

Martindale-Avvo™

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL CONSUMER 2021

How prospective clients
decide who to hire



INTRODUCTION

How do legal consumers find you, the attorney they want to hire? What tools do they use to research lawyers and how quickly do they make their hiring decisions?

To help you understand what matters most to potential clients, Martindale-Avvo surveyed legal consumers in the spring of 2021, gaining insight from 2,453 respondents across the United States and Canada about the criteria that mattered most to them when choosing an attorney.

In line with the prior two years' reports, legal consumers made clear that they value attorneys who respond promptly to their inquiries and have taken the time to get client reviews. We have structured the results to walk you through the consumer's journey, which we have defined as the following steps:



Finding an attorney



Hiring an attorney

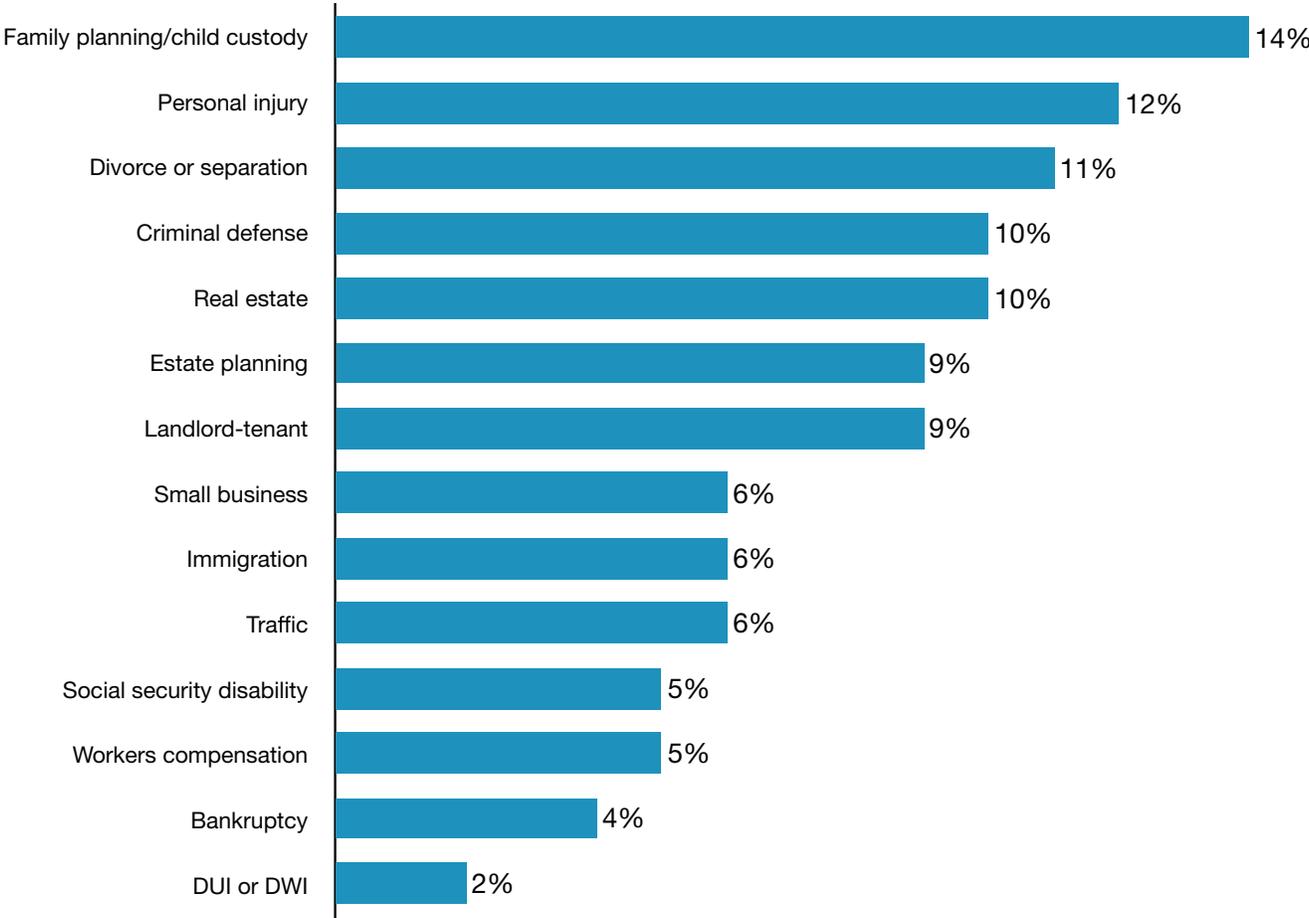


Working with an attorney.

The report reveals important factors in each part of their journey to help you better understand your buyers, how best to attract them and how to convert them to clients.

Legal needs varied widely

What legal needs have you experienced or dealt with? (select all that apply)
[chart shows responses of “currently experiencing”]



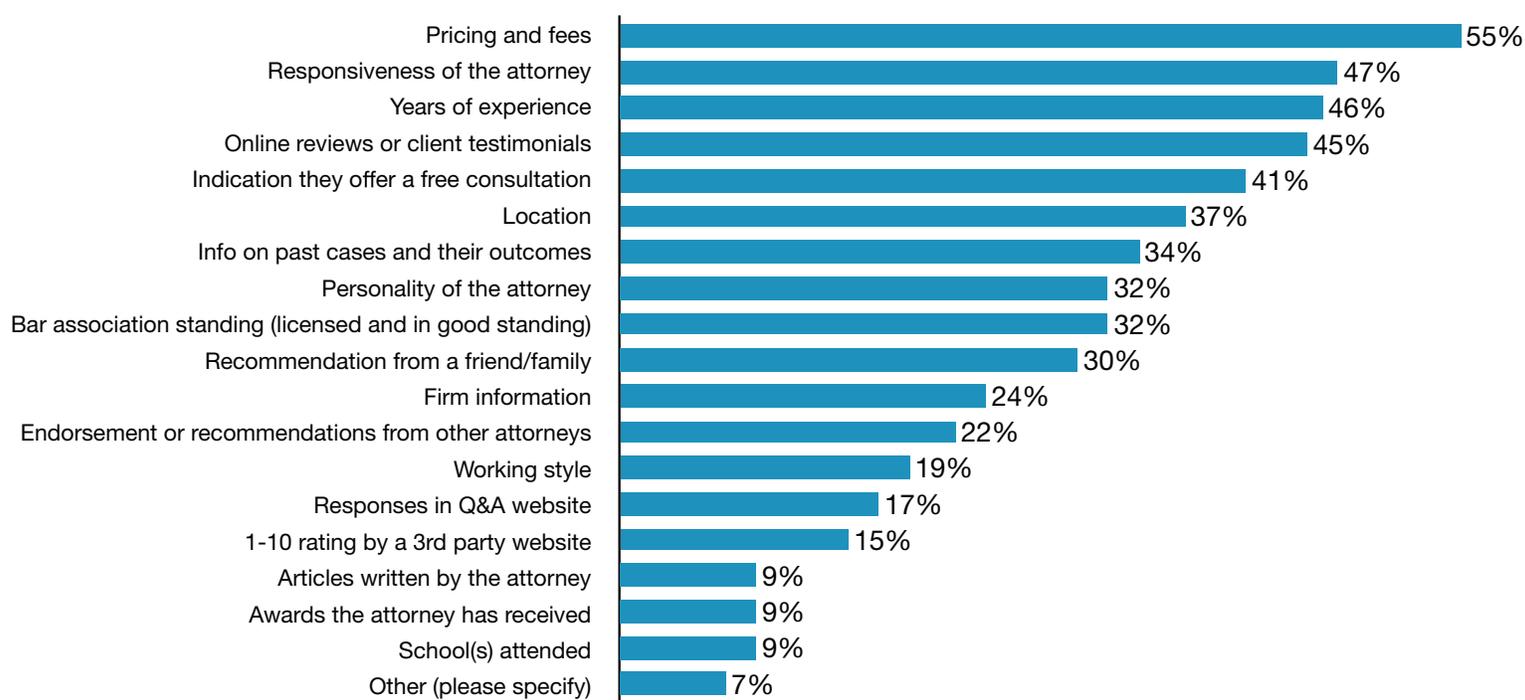
Nearly two-thirds (64%) of those surveyed were currently experiencing a legal need. Three of the top six spots comprised consumers seeking to address family matters – family law (family planning/child custody), divorce/separation and estate planning, with family law number one. Criminal defense concerns moved into the top five legal needs in 2021.

Over the past 12 months, half (51%) of respondents had dealt with a legal issue, with divorce/separation ranking as the top concern.



Many factors are considered before contacting an attorney

**What information did/do you want before you first contact an attorney?
(select all that apply)**

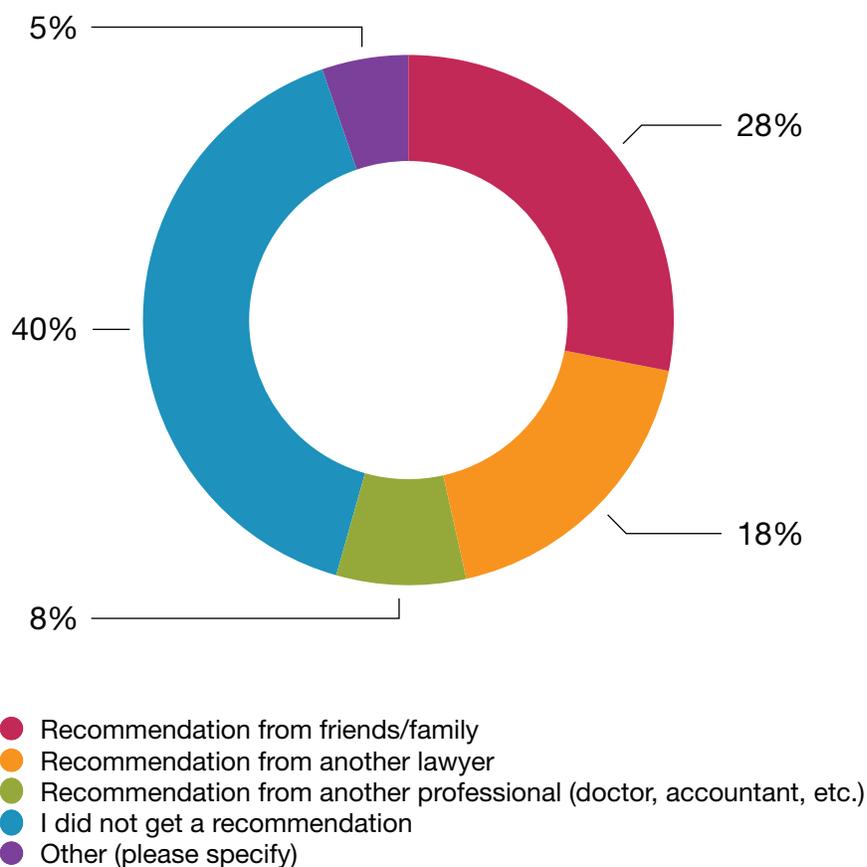


An understanding of “pricing and fees” ranked as the top decision criteria again this year. Legal consumers want to know if they can afford an attorney’s services. Free consultation dropped from the second to the fifth spot, being replaced by “responsiveness of the attorney” which was critical to 47% of the respondents. Years of experience and the presence of online reviews/client testimonials remained at the top of the list as key factors to be included in consumers’ decision making.



Consumers tapped their network

Did you get any recommendations when starting your search for an attorney?

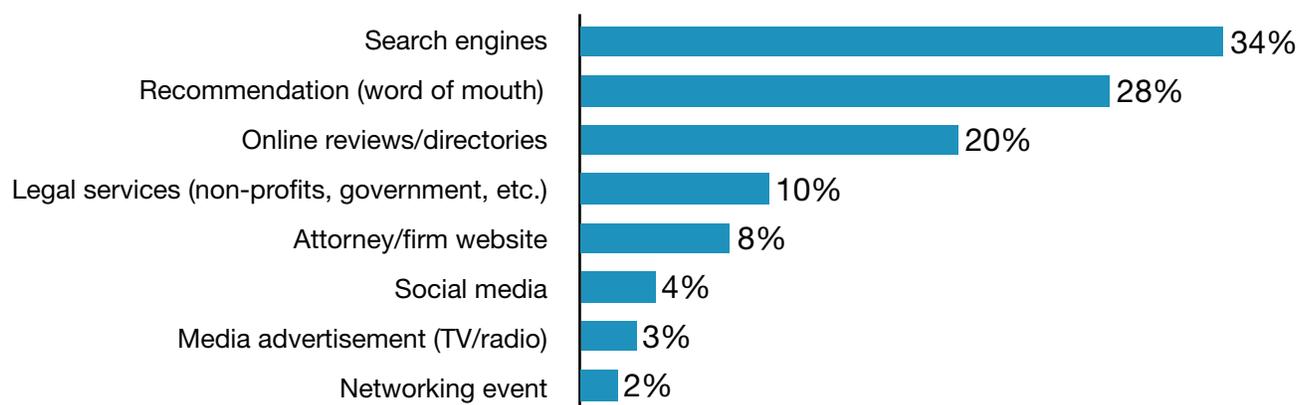


Just over half of consumers (54%) reported that they sought a referral to an attorney to help with their legal issue, up from 44% last year. Family and friends were the first place consumers turned to get a recommendation, and the younger the consumer, the more likely they were to seek those recommendations.

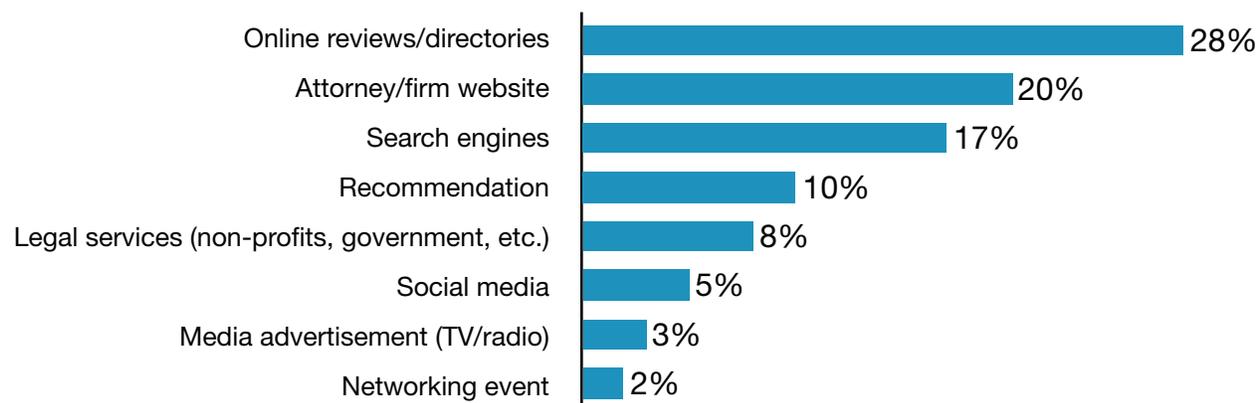


Researching an attorney is a multi-step process

1st resource used when finding an attorney



2nd resource used when finding an attorney



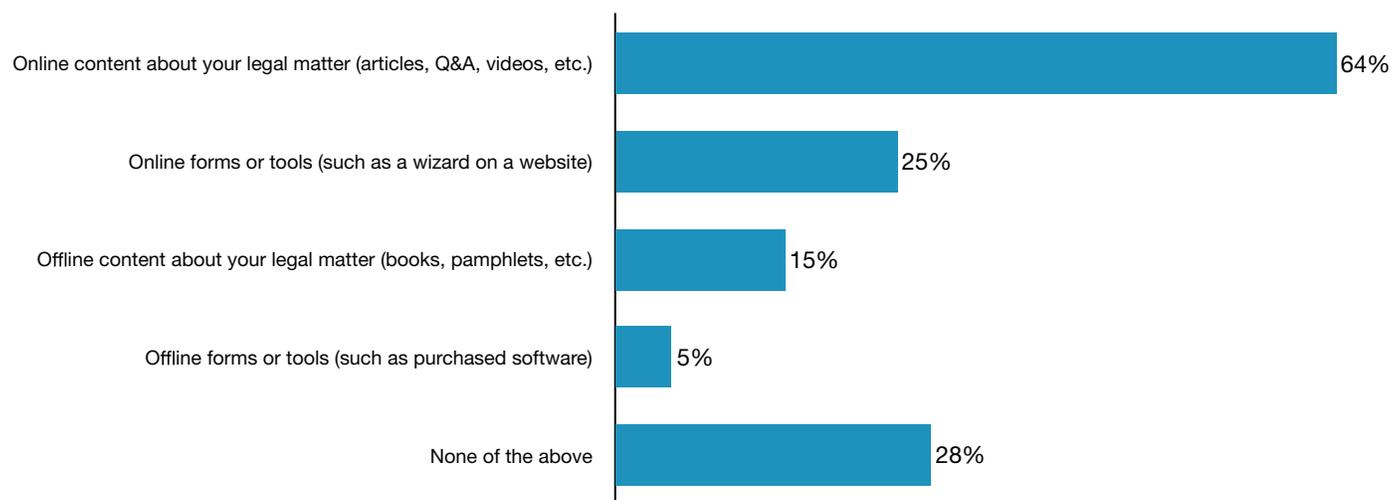
When looking for an attorney, a majority of consumers begin by using a search engine (34%) or seeking a word-of-mouth recommendation (28%), with online reviews/directories being the third most common choice (20%).

However, once consumers have used these resources to locate an attorney or attorneys, 86% of them went on to do additional research. The majority of this group used online reviews/directories and attorney/firm websites to probe for more information to help inform their decision of whether or not to hire.



Consumers tap additional resources throughout their journey

Did you use any of the following resources when handling your legal matter?
(select all that apply)

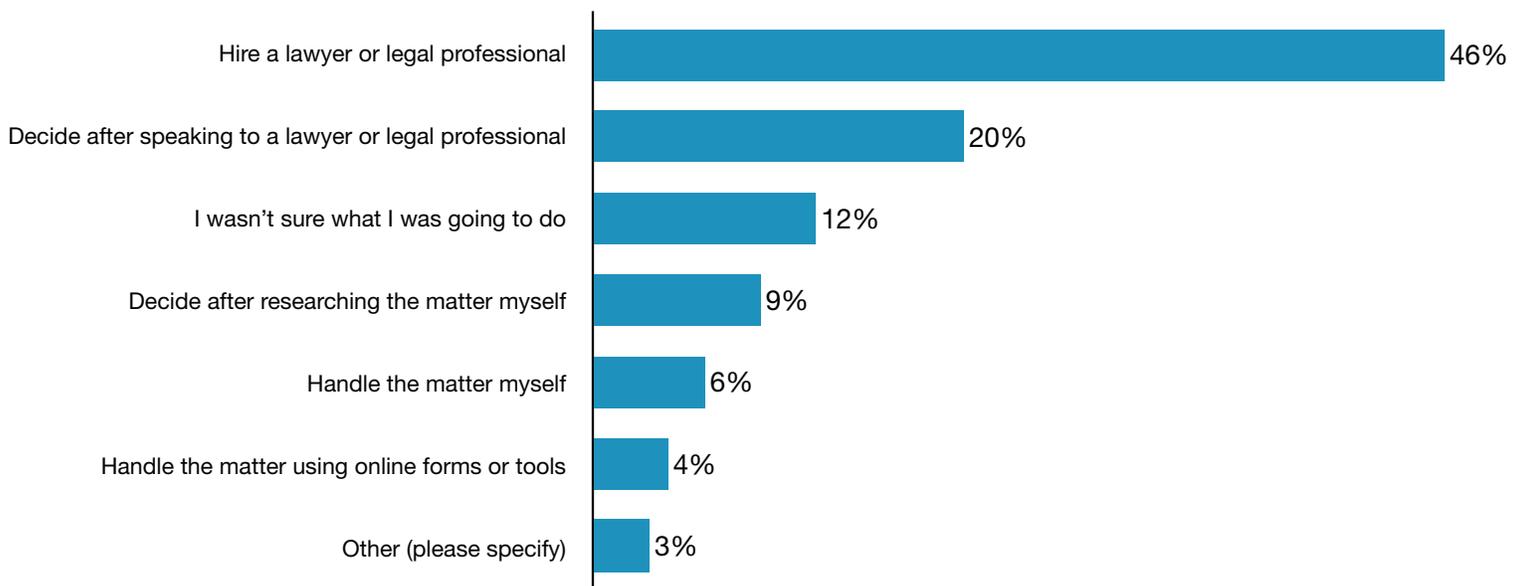


Nearly three-quarters (70%) reported using online content, forms, guides and other tools to come to a fuller understanding of their legal issue. Even users who hired an attorney used these resources at a similar rate.



Nearly half of consumers initially planned to hire an attorney.

How did you initially plan to handle your most recent legal matter?

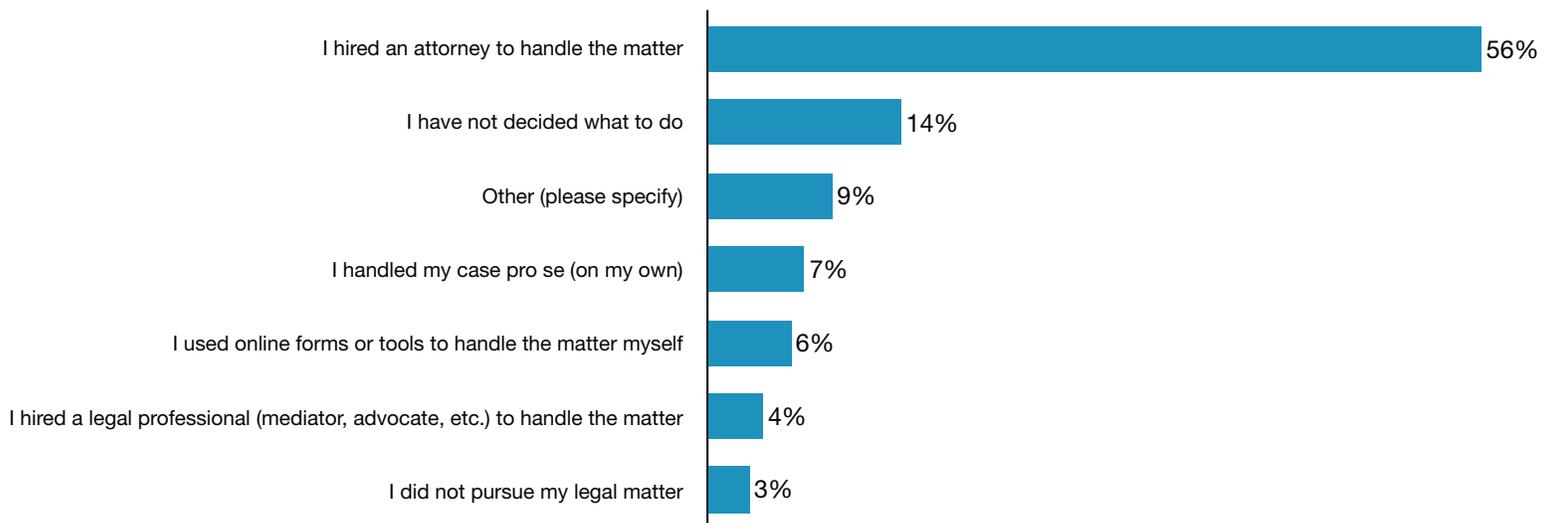


This year, we asked consumers how they thought they would handle their legal matter once they became aware they had an issue to be resolved. While from the get-go, 46% were planning to hire an attorney, the vast majority of the remaining 54% were still deciding how they were going to move forward.



Further investigation prompted the hiring of an attorney

How are/did you handle your most recent legal matter?



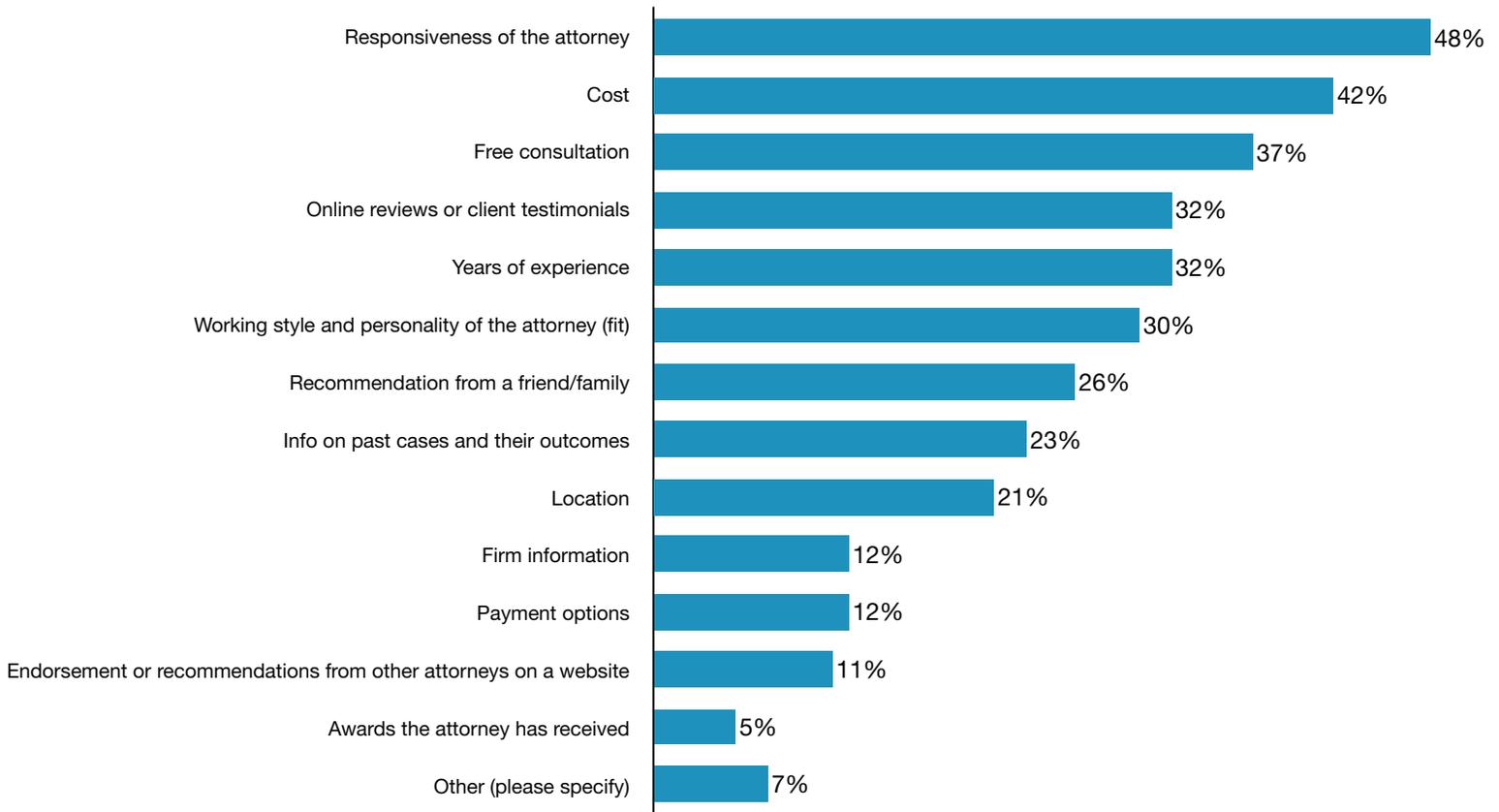
While 46% initially planned to hire an attorney, 56% said they ultimately hired one. Among those who wanted to speak with an attorney before making up their minds, 43% went on to hire an attorney, while 8% hired another legal professional (mediator, advocate, etc.).

Those consumers who, at the outset, indicated they wanted to do their own research still hired an attorney at a rate of 40%.



Key factors in the final decision

What are the three most important pieces of information on which you based your hiring decision?



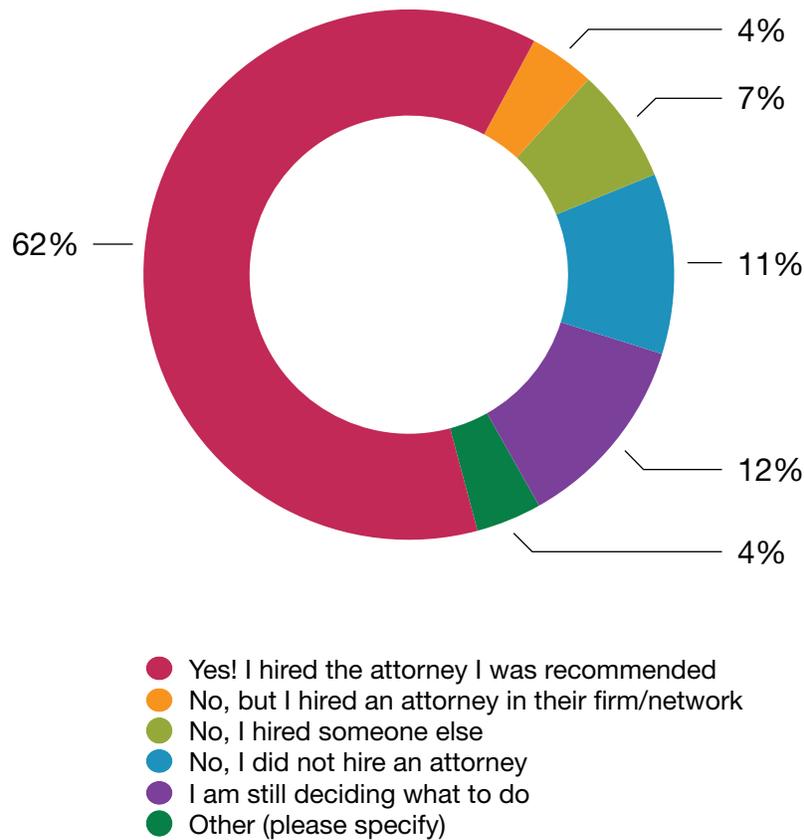
Attorney responsiveness ranked as the number one most important attribute consumers required for hiring an attorney, the same as the prior year. In fact, the other major factors – cost, free consultations, online reviews or testimonials, experience, and personality fit – ranked in the same order of importance as well.

When this data is viewed through the lens of those who ultimately hire an attorney, working style and personality fit, recommendations from friends/family, and online reviews or client testimonials all moved up in rank. The focus on free consultation and cost lessened.



Referrals are given considerable weight

Did you hire the attorney you were recommended?

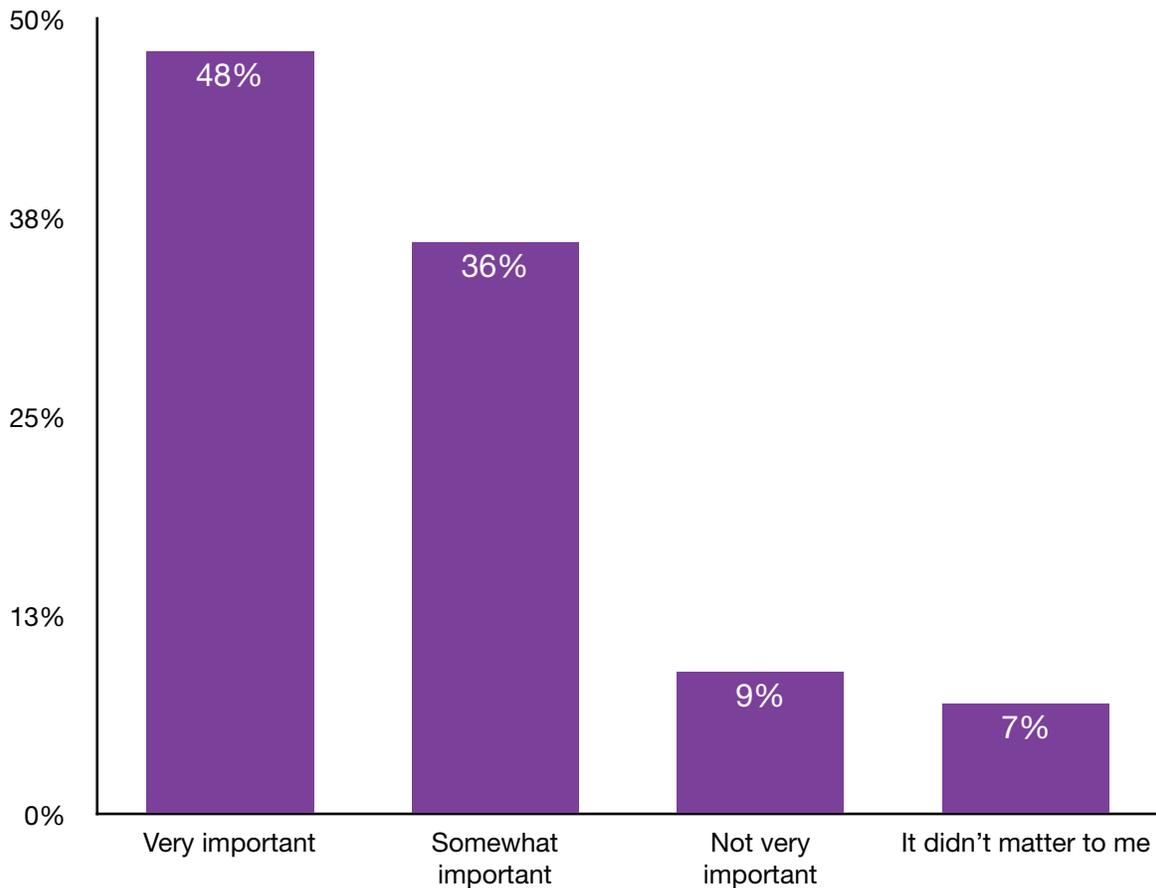


Among those who received a recommendation for an attorney to use, 62% ultimately went on to hire that attorney, the same percentage as the prior year's respondents. That didn't mean, however, that the consumers hired the recommended attorney blindly. They performed due diligence on the name/s they received, with 45% researching the attorney/s reputation using online reviews and 48% combing through the attorney's/firm's website before making the decision to hire.



Reviews and ratings remain a significant factor

What role did reviews and ratings play in your selection of an attorney?

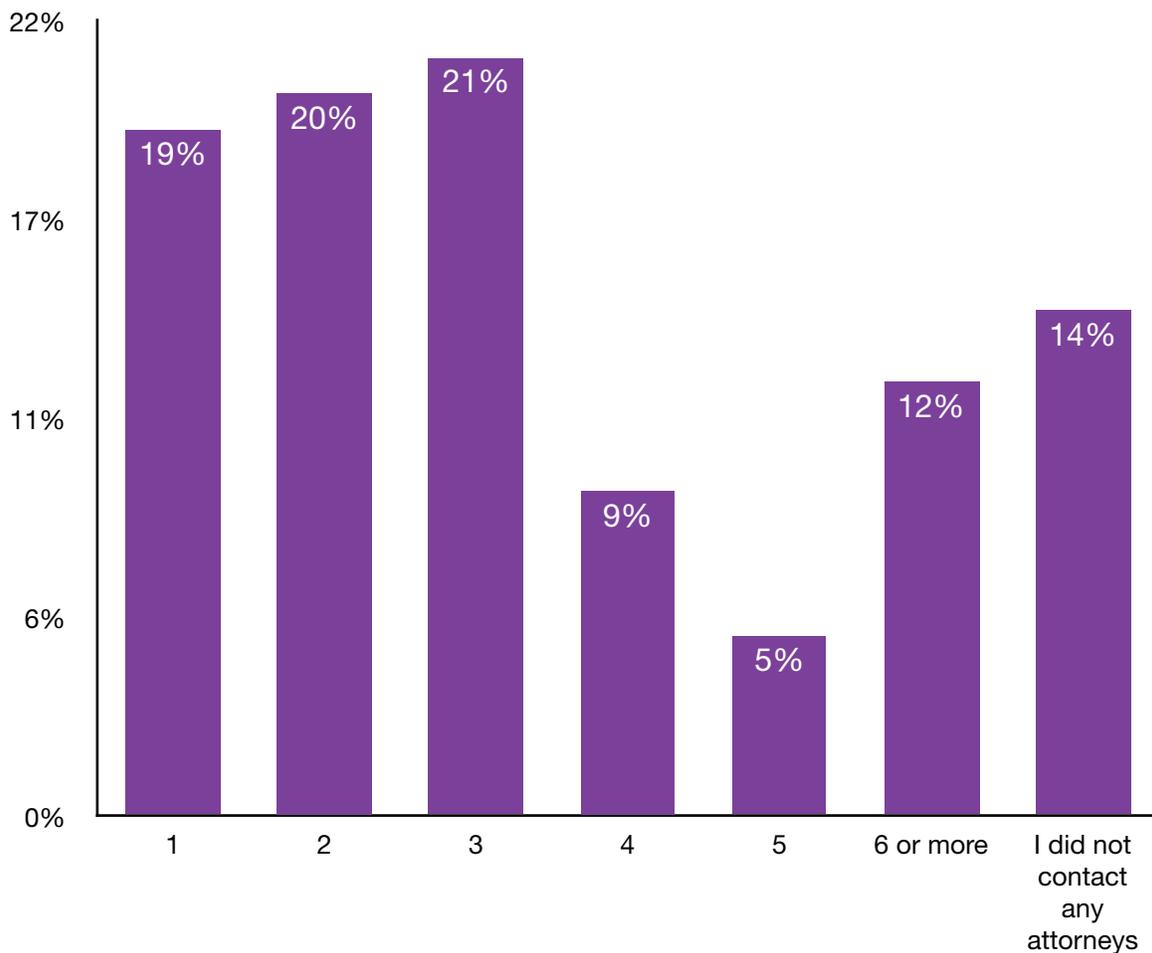


Reviews continue to grow in importance for prospective clients, particularly with younger generations. They both complement in-person referrals and serve as a proxy for consumers who don't have a referral in hand. Nearly half (45%) said that reviews and ratings were "very important," while a total of 80% said that reviews were either "very important" or "somewhat important" to them. Younger respondents (those aged 25-34) were the most likely to say that reviews and ratings were "very important" to their selection of an attorney.



Consumers assess multiple attorneys before hiring

How many attorneys did you contact before making a hiring decision?



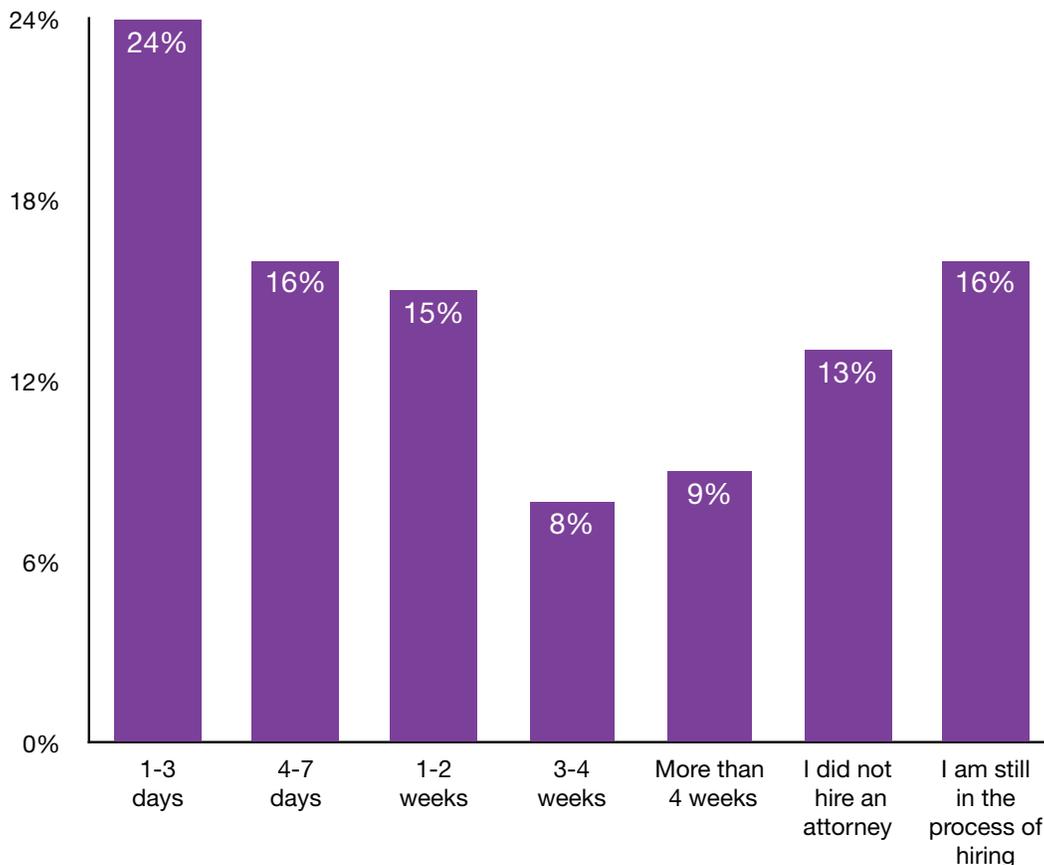
Nearly two-thirds of consumers (60%) contacted one to three attorneys before making a final decision; 50% indicated they would contact between two and four attorneys.

A majority (61%) of consumers wanted a potential attorney to be located in their region/area or in their city, although that number varied depending on the nature of the legal issue and whether local law had an impact. The most dramatic example was immigration, where federal law applies; 46% seeking immigration counsel said location would play no role in their decision.



Consumers make up their minds quickly...

About how long did it take to hire an attorney (from the moment you knew you needed an attorney to making a decision on one attorney)?



Most consumers choose their attorney quickly after realizing they need one, with a majority (55%) making a decision in two weeks or less.

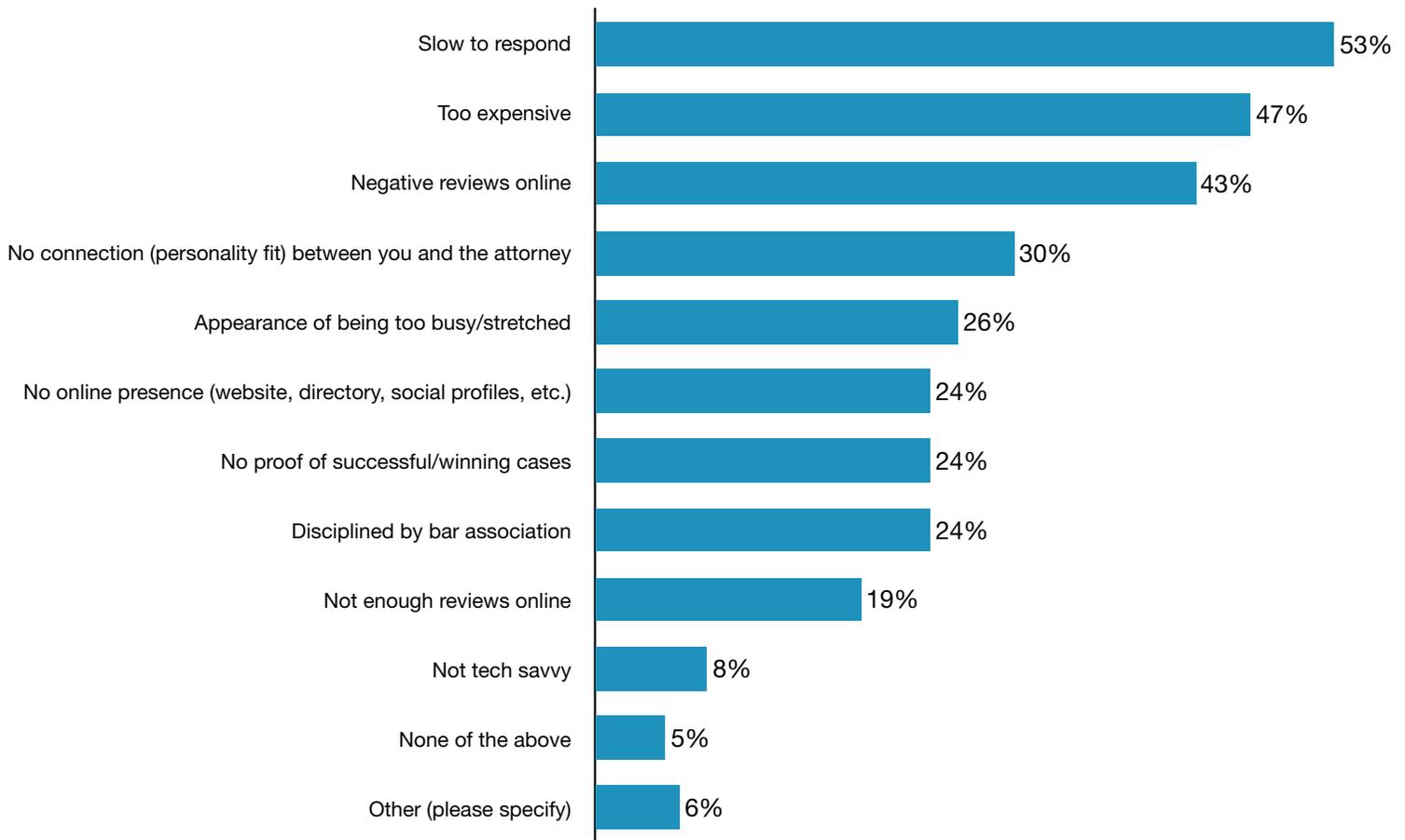
Additionally, nearly a quarter (24%) come to a decision within three days of realizing they need an attorney.

Among consumers who did not hire an attorney, the most common reasons were cost (23%), being able to resolve the matter without an attorney (20%), or not hearing back from any attorneys (16%).



...And they expect prompt responses from attorneys too

What are the 3 biggest deterrents (or red flags) to hiring a particular attorney?



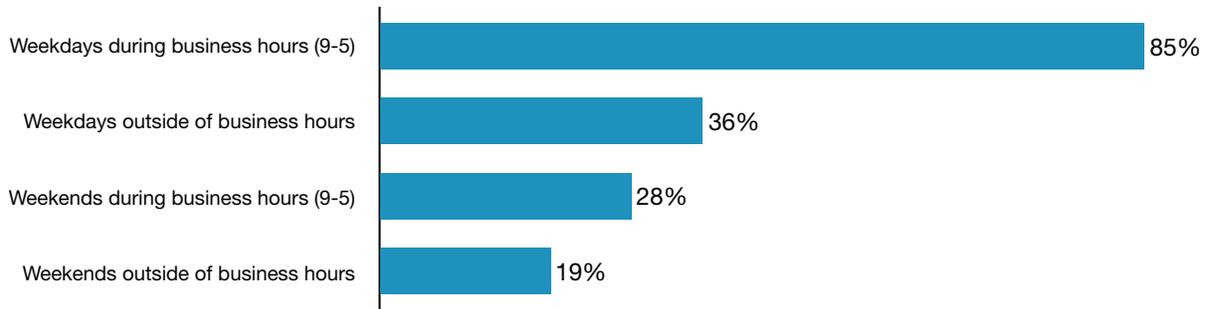
Continuing the trend from prior years, “slow to respond” was rated as the biggest red flag when hiring an attorney. Just over half (53%) of respondents indicated this was a major deterrent, even though the majority of attorneys (79%) responded within 24 hours or less.

The second and third red flags continue to be the same and were also significant concerns: “too expensive” (47%) and “negative reviews online” (43%).

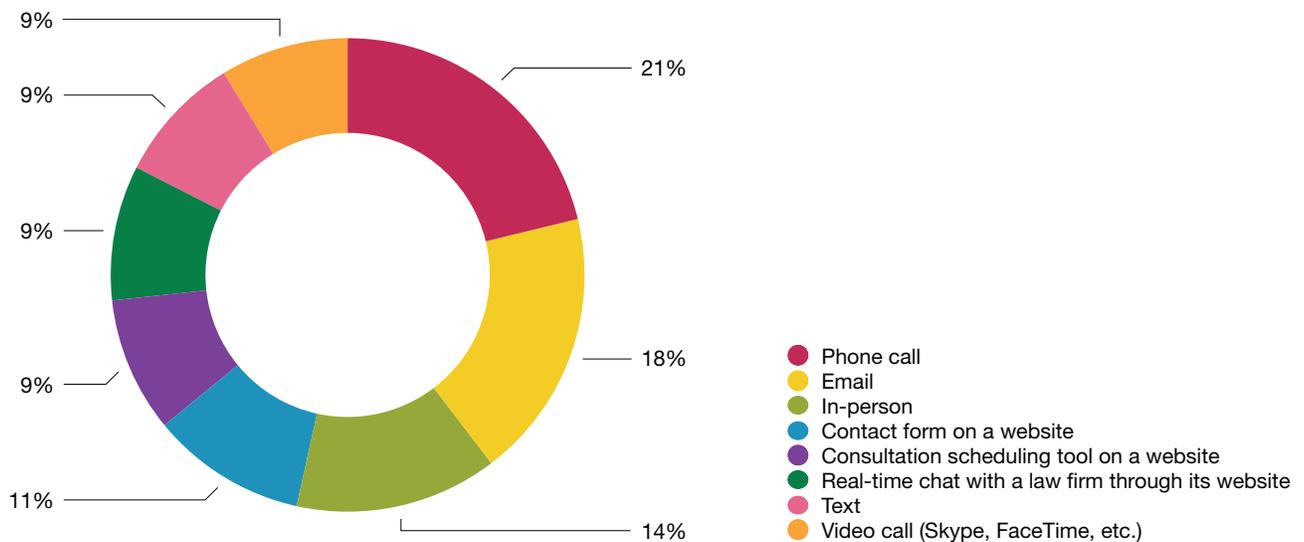


Contact times and methods

During what times would you be likely to contact an attorney? (select all that apply)



How likely are you to use the following methods when initially contacting an attorney? (chart shows “very likely” responses)



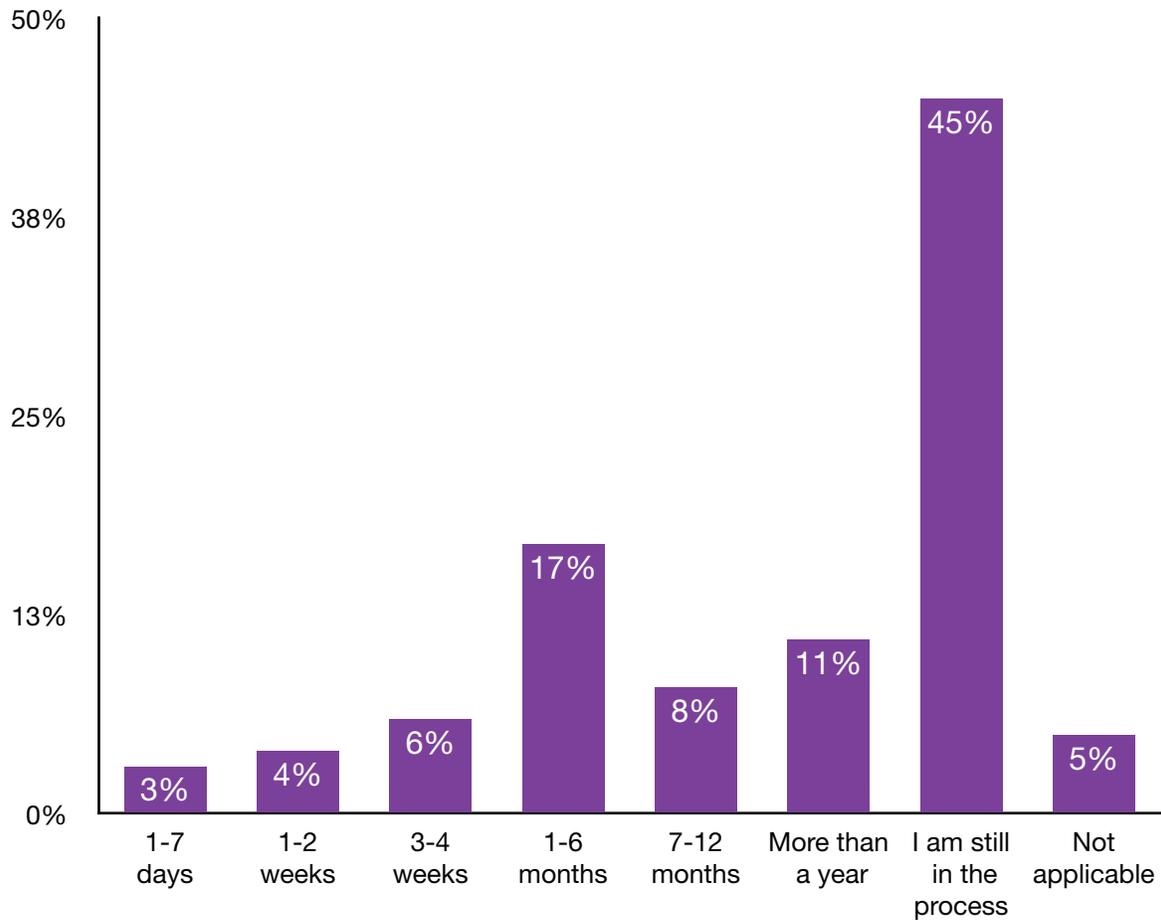
Most consumers (85%) will contact an attorney/firm during weekday business hours, although a smaller segment might also try to reach a firm after hours or on a weekend.

Phone remains the preferred method of initial contact for consumers (46%), followed closely by email (40%).



Time to resolution varies

How long did your most recent legal matter take to resolve?

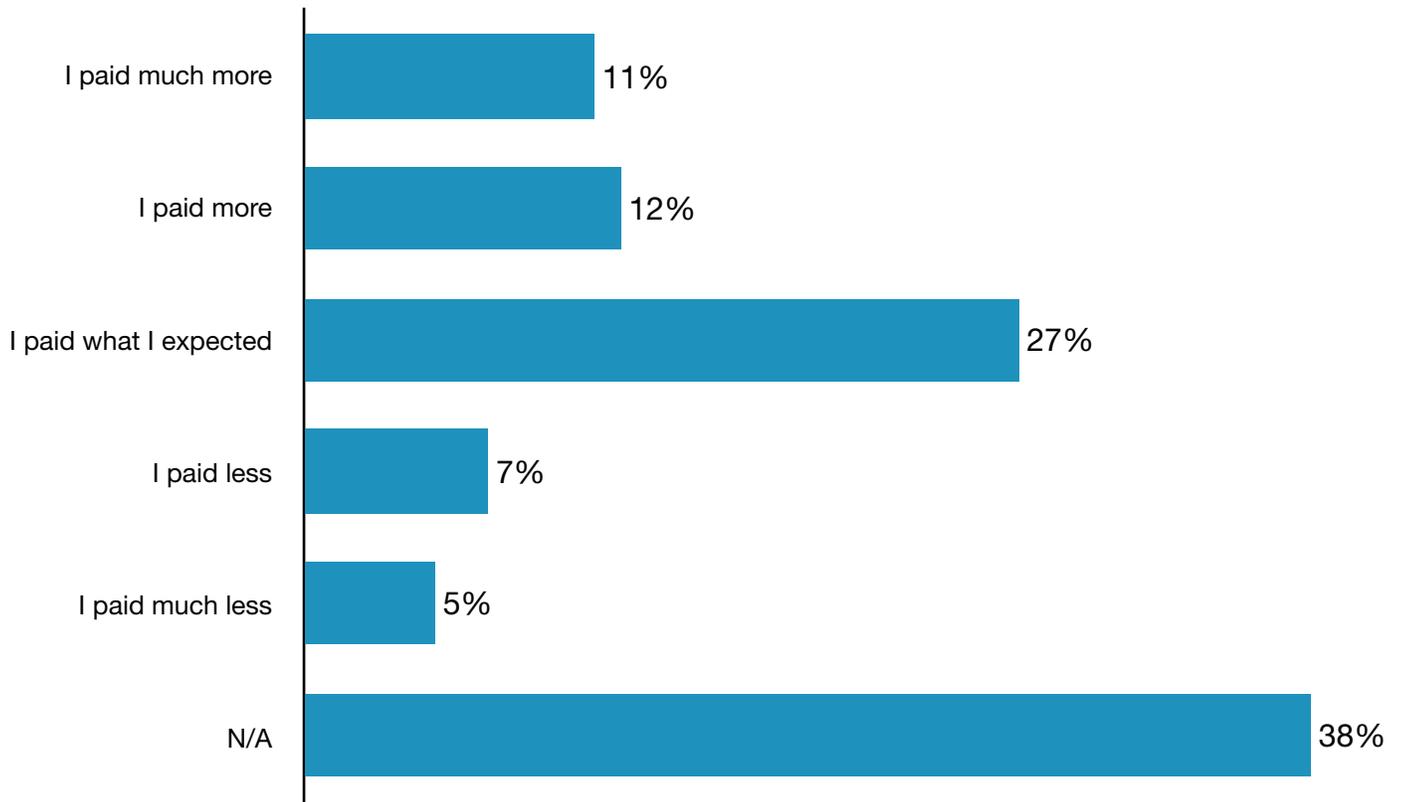


Nearly one-third (30%) of consumers had their legal matter resolved within six months. Overall, 45% of respondents were still involved in a legal matter.



Cost versus expectations

How did the expected cost compare to the cost you paid to resolve your legal matter?



Among respondents who said they paid for legal representation, a majority (53%) paid \$5,000 or less to resolve their legal issue.

Respondents most commonly said the cost of their legal issue was what they expected (27%), followed by users who said it cost more than expected (23%). The N/A category encompasses a variety of scenarios ranging from not paying for legal representation to not having it resolved yet.

METHODOLOGY



Sample Size: 2,453 consumers completed the survey.



Data Collection Period: 4/12/21 to 5/19/21



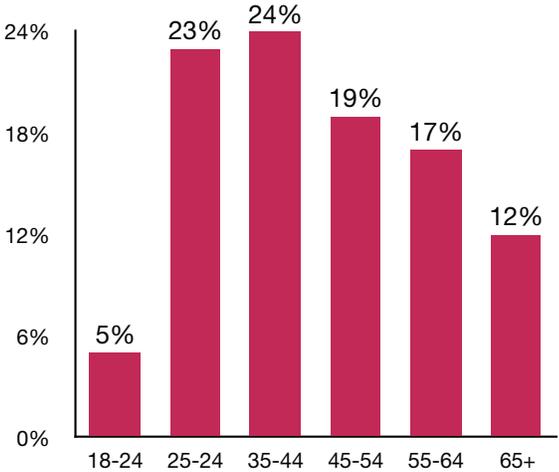
Survey Method: Online survey of legal consumers in the Martindale-Avvo database who had a current legal need or dealt with one in the past 12 months.



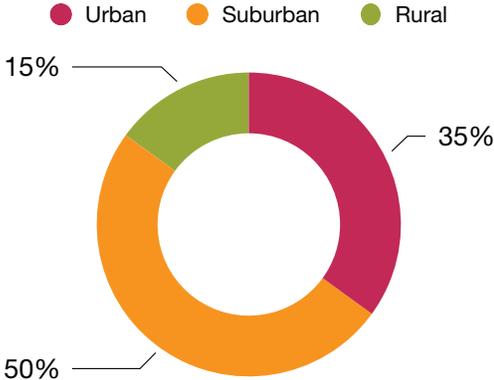
Sampling Error: The margin of error for the respondents was +/- 1.98% at a 95% confidence level using a point estimate of 50%.



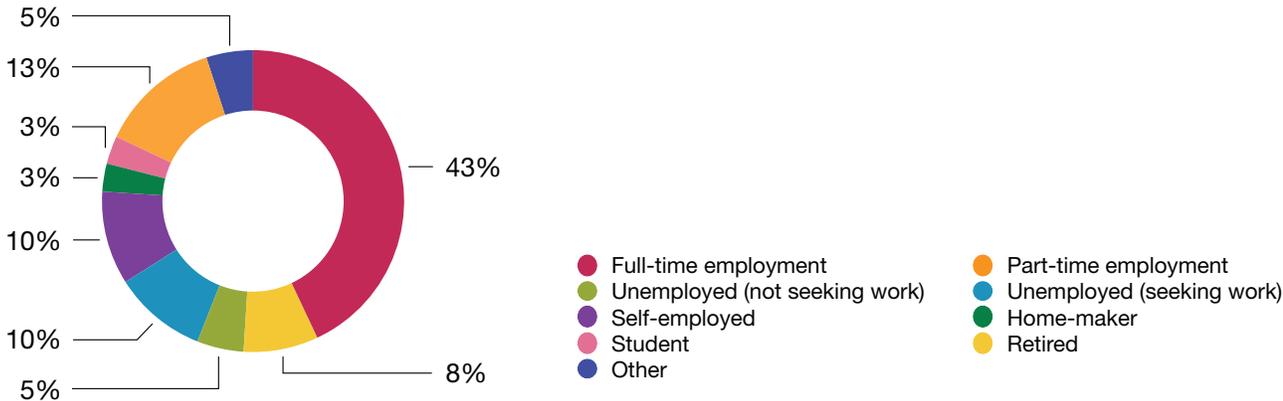
Age Demographics



Location Type



Employment Status



KEY TAKEAWAYS



Key hiring factors remain consistent year over year (cost, responsiveness, experience, client reviews).



Finding an attorney is most often a multi-step process. Consumers use a wide range of resources for hiring and for understanding their legal issue.



A majority of consumers with a legal issue will decide to hire an attorney. Most do so rather quickly and by considering multiple attorneys.



Lack of attorney responsiveness continues as the primary hiring red flag.

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