What AI Adoption Looks Like in Solo, Small, and Mid-Sized Law Firms

Written by Damien Riehl

The proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) in the legal industry is undeniable. And, when we explore data on AI adoption and use in law firms of different sizes, distinct patterns begin to emerge that can provide true guidance on the specific challenges and opportunities presented by AI. After all, every law firm is different, and as the structure and makeup of firms change, so too do the circumstances for those who work in them.

To bring all this data together, every year, we publish *Legal Trends Report*data examining key trends shaping solo, small, and mid-sized law firms. In doing so, we deliver tailored data and insights to help firms of every size navigate industry shifts and position themselves for long-term success.

In this blog, we'll compare data from our reports on AI adoption to gain a clearer sense of how AI use differs among these segments.

Want the full picture? Dive into the latest Legal Trends Report for in-depth insights on the state of the legal profession—and where it's headed.

Where does the *Legal Trends Report* data come from?

The data referenced in this blog post draws on Clio's aggregated, anonymized data from tens of thousands of U.S. legal professionals, surveys of over 2,400 legal professionals (including Clio customers), and a nationally representative survey of 1,003 U.S. adults to provide insight into current legal practice and strategies for growth.

Who's leading in law firm AI adoption?

Even though mid-sized firms have traditionally been slower to adopt technology than smaller firms, they are now taking the lead on AI adoption in the legal industry. In other words, we're seeing a remarkable industry first in which mid-sized firms are outpacing smaller firms embracing technological advancements.

On the other hand, solo and small firms, which have traditionally led the way in technological adoption, are significantly less likely to have adopted AI widely or universally. And, while a higher proportion of solo and small firms report adopting AI in a minimal capacity, they are much less likely than mid-sized firms to adopt AI in a more involved capacity and are more likely to have not adopted AI at all.

So, why are mid-sized firms outpacing solo and small firms in AI adoption? It likely comes down to resourcing.

With the resources to support implementation—like larger budgets and dedicated IT teams—many mid-sized firms are well-positioned to explore AI-powered tools across a range of practice areas and business functions. While many solo and small firms are adopting AI in a minimal capacity, they may simply lack the resources to integrate AI more comprehensively into their practices.

One thing to keep in mind: Just because solo and small law firms aren't adopting AI now doesn't mean that they don't plan to in the future. Over four in five legal professionals in firms of *all sizes* believe that AI use will increase in the legal industry over the next year, suggesting that we'll likely see more AI integration in solo and small firms in the near future.

Struggling to adopt AI in your practice? Consider using an AI tool like Manage AI, which is built directly into Clio's case management software, allowing you to get the benefits of AI with minimal effort.

What AI tools are solo, small, and mid-sized firms using?

There are distinct differences in the types of AI tools that solo, small, and mid-sized firms use in their day-to-day work.

Generally speaking, solo and small firms are more likely to prioritize legal research platforms and generic non-legal AI tools (like ChatGPT) instead of AI tools that perform more specific functions. It may be that the former are presently more accessible and affordable for smaller firms, or provide a greater return on investment than more niche tools.

Mid-sized firms, on the other hand, are not only adopting AI faster—they're also integrating AI across multiple types of tasks at a much higher rate than solo and small firms. Many see AI not just as a time-saver, but as a way to grow their business, enhance client engagement, and scale their operations holistically.

Check out Clio's AI for legal research, Clio Work.

What AI benefits matter most to solo, small, and mid-sized firms?

When asked about the benefits of AI, legal professionals cite time savings and increased efficiency as top motivators for adoption. However, lawyers in solo and small firms are much more likely to mention these benefits than mid-sized firms. On the other hand, lawyers in mid-sized firms are more likely to say that AI improves the quality of their work, helps manage caseloads more productively, and enhances collaboration.

These results likely point to the unique needs of different firms. Namely, solo and small firm lawyers often juggle many tasks themselves due to limited resources. For these firms, time savings and efficiency are clear benefits of AI given its potential to take on routine administrative tasks and free up time.

Mid-sized firms, on the other hand, will naturally have larger teams, more support staff, and established workflows. Thus, their pain points usually have less to do with time-saving, and more to do with optimizing how their team works together.

Nevertheless, the perceived benefits of AI among solo, small, and mid-sized firms lead to the same conclusion: law firms gravitate toward AI. These tools are becoming a vital part of legal practice and help firms deliver better service while doing more with less.

What does this data mean for my law firm?

It's clear that there is no "one size fits all" approach to AI adoption in law firms. And, while it's clear that all firms recognize the value of AI, their motivations, resources, and use cases differ in meaningful ways.

So, what should your firm take away from this data?

	IF YOU'RE A MID-SIZED LAW FIRM:
Consider starting small: Given your comparatively-limited resources, solo and small firms may wish to start by integrating affordable, general-purpose AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) or AI tools embedded in platforms they already use (e.g., Manage AI). This minimizes the implementation burden while delivering immediate time-saving benefits.	Use AI to optimize team collaboration and workflow integration: With larger teams and existing operational infrastructure, mid-sized firms can go beyond simple automation. Explore AI tools that enhance collaboration (e.g., document review, task management, and client communication tools) across practice areas.
Focus on use cases that impact time and efficiency: Since time savings and efficiency are core needs for solo and small firms, prioritize tools that automate or streamline routine administrative work, such as document drafting, scheduling, intake, or research. These can help you free up capacity without completely overhauling your processes.	Leverage AI as a strategic growth enabler: Mid-sized firms should view AI not just as a time saver, but as a business accelerator. Use it to scale operations, improve the quality of service, and unlock new service models—particularly those requiring high efficiency or quick turnaround.
Plan for future AI adoption: Even if you're not in a position to adopt AI now, keeping informed and building an AI adoption roadmap will be crucial. AI tools will inevitably become more accessible over time, and firms that prepare early will gain a competitive edge.	Invest in internal AI competency: To maintain their early lead, mid-sized firms should consider formalizing AI evaluation and training processes. Dedicated IT or innovation teams can experiment with and assess new tools to stay ahead of competitors and industry trends.

Conclusion

As AI continues to reshape the legal landscape, understanding how adoption varies by firm size is key for making smart, strategic decisions. Whether you're navigating resource limitations as a solo or small firm, or exploring how to scale operations in a mid-sized firm, refer to the data and suggestions mentioned above on how you can leverage AI in ways that align with your firm's unique needs.

Curious about what's next? Download the latest Legal Trends Report and uncover the key trends driving change in the legal industry.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.