in when funds will move and when a transaction will settle, it becomes much easier to plan, manage resource and stabilise cash flow.

Q. How can firms balance speed, cost and risk in an increasingly price-driven market?

Rob Gurney
A. Achieving the right balance between speed, cost and risk is one of the defining challenges for modern conveyancing firms. Increasingly, the answer lies in the intelligent adoption of technology.

The industry is now rapidly moving towards digital-first processes, and firms that fail to adapt risk being left behind. Artificial intelligence and automation are no longer viewed with scepticism; instead, they are becoming essential tools for managing workload, reducing manual effort and improving consistency. As adoption accelerates, with 78%3 of conveyancers now using AI to support fee earners, the impact is increasingly visible in practice, with 86%4 reporting improved customer experience driven by more transparent, efficient and consistent processes.

When implemented effectively, technology can accelerate transaction timelines, reduce reliance on manual resource and minimise the risk of human error. The key is selecting the right solutions and partners - those that are aligned with the firm's processes and regulatory obligations - so that efficiency gains are realised without introducing additional risk.

Angela Hesketh
A. If there's one area likely to make the biggest difference, it's how firms make better use of the tools and processes they already have and where they choose to remove unnecessary effort from the transaction.



There's already been progress in areas like digital ID, source of funds and AML. Many firms are using these tools day to day, and they are helping to save time and manage risk. The opportunity now is less about adding more, and more about looking at where the process still relies on workarounds, repetition or manual intervention.

For many, that becomes most obvious towards the end of the transaction.

Completion and post-completion are still areas where teams often rely on emails, calls and last-minute checks to move things forward and confirm status. It's familiar and it works but it also means a lot of time is spent chasing, rechecking and making sure everything lines up when it needs to. That effort is rarely visible, but it has a real impact on capacity and cost.

Looking ahead, the firms that see the greatest improvement in profitability are likely to be those that focus on reducing that kind of friction. Small, practical changes that improve visibility, reduce the need for duplication, and bring more confidence into the final stages of the transaction can have a disproportionate impact.

Importantly, this isn't about replacing the role of the conveyancer or changing how firms deliver their service. It's about freeing up time from the parts of the process that are repetitive or uncertain, so that focus can remain on the areas where professional judgement really matters.

In that sense, the opportunity isn't about doing more. It's about making the process feel more predictable, for both firms and their clients.

Natalie Summers
A. In an increasingly price-driven conveyancing market, firms face the challenge of delivering services quickly and affordably while still managing legal, regulatory, and professional risks, so firms must strike a careful balance.

Conveyancing firms can adopt case management software, document automation, e-signatures, and online client portals to streamline routine tasks. This reduces administrative costs and processing times without compromising legal compliance.

Many conveyancing transactions follow similar procedures. Creating standard workflows, checklists, and templates helps ensure consistency and reduces the risk of omissions.

Not all transactions carry the same level of complexity or risk. Straightforward transactions can be handled through efficient standard processes, while higher-risk cases receive additional scrutiny from experienced staff.

Pressure to reduce fees should not lead to shortcuts in due diligence, anti-money laundering checks, title investigations, or regulatory requirements. Robust compliance systems help avoid costly claims and reputational damage.

Well-trained staff can process transactions more efficiently while identifying potential issues before they become costly problems.

Rather than competing solely on the lowest fee, firms can provide clear pricing structures and demonstrate the value of their service through expertise, communication, and reliability.

"Small, practical changes that improve visibility, reduce the need for duplication, and bring more confidence into the final stages of the transaction can have a disproportionate impact."

Tracking key performance indicators such as transaction completion times, error rates, client satisfaction, and claims frequency allows firms to identify inefficiencies and maintain service quality.

Q. Are firms investing enough in technology to improve profitability in conveyancing or investing in the wrong areas?

Rob Gurney
A. This remains a significant issue across the sector. Historically, the perceived cost of technology investment has been a barrier, particularly for smaller firms. However, the emergence of AI-driven solutions and cloud-based platforms is changing this dynamic considerably.

There is no longer a requirement for large upfront capital investment to benefit from cutting-edge technology. Increasingly, solutions are available on a transactional or subscription basis, making them accessible to firms of all sizes.

The challenge is less about the level of investment and more about where that investment is directed. Firms need to focus on technologies that drive measurable efficiency gains within the core transaction process, rather than peripheral tools that add limited value. Strategic investment in the right areas will be key to improving long-term profitability. Firms are increasingly focusing on AI solutions (46%)5 and further digitisation (39%)6 to drive efficiency, yet many continue to face constraints, with 67%7 reporting limited investment budget as a significant barrier.

Q. How do delays in the property market impact cash flow, and what can firms do to mitigate this?

Natalie Summers
A. Delays in the property market can have a significant impact on a firm's cash flow. Most Conveyancing Teams will have an estimate on what matters they believe will complete that month. This is of course subject to change until exchange has occurred to make a date legally binding but given what has been completed in the transaction and what is still awaited before a date can be agreed will be known to the fee earner with conduct of the file. A matter may be ready to complete but we are waiting on everyone in the chain to also be ready or someone may be relocating or need to give notice on a rental property meaning when technically the matter could complete and be invoiced that month, it could be a month or longer away until completion can actually take place. Meanwhile, a firm must continue to pay wages, utilities, insurance, maintenance, taxes etc. Unfortunately it is very common to have a number of matters that can complete to sit waiting for chains or third parties. In order to mitigate this risk, firms can try to align with the client and agent on what matters could delay a quick completion turnaround and actively chase what is outstanding.

Q. What will have the biggest impact on profitability in conveyancing over the next 3–5 years?

Rob Gurney
A. Over the next three to five years, the biggest impact on profitability will come from the automation of the core legal process itself - the "meat and potatoes" of conveyancing. To date, much of the innovation in legal technology has focused on solving isolated or peripheral challenges within the transaction.

While these incremental improvements are valuable, they do not unlock the full potential for efficiency. Real transformation will occur when the end-to-end conveyancing process becomes highly automated. Importantly, this does not mean replacing the lawyer. Instead, it enables legal professionals to focus on the critical elements of due diligence, judgement and sign-off, while routine and repeatable tasks are handled by technology.

By removing inefficiencies at the heart of the transaction, firms can significantly increase throughput, reduce operational costs and ultimately enhance profitability, while still delivering a high-quality service to clients.

Natalie Summers
A. Over the next 3–5 years, the biggest impact on profitability in conveyancing is likely to come from the ability to increase efficiency through technology and process automation while maintaining compliance and service quality. While property market conditions and regulatory changes will remain important, firms that automate routine work, improve workflow management, and maintain strong compliance systems are likely to achieve the strongest and most sustainable profit growth in an increasingly competitive and price-sensitive market.



Profit, Probate and People: Where Firms Can Protect Margins and Drive Growth

In this issue, our Wills and Probate Panel explores the key factors affecting profitability in private client practice. Simonne Llewellyn, CEO of Finders International Probate Genealogists, and Sam Kimber, Probate Researcher and Genealogist at Pro-Gen Research, discuss where firms are losing money, how to manage risk in fixed-fee matters, and why effective communication is increasingly becoming a commercial advantage in probate work.

This issue's opinions are from:



Simonne Llewellyn
CEO, Finders International Probate Genealogists



Sam Kimber
Probate Researcher & Genealogist, Pro-Gen Research

Q. Where are firms losing money in wills and probate work, particularly in longer-running matters?

Simonne Llewellyn: From our perspective, the greatest and often least visible financial losses in probate arise from delay and uncertainty, particularly in intestacy cases or where beneficiaries are missing or unknown. What initially appears to be a straightforward estate can quickly become disproportionately costly when unresolved issues, including gaps in entitlement or asset identification, are identified too late in the process.

We regularly see firms absorbing significant fee-earner time over many months — or even years — attempting to locate heirs, re-review family histories or manage estates that remain open simply because critical investigations weren't undertaken at the outset. The longer a matter runs on, the greater the risk of erosion to profitability through internal costs, complaints, client frustration and reputational exposure.

In many cases, the financial loss isn't driven by the complexity of the estate itself, but by uncertainty being allowed to sit within the file for too long. Early identification of risk, particularly around entitlement and family structure, is key. Engaging specialist probate genealogists at an early stage can significantly reduce unnecessary correspondence, indecision and repeated work, helping firms bring matters to a close more efficiently and protect margins.

Sam Kimber: One of the biggest and most overlooked sources of lost profitability in probate matters is poor communication. In our experience, matters rarely become problematic because of the complexity of the legal work itself. More often, delays, complaints and increased costs arise when beneficiaries, executors or other stakeholders are not kept informed. When communication breaks down, queries escalate into complaints, beneficiaries may seek separate representation and practitioners can find themselves spending significant amounts of non-billable time managing issues that could have been avoided through proactive updates and clear expectation management.

Q. How can firms balance fixed fees with the often unpredictable nature of probate work?

Simonne Llewellyn: Fixed fees have become increasingly common in wills and probate, driven by client expectations around transparency and cost certainty. However, probate is inherently unpredictable, particularly in cases involving missing beneficiaries, international family lines or incomplete information.

The challenge for firms is ensuring that this unpredictability doesn't sit entirely within the fixed fee. Too often, uncertainty is absorbed internally, with additional work undertaken without corresponding recovery, ultimately impacting profitability.

From a business perspective, the answer lies in managing risk rather than carrying it. Firms should feel confident in externalising specialist elements of probate work where appropriate, rather than attempting to incorporate them within a fixed-fee model that was never designed to accommodate significant investigative work.

At Finders International, we work alongside firms using flexible and risk-managed fee structures, including success-based solutions, which allow solicitors to offer certainty to clients without exposing themselves to unlimited financial risk. By clearly defining what sits within a fixed fee and what requires specialist intervention, firms can protect both their clients and their bottom line.

Q. What role does client care and communication play in the financial success of probate matters?

Simonne Llewellyn: Client care and communication are not simply compliance or reputational considerations; they are fundamental to the financial health of probate matters. Probate clients, and particularly beneficiaries, are often navigating unfamiliar and emotional territory, which makes clarity and expectation management essential.

Poor communication has very real financial consequences. Unclear explanations or infrequent updates can lead to confusion, mistrust and frustration, all of which increase the likelihood of disputes, complaints and delay. Each of these introduces additional cost and extends the lifecycle of a matter.

Conversely, clear, empathetic and proactive communication supports cooperation and momentum. In our experience, beneficiaries who understand why a process is taking time — for example, where heir tracing or family verification is required — are far more engaged and patient, enabling cases to progress more smoothly.

Ultimately, good client care supports faster resolution, fewer complications and better outcomes for all parties. In a sector where margins can be tight, firms that treat communication as a strategic tool rather than an administrative task are far better placed to deliver both excellent service and sustainable profitability.

Sam Kimber: Client care and communication play a fundamental role in the financial success of probate matters. Probate sits at the intersection of law, finance and human emotion, and beneficiaries are often navigating grief while executors can feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Clear, proactive communication helps manage expectations, reduces the risk of complaints and disputes, and keeps matters progressing efficiently. It is particularly important in cases involving missing beneficiaries, overseas heirs or estranged family members, where trust and transparency can significantly influence how smoothly a matter proceeds. Strong communication is not simply good client care; it is a key driver of profitability and risk management.

Q. What will have the biggest impact on profitability in wills and probate over the next 3–5 years?

Sam Kimber: While technology and process improvements will continue to play an important role, firms that consistently perform well are likely to be those that excel in client communication and service delivery. Probate remains a referral-driven area of practice, and the experience beneficiaries and executors have during the administration process can directly influence future instructions and recommendations. Firms that invest in regular communication, clear explanations of process, effective expectation management and dedicated points of contact will be better placed to reduce complaints, minimise delays and strengthen their reputation. In an increasingly competitive market, a reputation for clear and compassionate communication may become one of the most valuable commercial advantages a probate practice can have.

MODERN LAW CONVEYANCING CONFERENCE 26

Whisper it quietly but the Modern Law Conveyancing Conference (MLCC) was my first MLCC! For reasons that seem to elude me I missed Coombe Abbey in 2024 and 2025, but I wasn't missing this one.

I've attended and participated in dozens of conferences over the years, and the set up and environment of MLCC 26 gave a freshness and level of intrigue that you just don't get from hotel type events. Freight Island was a brave call, but speak to any attendee or exhibitor and they would say it worked superbly.

Environment is one thing though; delivering is another entirely. Over the course of the day we saw conveyancers of all generations host, participate and lead the discussion on the main stage. We also saw conveyancers lead the discussion on the tech stage. This wasn't about supplier pitches, it was about experiences shared, moments in time, memories recalled and a deep level of honesty that is rarely seen at these kinds of events. It didn't feel like we were trying to tackle the impossible, or talking about the same subject that every conference in the last 5 years has discussed. It felt like a community. A community that wanted to better itself, learn and take on board things that would better shape their business, team or career.

Every community needs leaders and although they would never admit it the hosts for the day Tom Parkinson and Laura Cartwright pulled things together wonderfully as well as sharing their own experiences, which if you've ever listened to Bricks & Banter you'll know they do with raw honesty to be admired. They'll crucify me for writing this but I reckon they'll be even better next year too!

I wrote earlier about a deep level of honesty. Nothing epitomised that better than Donna-Marie Sturrock's story of how she navigated the traumatic closure of her law firm Alexander Grace. There are many people in the profession who will sit behind their LinkedIn keyboards and shout from their ivory towers. Very few people will have the guts to stand up there, or in this case sit on the sofa, and share how this shaped and impacted her. Donna did that so passionately and eloquently and she absolutely owned the moment. This wasn't some sort of PR defensive mechanism either, it was deeply personal.

One message I have to mention came through loud and clear throughout the day: conveyancing is not a race to the bottom. Time and again, panellists on both stages returned to the same point, that conveyancers must understand and own their value proposition. This is skilled, high-risk work that protects the biggest financial decision most people ever make, and the fee should reflect the expertise and the liability that sits behind it. Competing on price alone is a race nobody wins. That's not to say the future of modern legal services can't be disrupted by new models. Disruptors are not far away, and they have a clear value proposition. If yours isn't honed and nailed, now is the time.

Throughout the day there was a lot of talk about the future, from the next generation panel of rising stars right through to the session I sat in on about moments that shaped our careers. As custodians of the profession, we as business leaders, team leaders and professionals have a responsibility to leave the profession in better shape than we inherited it, to hand over a healthier house than the one we moved into. The doubters would say this isn't achievable. The people who attended MLCC would BELIEVE it is.

Tom Lyes
Founder & CEO
Tom Lyes Consultancy Limited



This year's conference was a highlight all round, but to have the opportunity to join Mike Leeman, Donna Marie Sturrock and Tom Lyes on a panel discussing our career journeys and the next generation of leaders was the highlight of the day. The conversation wasn't about processes, technology or regulation. Instead, it focused on something much more personal and the experiences that have shaped us in to who we are today including the challenges we've faced throughout our careers and the lessons we've learned along the way.

One of the first questions we were asked was about a moment in our careers that fundamentally changed how we lead. Whilst training courses, qualifications and professional development all have their place, many of the lessons that stay with us are learned through experience and navigating change, making difficult decisions, dealing with setbacks and supporting people through challenging times.

We also discussed whether there had been a point when we questioned if conveyancing was the right career for us. I think this resonated with many people in the room because, if we're honest, most of us have faced moments of doubt at some stage in our careers. Conveyancing can be demanding, fast-paced and at times relentless. What became clear from the discussion was that despite those challenges, we all remain passionate about what we do. Whether it's helping clients through one of the biggest milestones of their lives, supporting colleagues and teams, or contributing to the wider profession, there are many reasons why people choose to stay and build long-term careers in conveyancing.

The conversation then turned to the next generation of leaders and what they might need to do differently from those who have gone before them. It was clear from all four of us that one of the most important points was that leadership is about being people focused. Future leaders will need to balance commercial objectives with creating environments where people can thrive. Supporting wellbeing, encouraging development, embracing flexibility and building inclusive cultures are no longer "nice to have" they are essential.

What I enjoyed most about the session was the honesty. Leadership can often be viewed through the lens of success, but the reality is that growth often comes from the difficult moments as much as the good ones. It was refreshing to have an open conversation about both the highs and the lows, and I hope those attending took away some practical insights they can apply in their own careers.

If there was one overarching message from the discussion, it was that leadership is ultimately about people. The titles, responsibilities and career milestones matter, but it is how we support, develop and inspire those around us that leaves the greatest impact.

Sam Burrows
Head of Growth and Development



Last week I attended the Modern Law Conveyancing Conference at Freight Island, Manchester and what a day it was! Kate and the team made it a fantastic day as usual. It was great to have panels of conveyancers instead of tech talks, economic forecasts and regulatory ones. I felt it was great to get real insight into the challenges in conveyancing and talking all things leadership, culture and success in conveyancing.

I was privileged to be asked to be part of the first panel. Nervous for me as I had never done it before, but I feel so passionate about conveyancing I knew I had to do this to be a voice out there!

The panel conversation shifted from the usual operational talking points to the deeper, more uncomfortable truths. The discussions were a candid exploitation of the pressures leaders face, the cultural shifts, and the evolving definition of success in a profession that I feel is overloaded and undervalued.

The panel started with a question about leadership challenges. For me it is staff retention but also trying to balance the commercial pressures, regulatory requirements and staff wellbeing whilst providing a quality and professional service to clients. Those on panel agreed that trying to improve turnaround times (as transactions from instruction to completion are taking longer than ever!) whilst dealing with all the red tape and managing client expectations is a challenge.

The discussion then moved onto what would be the three non-negotiables if you started from scratch. For me it's the three C's (well four if you include communication) which are caseloads, culture and case management systems. Caseloads for some are high and there is a "less is more" thought that if a conveyancer has lesser cases, they provide a better service, turn the case round quicker and happier staff as not overloaded and being reactive, they can be more proactive and feel that they have delivered an excellent service to clients!

Culture (the right type!) is important as it helps to attract and retain talent, drives performances and aligns the brand of the firm. Culture covers various things, but I think it is important to have an approachable line manager and work for a firm that wants to support their staff. It saddens me to hear there are firms where people cannot admit they have made a mistake, ask for help and/or challenge processes without fear. People need to feel psychological safety as without this performance is fragile and recruitment is a constant turning table which is not good for anyone. Staff retention is harder than ever especially with less experience in the profession which is why more firms are looking to grow and train their conveyancers.

A good case management system (and fine tuned processes and procedures) is a must as they assist not only with some risk factors they help efficiencies. There is more stress from poor systems and processes, not the law.

To me the three C's aren't nice to haves, they're a necessity which allow performance and wellbeing to coexist rather than compete.

Next, we discussed things that have worked previously, what has failed and what we would do differently next time. For me communication is at the top of the list but also explaining "why" changes are being made, not just they're happening! I think as leaders' if things are not working then we need to acknowledge this sooner rather than later and make the necessary changes. We need to listen to feedback from the teams and they cannot think that speaking out is a criticism or them not taking initiative as it could expose them to blame if there are problems.

Lastly, we discussed measuring success in 2026 but not using billing or completions as a metric. For me it is staff retention, for the reasons mentioned above.

The day was fantastic from start to finish and great to see people I have met over the years in the industry and also meet lots of new people too. The hosts for the day were Laura Cartwright and Tom Parkinson who did an amazing job. Well done again to Kate and her amazing team!

Tammy Jones
Legal Director, Napthens

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LEGALTECHTALK

If you've never been to LegalTechTalk before, it is safe to say this is not your typical legal conference.

From the moment attendees arrived, it was clear this year's event was designed to be an experience rather than simply another series of presentations. Each stage had its own identity and theme, ranging from rainforest-inspired spaces to woodland and frost-themed environments, all brought to life with impressive decor and theatrical production. Dancers, performers and immersive staging created an atmosphere more akin to a festival than a legal technology conference.

Opening the event, Bradley Collins spoke about transformation and the challenge facing the legal sector: how do we create meaningful impact at scale? With over 300 speakers and ambitions to expand further into the United States, the message was clear. LegalTechTalk is clearly aiming to drive positive change across the legal profession.

A keynote session from John Saiz, former Chief Technologist at NASA, reflected on the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster. While the Columbia disaster provided the backdrop, the real focus was culture. The investigation identified a number of organisational failures, including the normalisation of deviance, excessive reliance on group consensus, communication barriers and decision-making driven by time pressures.

The Columbia Accident Investigation Board found that a "can do" culture, combined with organisational structures that made it difficult for concerns to be escalated effectively, played a significant role in what went wrong. Whilst the lessons came from the aerospace industry, they felt remarkably relevant to legal professionals navigating rapid technological change.

Perhaps the most important lesson was that innovation is not simply about technology. NASA's response included investment in leadership programmes, mentoring, benchmarking and creating spaces for open innovation. His message resonated throughout the conference: "Don't forget the people."

That theme appeared repeatedly during discussions around artificial intelligence.

Max Junestrand, CEO of Legora, declared that "Legal AI is dead", arguing that the conversation should move beyond AI as a standalone concept and towards autonomy, productivity and business transformation. Rather than viewing AI as a replacement for lawyers, speakers consistently framed it as a tool to enhance human capability.

Several sessions focused on AI agents and automation. While enthusiasm was high, speakers emphasised that agents are only as effective as the data, context and guardrails provided to them. Sarvarth Misra, Co-Founder and CEO of LEAH, delivered one of the most memorable observations of the conference: "A bad process will always be a bad process." Adding AI to inefficient workflows is unlikely to solve underlying problems. Instead, firms should rethink how work is delivered before introducing new technology.

Another interesting theme was how firms can prepare future lawyers for an AI-enabled profession. Alison Malin Zoellner, Group General Counsel at Dentsu Group, highlighted reverse mentoring initiatives where junior lawyers are helping senior colleagues understand emerging technologies while continuing to receive the training and development they need.

Cost was another recurring theme. Several speakers cautioned against assuming AI is always the most efficient solution. Firms need to balance token consumption, implementation costs and internal resource requirements against actual time savings and business benefits.

One panel challenged a question frequently heard across the profession: "What is your AI strategy?" The consensus was that firms should focus on solving business problems rather than adopting technology for its own sake. As one speaker put it, nobody asks what your hammer strategy is when building a house.

Beyond the conference stages, the exhibition hall was equally impressive. Exhibitors clearly arrived prepared to stand out in a highly competitive environment. From interactive games and competitions to creative giveaways and merchandise, vendors pulled out all the stops to attract delegates to their stands. The competition for delegates' attention was fierce, and exhibitors clearly came with their A-game.

The exhibition floor also provided countless opportunities to network. Whether reconnecting with familiar faces, meeting new contacts or exploring emerging technologies, there was a real buzz throughout the venue. The combination of legal professionals, technology providers and innovators from across the globe created an environment where conversations continued long after the sessions had finished.

Another feature that stood out was the inclusion of the Rest Room, created by Paula Hatfield, founder of Hub of Happy. Designed as a quiet space for delegates needing time away from the noise and activity of the conference floor, it provided an opportunity to decompress, reflect and recharge. For neurodivergent attendees in particular, it was a welcome recognition that inclusion is about more than policies and conversations. It is about creating environments where everyone can participate comfortably.

In many ways, the space perfectly reflected the wider message running throughout the conference. Whilst discussions focused heavily on AI, automation and the future of legal services, the strongest theme was one repeated by speaker after speaker: don't forget the people.

LegalTechTalk 2026 showcased some of the most exciting developments currently shaping the legal sector. The exhibition hall was bigger than ever, the conversations around AI were more mature, and the focus had shifted from experimentation to implementation. Yet the message that resonated most was not about technology at all. It was about culture, trust, leadership and people.

In a conference focused on the future of legal services, that felt like the message that mattered most.

Kayleigh Smale



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