

# Trust, Relevance, & AI in 2026

What Corporate Counsel and Business Leaders  
Want from Law Firm Thought Leadership

SURVEY FINDINGS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

JD SUPRA®

LIMELIGHT

Thought leadership in the form of substantive legal analysis, commentary, and guidance remains one of the most dynamic and engaging ways lawyers and law firms have to demonstrate expertise, build credibility, and connect with prospective clients. But what do the people reading this content (in-house counsel and business leaders) actually want from it?

To answer this question, JD Supra and LIMELIGHT surveyed corporate counsel and C-suite executives about how they discover, evaluate, and engage with law firm content. Nearly 200 participated and provided invaluable insights.

The results paint a clear picture: decision-makers are actively consuming legal insights, but they are selective. They prioritize clarity, relevance, and actionable guidance and they increasingly rely on trusted editorial platforms and curated channels to find it.

The findings that follow highlight how often these audiences engage with legal thought leadership, what they value most, and where law firm thought leaders, marketing, communications, and business development teams have the greatest opportunity to strengthen their content strategies and grow business.



Kenny Gary  
CEO & FOUNDING PARTNER



Aviva Cuyler  
CEO & FOUNDER



# A Highly Engaged Audience

Good news: decision-makers are consuming legal insights regularly and in meaningful volume.

- just over 45% told us that they engage with law firm thought leadership daily
- just over 37% told us that they engage weekly

In total, more than 82% access legal thought leadership at least weekly. This is not casual reading. Many respondents dedicate significant time to staying informed:

- 47% spend up to five hours per week consuming thought leadership
- 38% spend five to ten hours per week
- 13% spend more than ten hours reading weekly

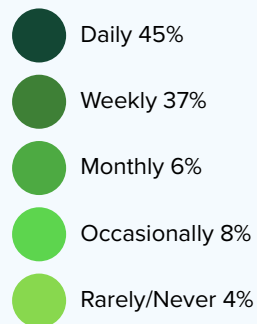
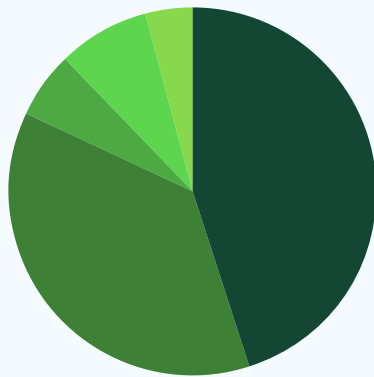
## ⇒ WHAT THIS MEANS

*The challenge for firms is not creating interest. It is earning attention from existing interest within a crowded landscape. As subsequent findings further reinforce, successful content must therefore do three things quickly:*

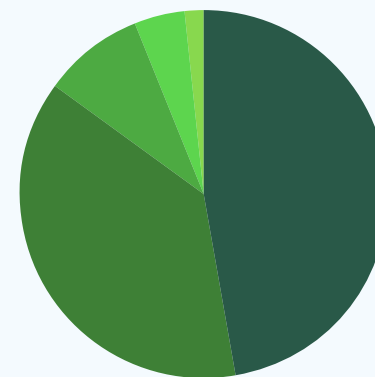
1. Demonstrate relevance to the reader's business.
2. Deliver clear insight.
3. Respect the busy reader's precious time.

# A Daily & Weekly Readership for Law Firms

How often do you engage with legal thought leadership content from law firms (e.g., articles, alerts, podcasts)?



How much time do you spend seeking and/or consuming thought leadership content weekly across all formats (e.g., blog posts, social media, podcasts, videos, publications, etc.)?



# An Ongoing Need for Guidance & Insight

Understanding why decision-makers seek out legal thought leadership is key to building an effective content strategy. The most popular reasons include:

- need for industry insights and updates (58%)
- guidance from alerts and legal analysis around breaking news (55%)
- answers to specific legal questions (46%)
- strategic counsel related to their business (45%)

## ⇒ WHAT THIS MEANS

These findings show that: *law firm thought leadership is valued most when it helps readers understand what is happening right now, in their specific market/business context, and what they should do about it next.*

1. Content that merely summarizes legal developments without industry focus, interpretation, or implications is less likely to stand out.
2. Given the growing understanding of how LLMs favor Q&A formatting, and the findings of this survey, consider framing your thought leadership as specific answers to legal questions.

# “Why does this matter to me?”

Respondents were clear about what separates truly relevant content from the rest. The most valuable legal thought leadership does three things:

- helps assess legal risk or compliance (56%)
- provides actionable takeaways (52%)
- explains how an issue affects the reader’s company or industry (52%)

Readers tell us that they also value:

- practical examples and case-based insights (45%)
- data that supports conclusions (44%)
- awareness of emerging issues they may not yet be tracking (43%)

## ⇒ WHAT THIS MEANS

The strongest thought leadership bridges the gap between law and business strategy.

Rather than focusing solely on legal developments, effective content answers the question decision-makers care about most: *how does the law impact me (and what can I do about it next)?*

# On Fostering Trust & Relevance

Respondents identified several factors that strongly influence whether they trust a firm's thought leadership, including these top drivers:

- clarity of insight and writing (75%)
- depth of knowledge about their particular sector (62%)
- transparency and acknowledgment of complexity (56%)

Notably, survey results show that meaningful thought leadership itself is one of the most powerful trust-building signals.

When asked what most deepens trust in a firm's capabilities, respondents cited:

- meaningful, relevant thought leadership (67%)
- case studies or real-world examples (60%)
- peer recommendations (56%)

By comparison, awards and rankings were selected by only 15%.

## ⇒ WHAT THIS MEANS

These findings reinforce what law firm clients and prospects have been articulating for years, whenever asked: "Know my business."

Focus your thought leadership on your readers' sector-specific business challenges and complexities, not general legal theory.

# Trust & Relevance: What to Avoid

While there is clear demand for law firm thought leadership, survey respondents also pointed to several recurring frustrations, including content that...

- feels self-promotional (43%)
- doesn't answer questions quickly (41%)
- is too long or unfocused (35%)
- repeats information already available elsewhere (30%)

Additionally, 20% of respondents find registration and paywalls (aka “gated content”) to be a challenge when engaging with legal thought leadership. They also expressed frustration with:

- excessive legal theory without practical guidance
- key insights buried deep within the text
- legalese that cannot easily be shared internally

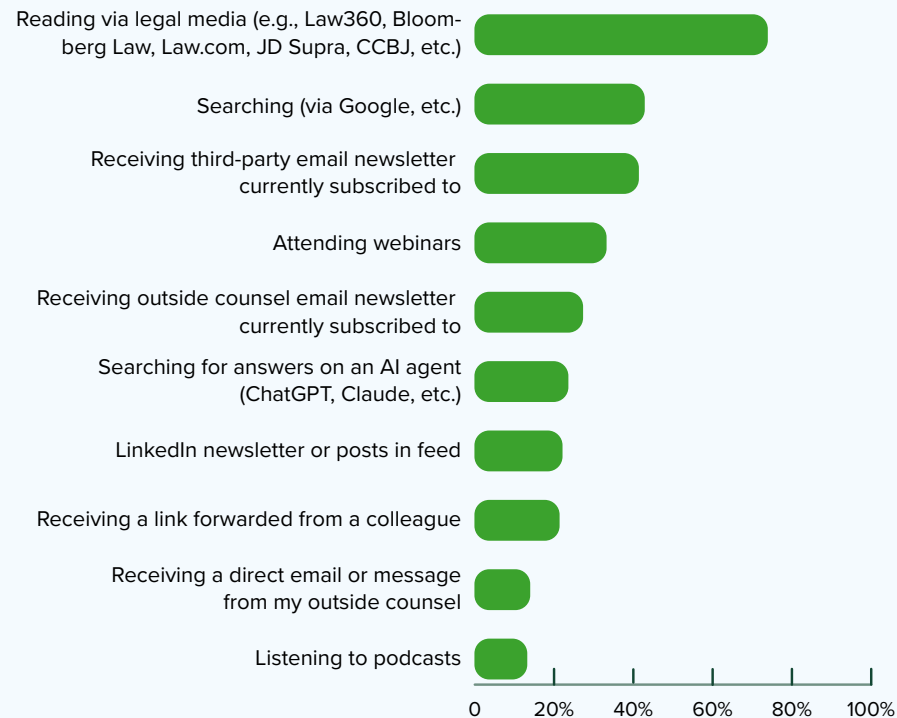
## ⇒ WHAT THIS MEANS

Thought leadership that prioritizes clarity, structure, and practical relevance will outperform dense or academic writing.

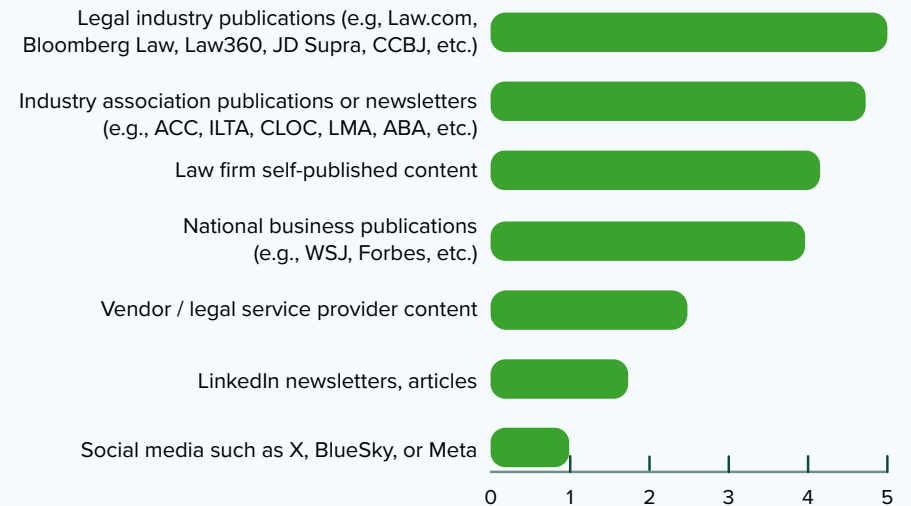
1. Make your content easily available to readers (no gates/roadblocks).
2. Don't bury the lede.
3. Write in plain language that enables in-house lawyers to share your insights internally with decision makers who can't/won't translate legalese.

# Where to Be Visible

When you find valuable thought leadership content that resonates, what is the behavior that best describes how you found it?



Please rank your perceived trust of content on a scale of 1–5. (5 being most trusted; 1 being least trusted)



# Where to Be Visible

Respondents most commonly discover valuable law firm thought leadership through:

- legal industry media and editorial platforms (71%)
- search engines (43%)
- third-party email newsletters (41%)
- webinars (33%)

In comparison:

- outside counsel newsletters were selected by 27%
- LinkedIn posts by 22%
- AI tools by 24%

These results highlight how trusted platforms, editorially curated legal media, and industry newsletters play a central role in helping decision-makers discover and monitor useful insights.

## ⇒ WHAT THIS MEANS

Implement a proactive media relations and communications strategy to ensure trusted placement and ongoing, third-party visibility.

Here is where media strategy meets AI visibility. *Not only do target readers consider media platforms as authoritative sources of legal insight, LLMs do as well.*

# Preferable Formats & Media

Respondents overwhelmingly favor written analysis and structured educational formats, including:

- client alerts and blog posts (74%)
- webinars or CLE programs (65%)
- long-form white papers or reports (49%)

In contrast to:

- podcasts (28%)
- overly long, promotional video content (19%)
- social media posts (15%)

## ⇒ WHAT THIS MEANS

For marketers and content strategists, one takeaway is clear: *written analysis remains the foundation of effective legal thought leadership.*

If your firm is not yet producing webinars, you may be missing out on a key opportunity for connecting with clients and prospects.

# How Thought Leadership Influences Hiring Decisions

One significant finding of this research: the role thought leadership plays in shaping hiring decisions.

The survey shows that legal insight is not just educational.

**Sixty-one percent of respondents tell us that thought leadership has impacted their decision to hire a law firm:**

- 27% have hired a law firm because of its thought leadership
- 34% say thought leadership helped a firm stand out compared with competitors

- 72% save the content for future reference
- 69% subscribe to receive more updates from the source of insights
- 60% forward it to colleagues
- 25% add the firm to a shortlist for future matters

*(continued)*

## How Thought Leadership Influences Hiring Decisions (*continued*)

Even when a reader does not immediately contact a firm, valuable insight often leads to:

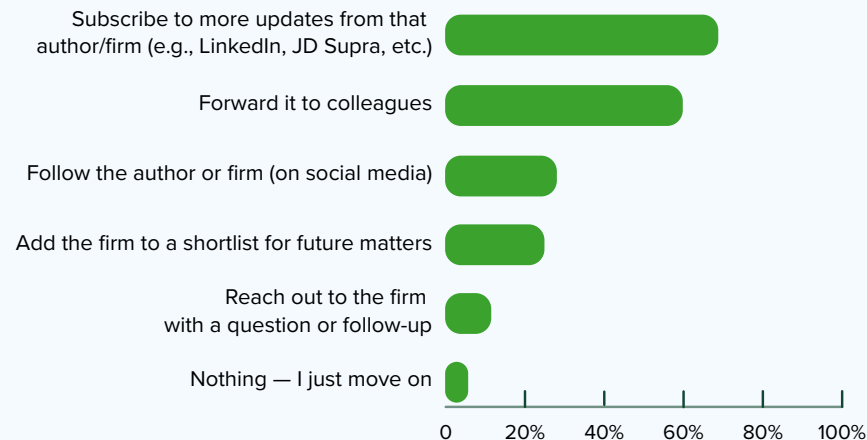
- broader internal circulation
- increased familiarity with the author and firm brand
- future consideration for legal work

### ⇒ WHAT THIS MEANS

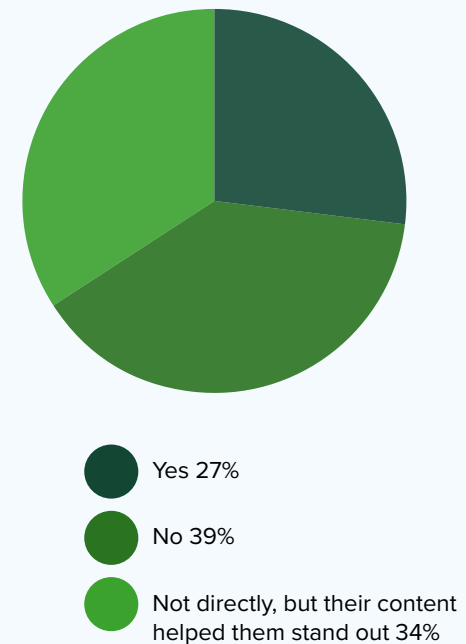
1. Publish consistently on topics relevant to clients' industries.
2. Make it easy for readers to follow authors and subscribe to updates.
3. Structure/write content so it can easily be shared internally.

# Thought Leadership & BD Opportunities

If you find a law firm's thought leadership content especially helpful, what are you most likely to do next?



Have you ever hired or added a new law firm to your consideration set because of their thought leadership content?



# On Artificial Intelligence and Questions of Trust & Visibility

As AI tools rapidly reshape the business landscape, the survey explored two related questions:

1. Do decision-makers trust law firm content created with generative AI?
2. Are readers using AI platforms instead of traditional search engines?

The results show a cautious attitude toward AI-generated legal insight:

- 40% of readers are skeptical of AI-generated legal content
- 18% prefer content written entirely by humans
- 27% are comfortable with AI-supported content if it is disclosed

These findings suggest that while AI can support drafting and research, readers still expect human expertise and accountability behind legal analysis.

When respondents use AI platforms to research legal or business questions, *they rarely treat the answer as final*. Instead, they treat it as the beginning of a deeper investigative process:

- 69% use AI responses as a starting point for deeper research
- 49% click through to source materials
- 36% review citations provided by the AI

(continued)

## Artificial Intelligence: Trust and Visibility (*continued*)

Despite the rise of AI platforms, traditional search engines remain a dominant discovery channel today:

- 68% are more likely to engage with content appearing in traditional search results
- 32% are more likely to engage with content surfaced by AI tools

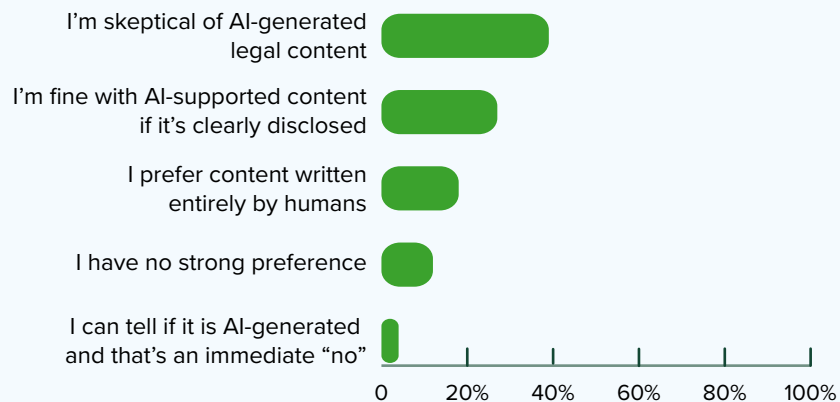
### ⇒ WHAT THIS MEANS

When decision-makers do not fully trust a longform AI-generated search result (versus a search engine listing), they often verify the underlying sources.

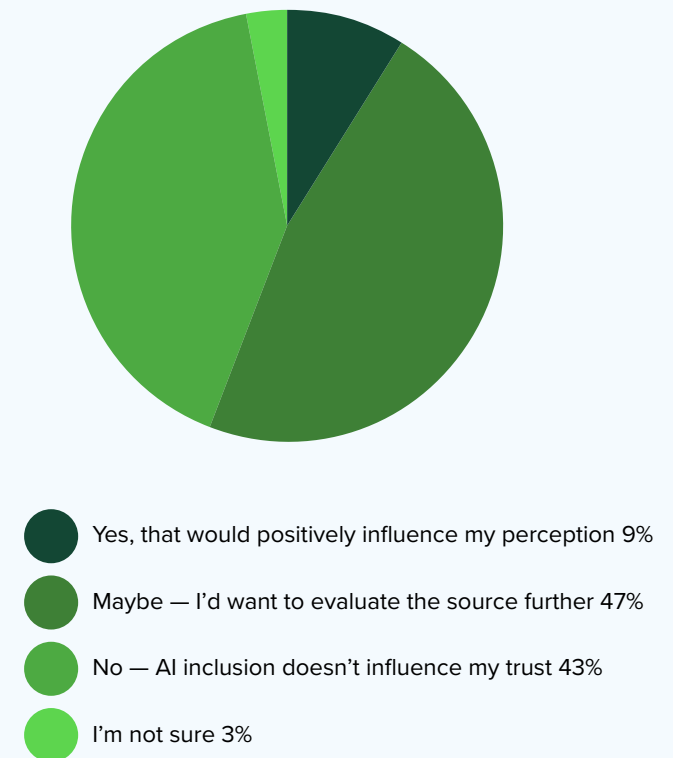
For law firms, this means strong thought leadership can still receive direct attribution and visibility when it is cited within AI responses. It happens in the verification of sources. Although the AI landscape is rapidly changing, these early findings suggest a positive future for law firm content in public LLMs and AI platforms, in which prospective clients and target readers are more inclined to follow insights back to their branded source.

# Artificial Intelligence, Trust, and Visibility

How do you feel about law firm thought leadership content generated (in part) by AI?

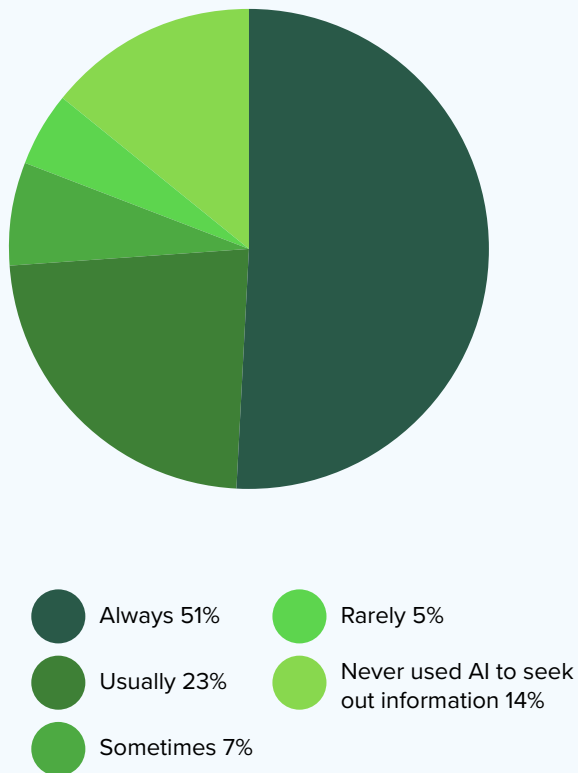


If an AI platform like ChatGPT recommended a firm's legal alert or blog post as part of its answer, would you be more likely to trust the firm's expertise?



# Artificial Intelligence, Trust, and Visibility

When finding content via AI agents, how often do you check the source of what you're reading?



When you use an AI platform (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini) to answer a legal or business question, what do you typically do with the response?



# Strategic Opportunities

The findings in this report surface several clear opportunities for law firms seeking to strengthen their thought leadership programs, including:

## Focus on actionable insights

Readers place strong value on content that helps assess legal risk, explains implications for their industry/sector, and provides practical next steps. In other words, thought leadership that translates legal developments into business guidance will resonate most strongly.

## Leverage trusted editorial platforms

Legal media and curated newsletters are among the most effective discovery channels for legal insights. Publishing through respected platforms can help firms reach readers who may not yet follow them directly.

## Expand your webinar offerings

Webinars rank among the most preferred content formats for legal insight (second only to written text). Firms that invest in educational webinars reach audiences actively seeking deeper guidance.

## Optimize content for sharing

...and relationship building. Readers frequently save content, forward it internally, subscribe to follow trusted authors. Clear structure, concise writing, and practical takeaways increase the likelihood that content will circulate within organizations.

## Prepare for AI-driven discovery

As AI tools become part of the research process, law firms should ensure their content is visible on authoritative media platforms and structured so it can be easily referenced and cited.

# Findings, Feedback, First Takes

A selection of early responses, insights, and action items from friends and colleagues:

## ON CLARITY & RELEVANCE

Decision-makers aren't passive consumers of legal insight — they're active, discerning, and time-constrained. This report confirms what the best legal communicators already know: earn attention with clarity, keep it with relevance—and the business will follow.

— ERIC GREENBERG, EVP & GENERAL COUNSEL,  
COX MEDIA GROUP

Whenever you get a piece of content from a lawyer, give it what I think of as the *flip it* test. Ask, “Could the recipient send this to their boss and have their boss immediately understand the implications based on the clarity of the writing alone (even if the boss is not a lawyer)?” If not, add a short *What you should know* section at the top summarizing the impact with the recipient's supervisor in mind.

— JULIA BENNETT, CHIEF MARKETING & BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, DAVIS WRIGHT TREMAINE LLP

## ON INDUSTRY & SECTOR FOCUS

The 62% of readers who trust firms that know their specific-sector business challenges isn't just a data point. Recently, an attorney landed a client by writing specifically about the regulations affecting their business and used the blog posts to stay top of mind.

— SHEENIKA GANDHI, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,  
GREENBERG GLUSKER LLP

## ON READER-DRIVEN CONTENT STRATEGY

Generating thought leadership without understating how it's being consumed is like shouting into an empty void. Using this data to know what to write, how to write it, and where to place it is what truly separates content in a crowded marketplace of ideas.

— M. ASHRAF LAKHANI, CHIEF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING OFFICER, PORTER HEDGES LLP

Listening intently for that voice of the client, this report underscores that GCs are not only receptive to but also hungry for our content – but only when it helps them to do their jobs more effectively and can be digested in the modes they value most. Using this data to guide our lawyers to understand not only the classic ways of communicating but also highlighting the point in the decision-making process during which AI-generated content and search results are prioritized (and fact checked) is incredibly helpful for legal marketing leaders in shaping productive and scalable writing habits firmwide.

— JENNA SCHIAPPACASSE, MANAGING DIRECTOR, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING, WINSTON & STRAWN

## ON ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

Our clients' time is valuable which leads them to be increasingly selective about the insights they read. We are committed to delivering thought leadership that is clear, actionable, and directly relevant to their industries, not just legal updates for the sake of it. This report gives our client development team the data and roadmap they need to turn great content into a genuine value add and to build the kind of trust that makes us a long-term partner, not just outside counsel.

— ERIN MESZAROS, GLOBAL CLIENT DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, EVERSHEDS SUTHERLAND

Before creating content strategy for my teams and individual attorneys, we will share these insights to ensure their writing is drafted and shared in a way that is more valuable to our clients and potential clients. For my attorneys who don't take the time to share their insights (yet), the data in this survey provides compelling evidence that there is great value in doing so.

— CYNTHIA VOTH, CHIEF CLIENT OFFICER, MILLER NASH LLP

## About JD Supra

JD Supra delivers need-to-know legal and business content to readers in all industries in daily email digests, via proprietary social feeds, on mobile platforms, to partner websites, and as news across the web. Through the innovative use of technology and curated audiences, JD Supra connects over 75,000 professionals writing on important topics to C-suite executives, in-house counsel, and media members concerned with legal, regulatory, and compliance matters impacting business today. JD Supra also provides firms with competitive insights and market intelligence derived from the thousands of articles being read daily across the platform.

Learn more: [info@jdsupra.com](mailto:info@jdsupra.com) | [jdsupra.com](https://jdsupra.com)

## About LIMELIGHT

Based in New York, LIMELIGHT offers a full range of growth communications services to the legal, technology, and professional services sectors, including strategic planning, branding, messaging, media relations, crisis communications, litigation PR, content development, survey research, digital marketing, and creative services. The agency specializes in AI visibility, generative engine optimization (GEO), and thought leadership, building the authoritative presence needed to drive business development in an AI-first world. LIMELIGHT is the only agency in the legal sector with an exclusive marketing partnership with Dow Jones and The Wall Street Journal.

Learn more: [stepinto@limelightgrowth.com](mailto:stepinto@limelightgrowth.com) | [limelightgrowth.com](https://limelightgrowth.com)

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