

NETWEBMEDIA AI SERIES · 14 INDUSTRIES

AI and Law Firms

Solo and small firms: intake, drafting, research, marketing and billing with AI — inside the ethics rules and without a fabricated citation.

SOLO PRACTITIONERS

SMALL FIRMS

IMMIGRATION

FAMILY

PERSONAL INJURY

BUSINESS LAW

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Book 13 of 14 · netwebmedia.com

Photo: Vitaly Gariev / Unsplash

About this series

Fourteen books, one question: what does AI actually change for a business like yours? Each book is written for one industry — its customers, its tools, its rules — so you can act on it this month, not someday. Buy one, or get all fourteen in the bundle.

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| 2. AI and Healthcare & Wellness | 9. AI and Events & Weddings |
| 3. AI and Hospitality & Tourism | 10. AI and Wine & Agriculture |
| 4. AI and Restaurants & Cafés | 11. AI and Beauty & Wellness |
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Every statistic in this book carries a numbered reference to a named, dated source in the Sources section. Benchmarks are medians or averages from other businesses as published by those sources — not predictions of your results.

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Start here

This book is for the people who actually run small law firms: the solo practitioner doing family law and estate plans from a two-room office, the three-partner personal-injury firm with one intake coordinator, the immigration lawyer with a paralegal and a phone that rings in two languages, the business lawyer who drafts contracts at night because the day went to client calls. It is also for the businesses that serve them: legal marketing agencies, virtual receptionists, paralegal and document-review services. If you practice law in a firm of one to twenty lawyers and want to know what AI changes for a business your size, this is written for you.

It is not a book about the future of the profession. It is a book about the next thirty days. Every chapter ends in something you can do this week, and every number comes from a named, dated source you can check in the Sources section.

Here is what you get. Chapter 1 shows where your peers already are, with the adoption data from Clio, the ABA, Thomson Reuters and LexisNexis. Chapter 2 explains, in plain English, the five jobs AI can do in a law firm and the ones it cannot. Chapter 3 is about your clients: how they now ask ChatGPT and Google's AI answers before they ever call a lawyer. Chapter 4 ranks the ten use cases that pay back fastest. Chapter 5 gives you a tool stack with real September 2026 prices, in three budgets. Chapter 6 covers the rules: ABA Formal Opinion 512, confidentiality, hallucinated citations, state bar advertising rules and Chile's new data-protection regime. Chapter 7 is the 30-day plan. Chapter 8 is for readers in Chile and the rest of Latin America.

You can read it front to back in about forty minutes. If you are short on time, read Chapter 4 and Chapter 7 and come back for the rest.

● Law firms and AI in 2026 — four numbers to know

79%

of US legal professionals use AI in their firms (2025)

26%

of law firms never answered a web-form lead within seven days

78%

of legal searches on Google now trigger an AI Overview

811

court decisions worldwide involving AI-hallucinated citations by lawyers

Sources: Clio, 2025 (vendor survey); Hennessey Digital, 2025/2026; 5W Public Relations / Semrush, 2026; Damien Charlotin, 2026

The pattern those four numbers describe is the whole story of this book. Almost every lawyer uses AI. A quarter of firms still do not answer. Clients now meet an AI answer before they meet you. And more than eight hundred lawyers have been named in court decisions for filing citations a model invented.

The firm that uses AI carefully, to be faster and more reliable rather than to replace judgment, has an advantage that is getting bigger, not smaller.

1. Why AI matters for law firms now

A growing profession competing for the same clients

There are more lawyers than ever. The US had 1,374,720 active lawyers in 2025, up 1.38% from 1,355,963 the year before, the first significant rise since 2020 and a 5.6% increase over ten years.¹ More lawyers chasing the same matters means the small firm that responds faster and delivers more predictably wins the referral.

And a small firm is a small business. Clio's 2025 survey of solo and small firms found that 59% name referrals as their top lead source, 79% of solos and 81% of small firms run on cloud practice-management software, and 76% and 72% take online payments. Software is only about 2% of a small firm's expenses (1% for solos), while staff salaries are 30% and marketing is 9% for solos and 5% for small firms.² Smokeball's panel agrees: 85% of small firms cite referrals as their primary growth channel and 43% call digital marketing key; cybersecurity incidents doubled from 5% to 10% of firms in a year.³

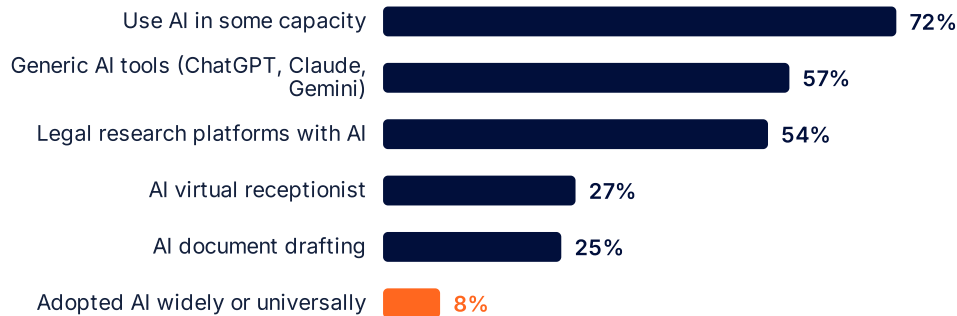
Pricing is shifting under your feet, too. 75% of solos and 65% of small firms now use flat fees for at least some work, while 84% still bill hourly; 71% of clients prefer fixed or flat fees.²⁶ That matters for AI because a task that took four billable hours and now takes one is a loss under the hourly model and a margin gain under a flat fee.

Where your peers are

Adoption is no longer the question. Clio's 2025 Legal Trends Report, from a sample of 1,702 US legal professionals, found 79% using AI in their firms and 82% expecting to use it more in the next twelve months. Nearly half use generic tools (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity); 40% use legal-specific AI, down from 58% in 2024 as the general assistants displaced them.⁵

In solo and small firms the picture is "everyone dabbles, almost nobody has committed." 72% of solos and 67% of small-firm professionals use AI in some capacity, but only 8% of solos and 4% of small firms have adopted it widely. The top tools are generic non-legal AI (57% of solos, 54% of small firms), legal research platforms (54% and 56%), virtual receptionists (27% and 16%) and document drafting (25% and 30%).²

● Solo lawyers and AI — how they use it (Clio, 2025)



Source: Clio, 2025 Legal Trends for Solo and Small Law Firms, 2025 (vendor survey)

Notice the last bar. Seventy-two percent use AI and 8% use it widely. Almost everyone is using AI to write; almost nobody has built it into how the firm answers, intakes, bills and reports. That gap is what this book is built around.

The ABA's own survey is more conservative and worth knowing when a colleague says "nobody real is doing this." Its 2024 Legal Technology Survey, published in 2025, found 30% of lawyers using AI (18% of solos, 46% at firms of 100 or more); 13% called AI "mainstream," up from 4% in 2023, and 45% expected it to be within three years. Among hesitant lawyers, 75% cited accuracy and hallucination worries.⁹ Smokeball's small-firm panel sits in between: 53% had integrated AI by 2025 versus 27% in 2023, and 53% have ethical concerns.³

The impact gap

Using AI and getting results from it are different things. By 2026 adoption reached 71% of solos and 75% of small firms, but fewer than a third (32% of solos and 31% of small firms) had increased revenue with AI, against nearly 60% of enterprise firms. 86% of solos and 78% of small firms made no pricing changes at all (51% of mid-sized and 46% of enterprise firms). 57% of solos and 55% of small firms have no AI policy, and time is the biggest hurdle for 27% of solos and 33% of small firms.⁶⁷