The 2021 Wolters Kluwer Biglaw Decision-Makers Survey

How top lawyers and executives are driving profits through a focus on tech.

Famously a hidebound group, lawyers have traditionally been slow to adopt new business models — and even slower to bring the latest technology onboard.

That, of course, changed in the spring of 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic mandated a shift to remote work, along with an overhaul of law firms' operations and tech capabilities.

Suddenly, varied "work from anywhere" technologies became a critical component of business continuity plans. Lawyers accustomed to marking up paper printouts traded in their manila folders for videoconference lighting, while Biglaw's IT departments worked around the clock to facilitate the transition.

Even amid this upheaval, large law firms grew their profits substantially. And while there can be no silver lining to a global pandemic, the industry has largely risen to the occasion, taking new steps that drive efficiency and profits.

Now, as law firms prepare for a post-pandemic future, it's becoming increasingly clear that technology adoption is the key to maintaining a competitive advantage. This applies to the increasingly cutthroat hunt for top talent, to firms' quest to please their clients and efficiently deliver high-level work, and even to business development and marketing efforts.

In the 2021 Biglaw Decision-Makers Survey, we sought to gain the views of those guiding the industry's largest institutions on the role of technology.

With our friends at Above the Law, we surveyed 70 counsel, partners, and director-level staff at Am Law 100 and midsize firms, bringing together a cohort that's well-positioned to effect forthcoming changes.

The survey's areas of focus include the importance of tech capabilities to varied aspects of a lawyer's professional life, the industry's performance in positioning lawyers for success, and the risks of falling behind.

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Key Findings

The survey repeatedly demonstrates these Biglaw decision-makers' strong belief that effective adoption of technology is critical to the related goals of efficiency and profitability.

This group was even unanimous in one belief: Insufficient leveraging of technology poses moderate or high risks to firm profitability. The overwhelming majority of these respondents also indicated that they're making it a top priority to use technology to simplify manual processes and cut costs.

The dynamic is especially pronounced when discussing efficiency, with over 80% of these respondents saying technology adoption is "of critical importance" to the goal of efficiently delivering client services.
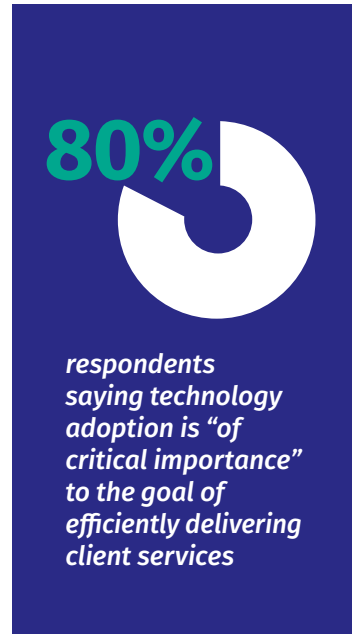
The respondents also cited technology as a key factor in maintaining client satisfaction, driving business performance, developing new clients — and even in considering whether to accept a job offer.

Still, the survey respondents indicated room for substantial growth, with the largest cohort rating their law firm's tech adoption as "fair." Only about half of law firm decision-makers indicated that their firm is using advanced technology for litigation support, and about half said the same regarding document management.

Consistent with this scenario, respondents were most likely to identify database and information systems as the area of technology they would most like to see upgraded at their firm.

At a high level, this survey appears to reveal a certain tension among Biglaw decision-makers: A strong majority believe technology is of high importance in many critical areas, but many also express a lukewarm view of their own firm's current tech adoption.

In this scenario, it appears likely that an increasing focus on technology is on the horizon for law firms.

80%

respondents saying technology adoption is "of critical importance" to the goal of efficiently delivering client services

- Approximately **70%** of Biglaw decision-makers reported that **leveraging technology for their firm's profitability was very or extremely important.**

- They **unanimously** cited insufficient leveraging of technology as a risk factor to profitability, with about **65% rating it a medium risk factor and about 35% rating it a high risk factor.**

- A strong majority (85%) indicate that **using technology to simplify workflow and manual processes to cut costs was a top priority going forward.**

- But only half reported that their firm is using advanced technology for litigation support.

- Just over half reported that their firms have adopted an advanced technology solution for document management.
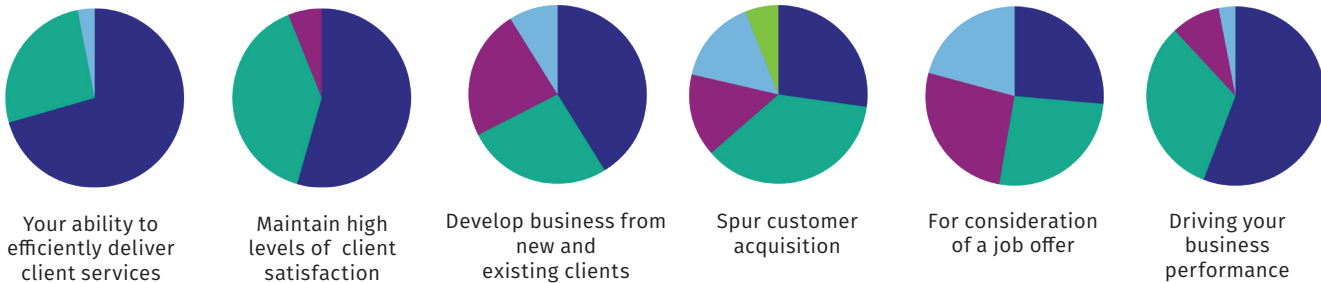

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Responses

How would you rate your current firm on its use of technology?

2.86%
Don't Know

11.43%
Poor

25.71%
Excellent

34.29%
Fair

25.71%
Good
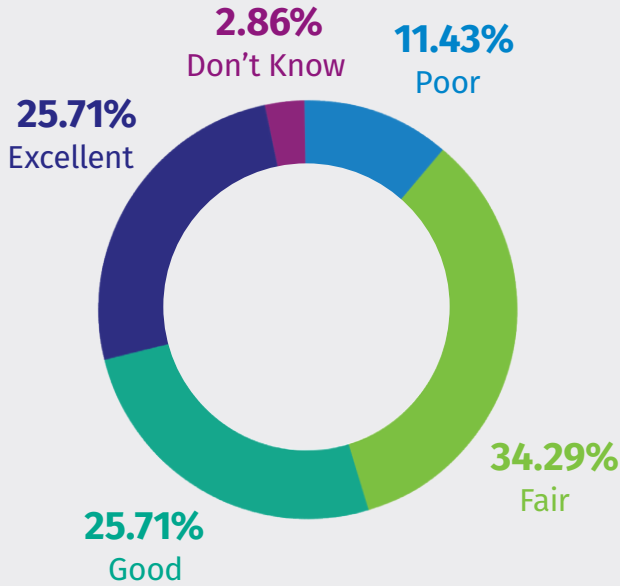
51.42% of law firm decision-makers rated their firm's current use of technology as either **good or excellent**. The largest cohort of respondents (34.29%), similar to overall responses, reported their firm's use as fair.

How important is your firm's technology adoption to:

Your ability to efficiently deliver client services

Maintain high levels of client satisfaction

Develop business from new and existing clients

Spur customer acquisition

For consideration of a job offer

Driving your business performance

- Extremely Important
- Very Important
- Moderately Important
- Slightly Important
- Not at all Important

Technology adoption was deemed **extremely important** by the largest cohort of respondents for almost every presented scenario, with the exceptions of spurring customer acquisition and considerations of a job offer.
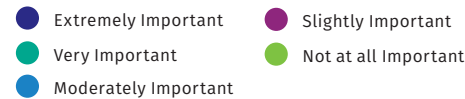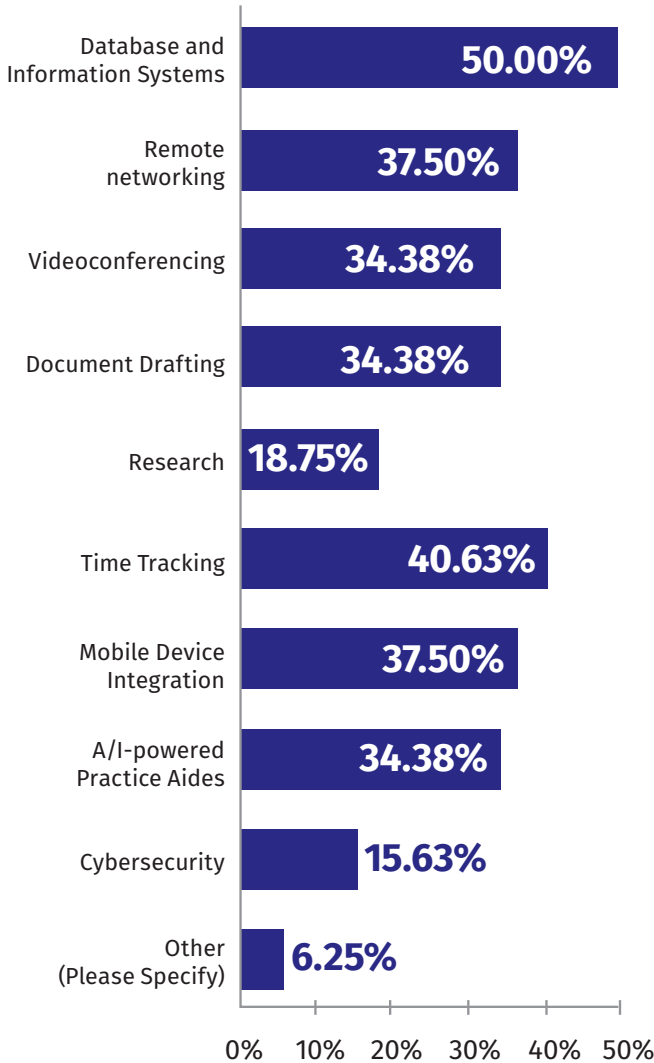
Does your client influence what technology your firm uses on matters?

60.61%
No

39.39%
Yes
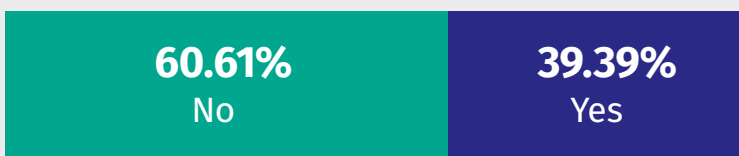
60.61% of law firm decision-makers reported that clients **do not** influence what technology their firm uses on matters.

Responses

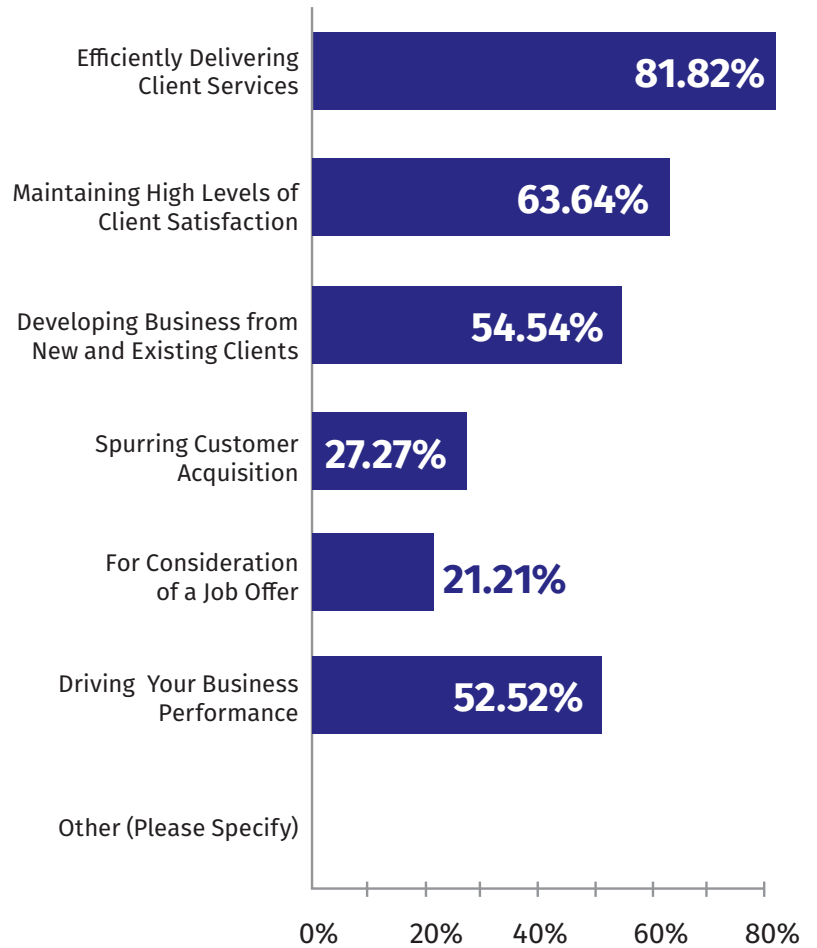## Which areas of tech would you like to see upgraded at your firm? *Multiple selections permitted*

Area	Percentage
Database and Information Systems	50.00%
Remote networking	37.50%
Videoconferencing	34.38%
Document Drafting	34.38%
Research	18.75%
Time Tracking	40.63%
Mobile Device Integration	37.50%
A/I-powered Practice Aides	34.38%
Cybersecurity	15.63%
Other (Please Specify)	6.25%

For which of the following would you say technology adoption is of "critical importance"? *Multiple selections permitted.*

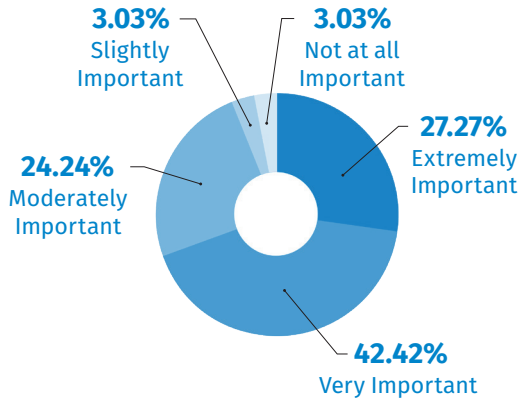| Area	Percentage
Efficiently Delivering Client Services	81.82%
Maintaining High Levels of Client Satisfaction	63.64%
Developing Business from New and Existing Clients	54.54%
Spurring Customer Acquisition	27.27%
For Consideration of a Job Offer	21.21%
Driving Your Business Performance	52.52%
Other (Please Specify)	

Database and information systems (50%) and **time tracking** (40.63%) were identified as the top two areas of tech law firm decision-makers would like to see upgraded at their firm. This was followed by both **mobile device integration** (37.50%) and **remote networking** (37.50%) equally.

Efficiently delivering client services (81.82%), **maintaining high levels of client satisfaction** (63.64%), and **developing business from new and existing clients** (54.55%) were identified as the top three areas for which law firm decision-makers reported that technology adoption is of "critical importance."

How important is leveraging technology for your firm's profitability?

3.03% Slightly Important

3.03% Not at all Important

27.27% Extremely Important

**24.24%** Moderately Important

42.42% Very Important

69.69% of law firm decision-makers reported that leveraging technology for their firm's profitability was **very** or **extremely important**.

How would you rate insufficient leveraging of technology as a risk factor to profitability?

**64.71%** Medium Risk

35.29% High Risk

Biglaw decision-makers unanimously cited insufficient leveraging of technology as a risk factor to profitability, with about 65% rating it a **medium risk factor** and about 35% rating it a **high risk factor**.

Do you expect to use technology to cut firm costs?

62.94% Yes

47.06% No
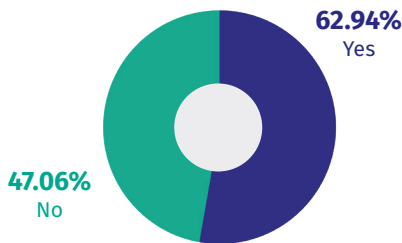
Almost 53% of law firm decision-makers reported that they **do** expect to use technology to cut firm costs.

Is leveraging technology to simplify workflow and manual processes to cut costs a top priority going forward?

84.85% Yes

15.15% No
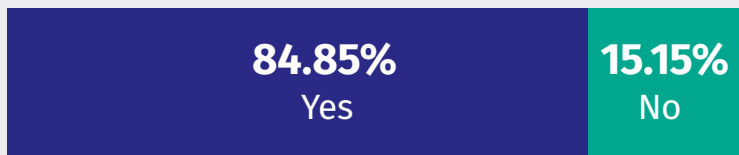
Consistent with overall responses, over 80 percent of law firm decision-makers indicated that leveraging technology to simplify workflow and manual processes to cut costs **is a top priority** going forward.

Is your firm using advanced technology for litigation support?
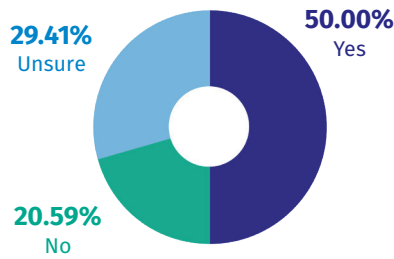
50.00%
Yes

29.41%
Unsure

20.59%
No

Half of law firm decision-makers reported that their firm **is using** advanced technology for litigation support. Similarly to the overall numbers, approximately one-third of law firm decision-makers (29.41%) reported that they were unsure whether their firm was using such tools.

If yes, what types of platforms or technology are you using?
Asked only of those who reported "Yes" when asked if their firm was using advanced technology for litigation support.
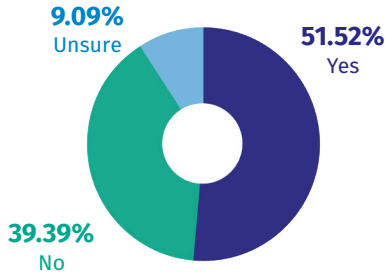
The most common responses included:

Everlaw	ABS SATCOM	LitiSuite/Luminance

Has your firm adopted an advanced technology solution for document management?

9.09%
Unsure

51.52%
Yes

39.39%
No

Over half of law firm decision-makers (51.52%) reported that their firms have adopted an advanced technology solution for document management.

If yes, what types of solutions are you using?
Asked only of those who reported "Yes" when asked if their firm has adopted an advanced technology solution for document management.

iManage and NetDocuments were the most common responses.
- DMS
- Worldox
- iManage
- Workflow, CLM, RPA, Contract Analysis, Document Automation
- Legal pilot France
- CCM ARG
- NetDocuments
- Juro
- Sharepoint

What changes could your CIO, CTO, and other technology professional make to help your firm become more profitable?

Responses from law firm decision-makers included:
- Whiteboard. Teams. Zoom. More tech rollouts and faster
- Automation - but only reliable automation
- More training and insistence on greater technology use
- Web-based remote login and effective document management system
- Get software that works better
- Better understanding of their solutions to facilitate adoption + ROI studies
- Tools implementation + change management
- Move to secure cloud adoption for technology deployment
- Need practice management system and better website
- Expand IT department to be able to investigate and implement more technology quicker. Develop tech committee to investigate, beta test and become champions for tech rollouts
- Better integration of ordinary software (i.e. iManage and change pro)