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The State of CRM at Law Firms

2019 Legal Industry Survey

The latest industry trends on how law firms are using CRM and integrating it into their marketing technology stacks.



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Foreword

By Chris Fritsch, CRM Success Consultant and Founder of CLIENTSFirst Consulting

2019 has been an interesting and chaotic year for CRM providers – and their customers – in the legal industry. While several new systems had success in recent years prying firms away from traditional law firm CRMs, some of those systems have recently been "sunsetted," and others have been purchased by other providers, leaving many law firm customers frustrated and searching for other options.

But while there has been tremendous change in the market, what hasn't changed is the pervasiveness of the people and process issues that continue to plague our industry. This year's Survey findings indicate that law firms (and, in fact, all types of organizations) continue to struggle with CRM utilization and adoption.

According to the Survey, one of the primary reasons for lack of attorney adoption is that the lawyers don't perceive that they get any benefits or value from using CRM. Additionally, in most firms, lawyers are not required to use or held accountable for using the software. Additionally, some attorneys consider the systems to be too time-consuming or complicated to use, while others lack the technical proficiency to utilize them. To further complicate things, many attorneys today are no longer formally managing their contacts in Outlook address books, instead keeping contact information in their phones, email or other disconnected documents or databases.

Because of these issues, firms continue to look for strategies and/or technology to complement CRM adoption – or compensate for the lack of it. Enterprise Relationship Management (ERM) systems continue to grow in popularity because of their ability to create new contacts from email signature blocks and use algorithms to identify and score the strength of relationships.

Additionally, as more firms are embracing formal business development (progressive firms now even call this sales), some are looking for formal tracking mechanisms such as pipelines. This type of complementary business development software can be built into or integrated with a CRM system to allow for entering business development activities and ensuring follow-up, with the ultimate goal of enhancing win rates. However, to enable CRM-based pipelines to provide real ROI, firms are going to have to dedicate additional staff and other resources to implement and utilize these tools. Another strategy may be to select a separate pipeline tool that may be quicker and easier for individual attorneys to use as a complement to business development training or coaching.

Despite the changes in the industry, the fundamental concepts of CRM success remain unchanged, as noted in this year's Survey. Firms must continue to address their people and process issues and change management challenges. Additionally, before attempting to select and implement a CRM, firm and attorney needs must be assessed. Data must be cleansed. Value must be communicated. Adequate resources must be dedicated, including time, money, and people. Training and communication must be an ongoing focus.

Most importantly, firms need to remember that CRM is not a project or an initiative, but rather a fundamental change – and improvement – in how firms manage their most important assets: their relationships. This means that CRM management never ends. The good news is that this also means that we have plenty of time to get better at it.

About Chris Fritsch

As a CRM Success Consultant and the Founder of CLIENTSFirst Consulting, Chris Fritsch helps firms select and implement the right CRM solutions to support their business development efforts, enhance adoption, and maximize return on investment. Chris also writes and speaks nationally on CRM and eMarketing success. Her areas of expertise include CRM, eMarketing data quality, and utilizing technology to strengthen client relationships. Chris received her law degree from Emory University School of Law in Atlanta, GA, and is a fellow of the College of Law Practice Management. Chris can be reached at 404-249-9914 or CF@CLIENTSFirstConsulting.com.

Executive Summary

In the summer of 2019, Ackert Inc. conducted the fourth installment of its market-wide study on Client Relationship Management (CRM) software within law firms. This white paper is a continuation of similar studies conducted since 2015 and is intended to examine ongoing trends in the industry. This year, over 120 law firms participated in the survey to describe the state of CRM at their firms, which included the following topics:

- 1. Which CRM platforms are the most popular.
- 2. The changing legal CRM landscape.
- 3. CRM support services and user adoption initiatives.
- 4. Adoption and return on investment (ROI) of different CRM platforms.
- 5. The rise of Enterprise Relationship Management (ERM).
- 6. How law firms are integrating their tech stacks.
- 7. Pipeline Management as a lawyer-facing solution to the CRM gap.

The following pages include a detailed analysis of the survey findings as well as a list of best practices for firms wishing to choose the most effective platform, promote higher utilization among lawyers, and maximize the ROI on their CRM initiatives.

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Key Findings

- CRM is becoming more advanced (and lawyer-friendly). Legal software companies continue to innovate toward the goal of increasing usability and minimizing data entry.
- Marketers have found ways to develop a stronger business development culture at their firms, and as a result, more lawyers are using CRM than ever before.
- Marketers are increasingly viewing CRM rollout as an evergreen endeavor, providing ongoing training and adoption initiatives long after the initial onboarding. This effort has undoubtedly contributed to higher utilization rates among lawyers.
- As an industry, we still have a long way to go. ROI is difficult to track, the majority of lawyers don't use CRM, and most CRM features aren't a good fit for lawyer business development.
- Auxiliary platforms which bridge the gap between CRM and lawyers, such as ERM and Pipeline Management, are an increasingly popular solution.

Continue reading for the latest industry trends, further analysis, and best practices.

Data Analysis

We analyzed survey response data from 122 legal marketing professionals. We asked a series of 17 questions regarding respondent demographics, platforms in their tech stack, user adoption, ROI, integration, support services, and business development tracking initiatives.

Respondent Demographics



Most of the survey respondents were legal marketing or business development professionals at the director or manager level. They represented firms of all sizes, but mostly in the range of 31-700 lawyers.

Marketing Budget

We asked, "How big is your marketing budget as a percentage of firm revenue (excluding salaries)?"

The Y-axis represents the percentage of firm revenue. The X-axis shows the percentage of survey respondents who selected each option.

This figure has decreased since last year, likely because many firms have had a growth year in 2019 but marketing budgets have not yet been adjusted, so the result is a smaller slice of a bigger pie.

Figure 3. Marketing Budget 1% 1.5% 2% 2.5% 3% 3.5% 4% 4.5% 5% >5% 0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25%

How Many Law Firms Have CRM?

We asked, "Is your firm currently using or has it used a form of Client Relationship Management (CRM) software? If not, why not?"

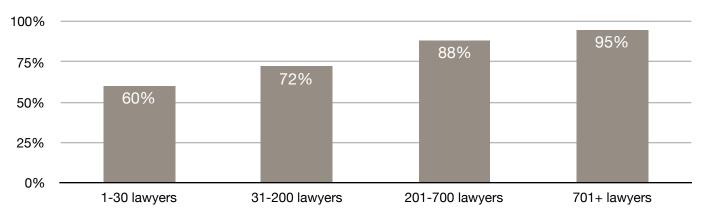
Figure 4 shows us that currently, 78% of firms use CRM, which is 1% more than last year, indicating fairly constant usage among firms.

Figure 4.
CRM Prevalence

22%

No CRM
Has CRM

Figure 5. CRM Prevalence by Firm Size



As Figure 5 shows, most of the firms that do not have CRM are small (1-30 lawyers). The larger the firm, the more likely it has a CRM.

Why Do Some Law Firms Avoid CRM?

For the firms who don't have CRM, we asked, "Why not?"

The reasons given were mostly some variation of a lack of buy-in.

Most of these respondents hailed from smaller firms, so resource constraints may be contributing to the lack of buy-in.

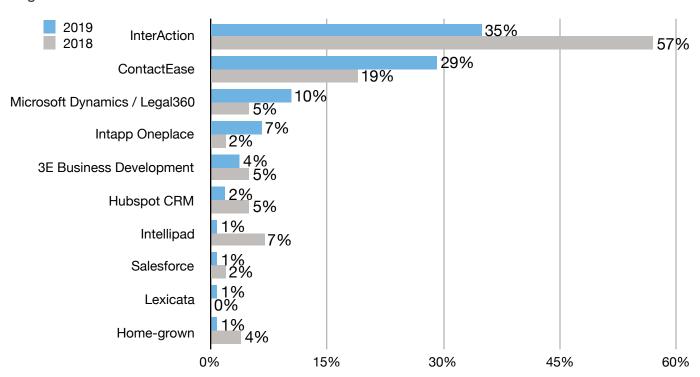
Figure 6. Reasons Firms Don't Have CRM



Which CRM Platforms are Firms Using?

There has been some significant movement in CRM players this year. The playing field is becoming more level, with some noteworthy underdogs capturing more market share. ContactEase, Legal360, and OnePlace have all increased their market share since last year. InterAction continues to hold the largest share of the legal marketplace.

Figure 7. CRM Platforms



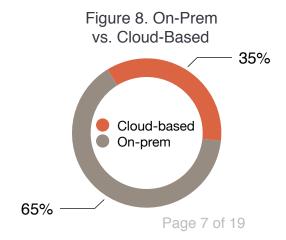
There has been considerable change in the LegalTech market this year. Intapp acquired OnePlace and Gwabbit, which has allowed them to offer a more consolidated solution. Thomson Reuters sunsetted 3E, leaving firms looking for another solution within the next few years. ContactEase released several new features, such as an ERM component.

Note that the data in Figure 7 was from a sampling of 122 law firms, so it might not be an exact reflection of each provider's true market share.

Also note that this year, we separated bolt-ons and auxiliary products, so continue reading for an analysis of ERM and Pipeline Management tools.

On-Premises vs. Cloud-Based

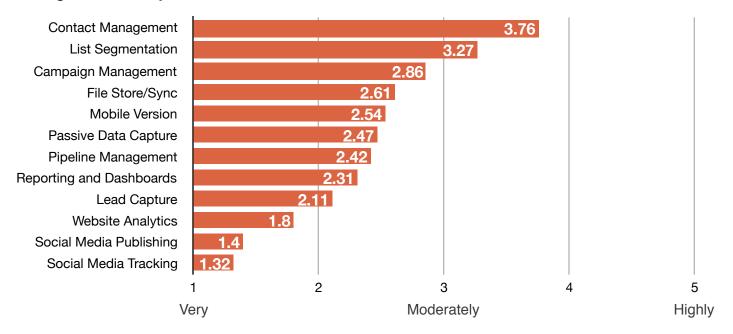
Law firms continue to move slowly to the cloud, though most still have on-premises installation.



Which CRM Features do Marketers Find Effective?

We asked marketers to rate the effectiveness of their CRM as a tool for the following activities on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "very ineffective," 3 being "moderately effective," and 5 being "highly effective."

Figure 9. Efficacy of CRM Features



With the exception of contact management and list segmentation, marketers rated most features as less than moderately effective. The highest-rated CRM features are marketing-related, while sales-related features like pipeline management and lead capture fail to meet expectations.

The Rise of Enterprise Relationship Management (ERM)

ERM is becoming an important and increasingly prevalent tool for law firms. It responds to a need that firms have had for years: to minimize data entry and take as much administrative work away from the lawyers as possible.

ERM's signature-scraping capabilities make it a desirable addition to CRM, especially because 25-40% of all CRM data can become obsolete every year.

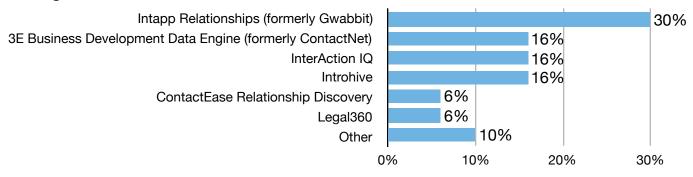
ERM is still fairly new to law firms, with only 41% of firms currently using it (mostly large firms).

Figure 10. Prevalence of ERM



When it comes to ERM platforms, the following are the market leaders. Of the 41% of firms that have ERM (Figure 10), the following chart represents the breakdown of market share by each platform. For example, 30% of the firms that have ERM use Intapp Relationships.

Figure 11. ERM Platforms



This year, Intapp acquired Gwabbit, the ERM market leader. Thomson Reuters acquired ContactNet in 2008, but renamed it more recently to 3E Business Development Data Engine.

The Integration Challenge

Integrating a legal technology stack is a complex problem for law firms. Out-of-the-box integration capabilities are rare in our industry. Custom-built Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) can be a useful workaround - they require that companies build their tools to be RESTful (API-friendly) and also require a developer to build the API bridge at both ends. Third-party connectors like Zapier provide basic, one-task API connectors between popular platforms, but their capabilities are limited, and they are not customizable. For firms that have heavily customized their CRM or built a home-grown tool, manual imports/exports of comma-separated values (CSV) files may be the only option unless they invest in a custom API.

Figure 12. Platforms Integrated with CRM

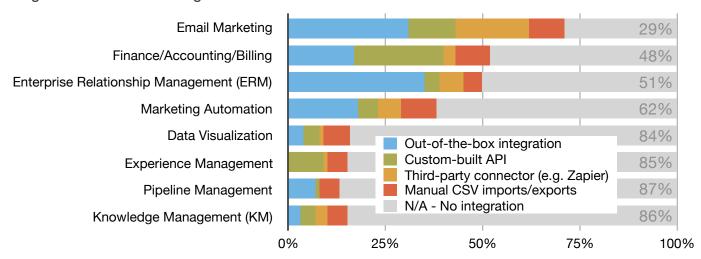


Figure 12 above shows how frequently law firms integrate various platforms with CRM, as well as the setup of the integration.

Email marketing platforms (e.g., Mailchimp, Constant Contact) are the tools that law firms integrate with CRM most often – only 29% of firms do not integrate the two. There's a high rate of out-of-the-box integration and pre-built third-party connectors available, which means marketers don't have to work very hard to get information to transfer back and forth. But even when baked-in or third-party integration isn't available, firms are willing to invest time and effort into getting platforms to talk to each other, as evidenced by the relatively high rates of custom-built APIs and manual CSV imports and exports.

When it comes to finance software, there's much less out-of-the-box integration and a very high rate of custom API integration. However, only half of firms connect finance software with CRM, suggesting many firms believe the effort is more trouble than it's worth.

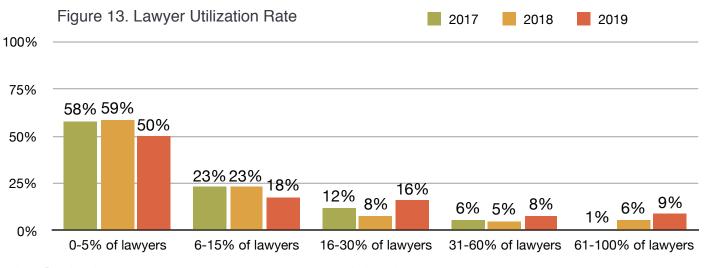
ERM has the highest rate of integration with CRM because the two tools are complementary; ERM is often built on top of CRM. For instance, Legal 360 ERM is built on top of Microsoft Dynamics CRM.

LegalTech providers have an opportunity to close the integration gap, which in past years has been difficult to do but is often requested by law firms. The integration challenge is likely one reason why Intapp has been ambitiously acquiring other platforms.

How Many Lawyers Use CRM?

Next, we asked marketers to estimate the percentage of their lawyers who use CRM regularly (at least once every two weeks) to track their business development activity. Marketers could select one of five options: 0-5% of lawyers, 6-15%, 16-30%, 31-60%, or 61-100%.

On the Y-axis of the chart below, we see the percentage of law firms who responded a certain way. For example, in 2019, 50% of firms reported that only 0-5% of their lawyers regularly use CRM.



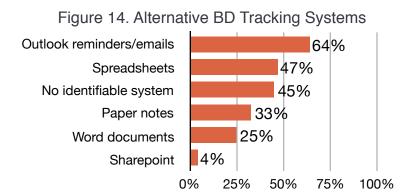
The good news is that the legal industry is seeing an improvement in lawyer CRM utilization rates. This year, fewer firms reported low rates between 0-15%, and more firms reported higher rates between 16-100%.

The largest firms (700+ lawyers) have the lowest rates of CRM use among lawyers. Surprisingly, firms in the 201-700 lawyer range have the highest rate of lawyer CRM use – perhaps because at that size, firms have a large enough marketing team and budget to invest in lawyer adoption initiatives at a rate that's 10% higher than average.

What Do Lawyers Use Instead of CRM?

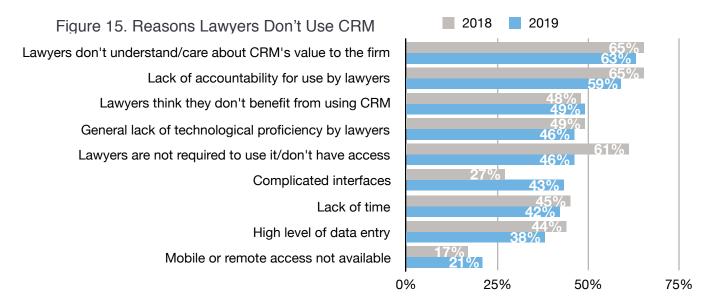
Next we asked, "For those lawyers who are not using CRM to track their business development activity, what is being used?" The results are shown in Figure 14.

While Figure 14 suggests a mix of impractical approaches, the rate of respondents who selected "no identifiable system" decreased from 57% last year to 45% this year.



Why Don't Lawyers Use CRM?

The next question asked, "For lawyers who do not utilize CRM for business development, which of the following factors do you believe contribute to low utilization?" Respondents could select multiple answers.



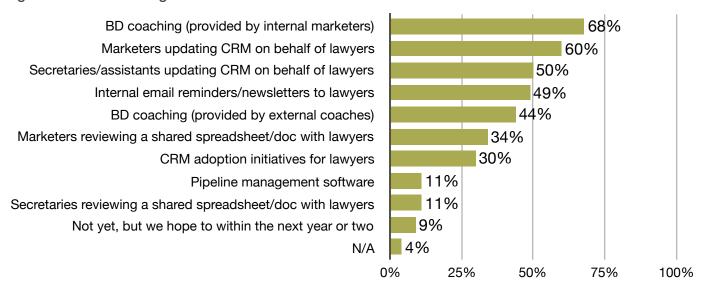
While the top five barriers are cultural, rather than shortcomings of the CRM software, there has been a slight decrease in most of these barriers in 2019. This suggests that law firms are successfully, albeit slowly, creating sales cultures within their firms.

The "reasons why" appear to be improving. While the biggest barriers to CRM use are still the users themselves, the responses suggest that more lawyers are at least trying to use CRM. After all, a lawyer who had never touched CRM would have no problem with its interface.

Business Development Tracking Initiatives

The next question was, "Has your department implemented any tools or initiatives aimed at tracking lawyer business development activity?" Respondents could select multiple answers.

Figure 16. BD Tracking Initiatives



Firms are investing a significant amount of time and energy into lawyer business development by getting them engaged, tracking their activity, entering data on their behalf, and more. It is very encouraging to see that only 4% of firms reported that they did nothing to track BD activity. We, as an industry, are making strides toward cultures that espouse business development accountability.

When we parsed this data by firm size, we found that the firms in the 201-700 lawyer range invested in BD tracking initiatives 10% more than average. This group also had the highest lawyer CRM utilization rates. This indicates that there is a correlation between BD tracking initiatives and lawyer engagement.

One of the most salient findings from another recent white paper, The State of Business Development Coaching & Training at Law Firms (2019), was that effective business development coaching often has very high levels of buy-in and generates high ROI. Technology tends to have lower buy-in among lawyers, but coupling technology with a coaching program can be an effective way to increase engagement and track activity among lawyers.

Also from that study, we found that the coaching programs which generate the greatest ROI focus on cross-selling and pipeline management. These two activities are inherently data-driven, so it makes sense to leverage technology in tandem with coaching as much as possible. CRM is not the ideal tool for that, as we'll see later in this white paper, but CRM augmentation platforms like ERM and Pipeline Management software can help.

CRM Support Services

In a similar vein, we asked marketers, "What support services were employed to assist with CRM implementation and adoption?"

CRM providers deliver significant support services in the beginning stages: implementation and initial onboarding. After that, most of the ongoing burden of ensuring CRM success falls on marketers.

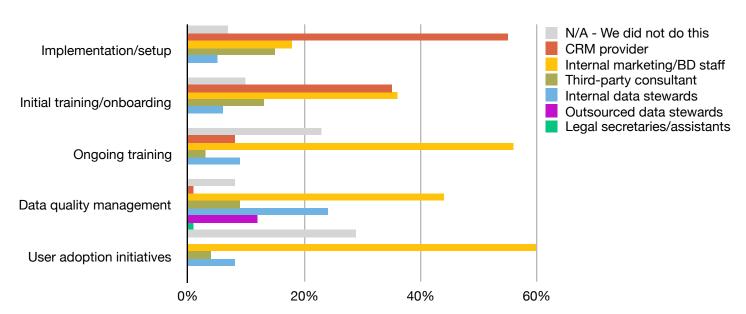


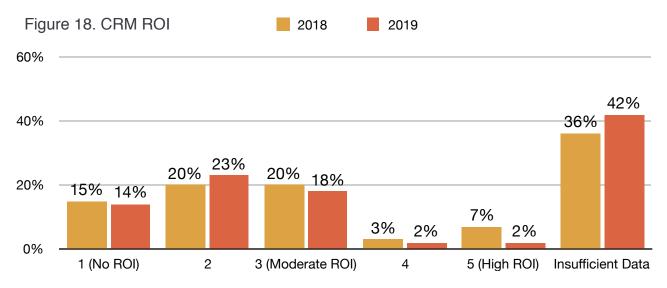
Figure 17. CRM Support Services Used

As the yellow bar indicates, marketing departments are investing a significant amount of time and energy into ensuring the ongoing success of CRM. These efforts are paying off, as evidenced by the increasing rate of lawyer adoption. But given that marketers are often overwhelmed and under-staffed, they should consider leveraging legal secretaries/assistants where they can.

We recently learned of a mid-sized law firm that incentivized greater CRM adoption by offering bonuses to administrative assistants who updated the most CRM records on behalf of their lawyers. The initiative was very successful - because the assistants were the gatekeepers to lawyers' calendars (and attention spans), they were an effective data support resource.

The ROI of CRM

Next, we asked marketers to rate the level of ROI they could attribute to their CRM on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "no ROI" and 5 meaning "high ROI." There was also a "not applicable" option, for firms with insufficient quantifiable data to estimate ROI.



Marketers reported somewhat less ROI than they did last year. A greater proportion of survey respondents had insufficient quantifiable data to calculate ROI, and those who could calculate it reported lower ROI scores on average.

Legal technology stacks are becoming increasingly complicated, with multiple platforms and data sets to manage. This may be contributing to lower ROI awareness. Marketers should consider using Data Visualization tools to customize and track ROI metrics.

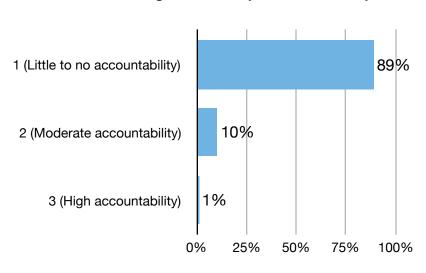
Lawyer Accountability

We asked marketers to describe the level of accountability to which lawyers are held with regard to using CRM on a regular basis for tracking business development.

Almost unanimously, marketers reported that lawyers face little to no accountability for using CRM.

In some firms, this is intentional; lawyers aren't given access to the tool, so obviously they wouldn't be expected to use it. Overall, holding their feet to the fire remains a challenging task.

Figure 19. Lawyer Accountability



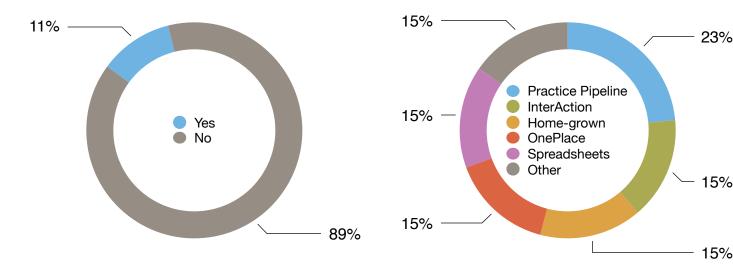
Pipeline Management

Next, we asked marketers, "Is your firm using any form of Pipeline Management system, and if so, which tool?"

Pipeline Management is defined as a tool or system (even if only a spreadsheet) that tracks the maturity of a sales deal through a pipeline. A deal matures as lawyers take successive touchpoints with the prospect, client, or referral source. These tools also, ideally, facilitate cross-selling between lawyers.

Figure 20. Pipeline Management Prevalence

Figure 21. Pipeline Management Platforms



Currently, 11% of firms have some kind of Pipeline Management system, with Practice Pipeline as the most prevalent among them. Many others have customized spreadsheets or developed home-grown software. Pipeline Management is still a relatively new phenomenon in the legal industry, but it may be a solution for firms that are struggling to get their lawyers to use technology and track their business development activity.

In the 2018 installment of our annual CRM survey, we compared the ROI of the various CRM platforms and bolt-ons. The platforms which scored the highest in ROI were Practice Pipeline and Salesforce, both of which focus heavily on sales pipeline management functionality.

If firms wish to draw a line between CRM and ROI, lawyer business development is key. Pipeline Management is proving to be a viable solution.

Conclusion

Significant shifts have occurred in the legal CRM space within the last year. Acquisitions, sunsets, new entrants, and fiercer competition have created an environment in which law firms have greater diversity of choice than ever before.

Yet marketers overall are less-than-satisfied with CRM's functionality. They feel that only a small handful of features are moderately effective while rating most features as somewhat ineffective.

When it comes to lawyer utilization of CRM, we're taking steps in the right direction. Marketers reported that a greater percentage of their lawyers are actively utilizing CRM this year - a win which undoubtedly must be credited to the hard work marketers put into user adoption initiatives. However, the vast majority of lawyers still won't use CRM - likely because 89% of firms report that lawyers have little to zero accountability for using it.

For the majority of lawyers that don't use CRM, a hodgepodge of un-trackable and un-strategic systems are used instead (like Outlook, spreadsheets, or nothing at all). There's still a lot of headway to be made when it comes to providing lawyer-friendly tools that capture their activity. The rise of CRM bolt-on tools like ERM and Pipeline Management is likely due to the fact that these tools solve a CRM pain point: lawyers won't use it, and we need low-effort tools to bridge the gap.

Similar to prior years, we asked marketers why their lawyers won't use CRM. It seems that the cultural problems that have plagued law firms for years (like lawyers not caring about CRM's value to the firm, and lack of accountability) are somewhat less problematic than they used to be. At many firms, the needle is gradually moving toward a stronger BD culture.

We asked marketers what "people programs" they put in place - initiatives they rolled out to encourage and track lawyer BD activity. Marketers expend a herculean amount of effort in this area with programs like BD coaching, updating CRM on behalf of lawyers, enlisting the help of administrative assistants, and more. All of these efforts are moving firm cultures in the right direction.

CRM requires support services to survive, and the various phases of a CRM rollout are mostly owned by the CRM provider and the marketers. There's an opportunity to offload some of this work onto data stewards, legal assistants, and consultants if marketers do not have the bandwidth to manage it themselves.

In 2019, firms are still struggling to tie CRM to ROI. Many firms report underwhelming or untrackable ROI, likely because they are struggling to integrate disparate platforms and data sets. CRM bolt-ons like ERM and Pipeline Management can help connect CRM to business development revenue (and therefore, ROI) by making the technology more user-friendly to lawyers.

Best Practices

In light of these conclusions, we offer a set of best practices on how to choose the right LegalTech platform for your needs, promote higher CRM utilization, and track quantifiable data in order to calculate an ROI. These recommendations are based on over 15 years of experience working with law firms worldwide.

- 1. Buy-in is key: turn leadership into champions. Use a KPI tracking system (even if only Excel) to demonstrate the value of technology adoption to firm leadership. Make a business case, get their buy-in, and recruit their voice to be an authoritative change agent and motivator among the lawyer base.
- Don't do it all yourself. Marketers do most of the heavy lifting after the CRM rollout and initial on-boarding are complete. Consider leveraging the efforts of administrative assistants, data stewards, and business development coaches to assist with the ongoing data maintenance, adoption, and ROI of CRM.
- 3. Firms that use ERM contend with a much lighter workload when it comes to data quality management. Everyone knows the old adage, "garbage in, garbage out." ERM helps you maintain CRM data integrity without having to rely on data stewards as heavily, so it is likely a worthwhile investment for many firms.
- 4. Bridge the CRM gap with Pipeline Management. Our surveys repeatedly remind us that most lawyers won't use CRM. Make technology more palatable by putting a user-friendly Pipeline Management tool in front of the lawyers, rather than expecting them to invest the time to adopt and maintain complex CRM technologies.
- 5. Integrate if you can. If not, Data Visualization can help. Most firms don't integrate their CRM with any other platforms, and understandably so. LegalTech platforms are built for a niche audience, and engineering the capability to integrate out-of-the-box is a tall order for tech providers. So if integrating all your tools is proving to be a challenge, consider implementing a Data Visualization tool like Practice Viewer or Tableau that synthesizes information from your various platforms into one view so you can cross-reference it easily.
- 6. Choose the right tool for the job. While CRM is undoubtedly necessary for marketing the law firm, it isn't suited for lawyer business development. Practice Pipeline is built with lawyers in mind, has an adoption rate up to seven times higher than CRM, generates 300% to 1,000% ROI for most firms, and has ROI tracking capabilities built-in.



About the Authors

David Ackert is the President of Ackert Inc., a business development coaching and technology firm with law firm clients across the globe. David is a business development mentor to thousands of high-achieving professionals in the legal, corporate, finance, and accounting sectors. Over the past two decades, David has developed and implemented revenue acceleration programs for hundreds of firms, many hailing from the top of the Am Law list. Widely recognized as a pioneer in the intersection of business development coaching and technology, David is the founder of several platforms that have won Your Honor Awards for delivering outstanding ROI. David is a fellow of the College of Law Practice Management.



Additional Industry Research

We publish annual white papers that examine the business development trends in the professional services industry. Each white paper provides relevant takeaways intended to provide best practices that enhance your firm.

- The State of Business Development Coaching and Training at Law Firms (2019)
- Business Development Trends Across Firm Demographics (2018)
- Key Performance Indicators for Law Firms (2018)
- The State of CRM at Law Firms: A Market-Wide Study (2018)
- Legal Pipeline Management: A Case Study (2017)
- Business Development Challenges in a Changing Market: A Market-Wide Study (2016)

To request our other white papers, please contact us at info@ackertinc.com.

Additional Resources

Practice Pipeline is a simple Pipeline Management tool that helps lawyers pursue new clients, prospects, and referral sources. With a user-friendly interface, minimal data entry and high lawyer adoption, Practice Pipeline inspires action.

Practice Viewer is a KPI dashboard for data-driven marketers. It integrates with all of your platforms to present your data in one central, customizable view so you can make better business decisions.

Practice Boomers is a business development e-learning program with a robust curriculum of video lessons, goal-setting tools, Pipeline Management, and performance metrics that get your lawyers' practices booming.

Our **Business Development Coaching Programs** provide a forum for your lawyers to develop actionable business development plans and implement them through discussion and accountability.

Our **Retreat Presentations** provide dynamic business development programming for your offsites and create new possibilities for your firm.

Our **Executive Roundtables** are facilitated peer networks of law firm leaders who tap into each other's perspectives, expertise, and strategic wisdom. Members meet via regular conference calls and an annual hosted retreat. We have one roundtable for marketing and business development leaders, and another for current and incoming managing partners.

For more information, visit www.AckertInc.com or contact us at info@ackertinc.com.