

Martindale-Avvo™

# **UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL CONSUMER 2020**

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 2020, gaining insight from 3,027 respondents across the United States and Canada about the criteria that mattered most to them when choosing an attorney. Our research unintentionally took place during the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine in the United States, but much of the data we gathered reflects responses pertaining to legal issues already underway or completed by that time.

In line with last year's report, legal consumers still 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

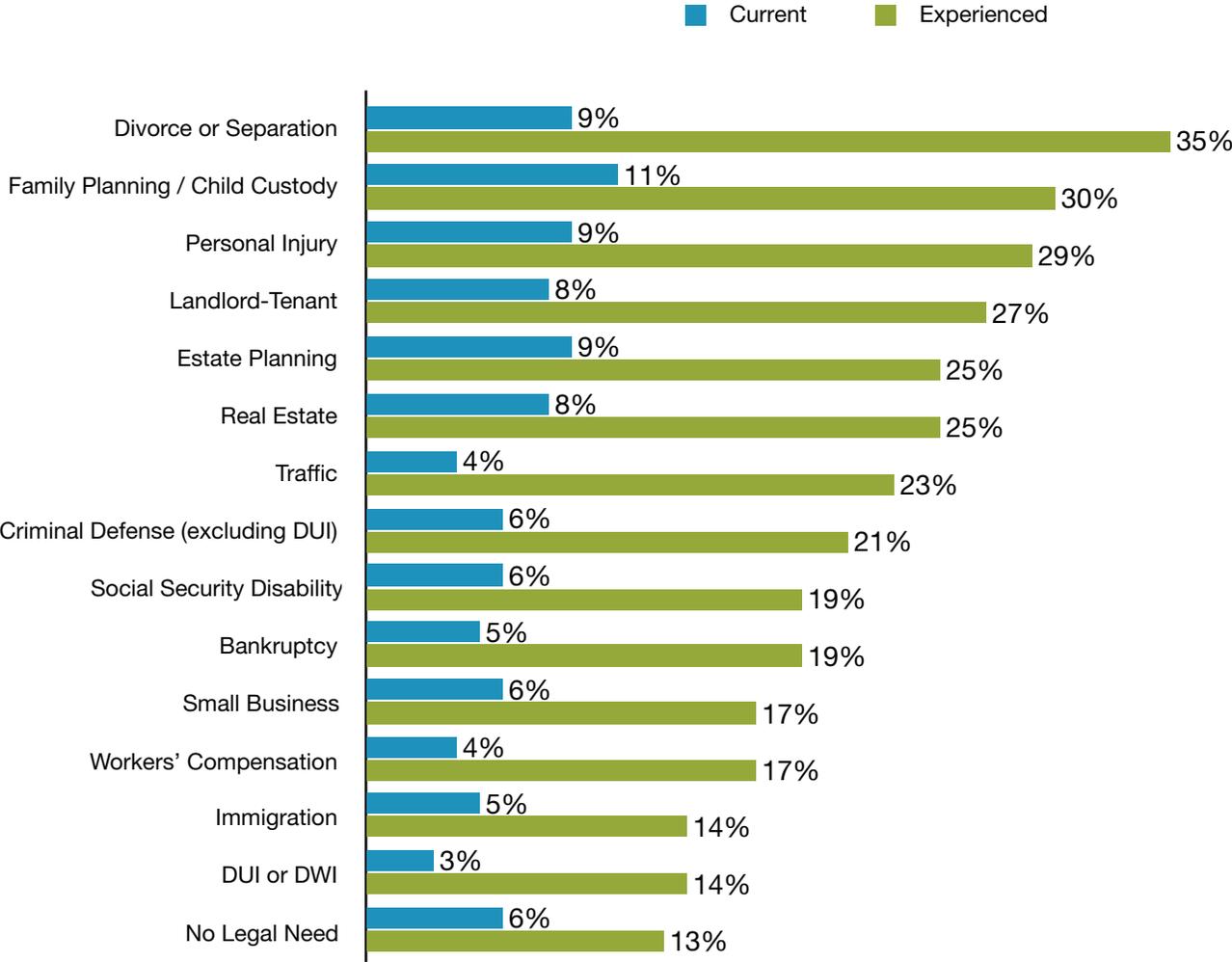


Working with an attorney

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.

# Respondents experienced a range of legal needs

What legal needs have you experienced or dealt with? (select all that apply)

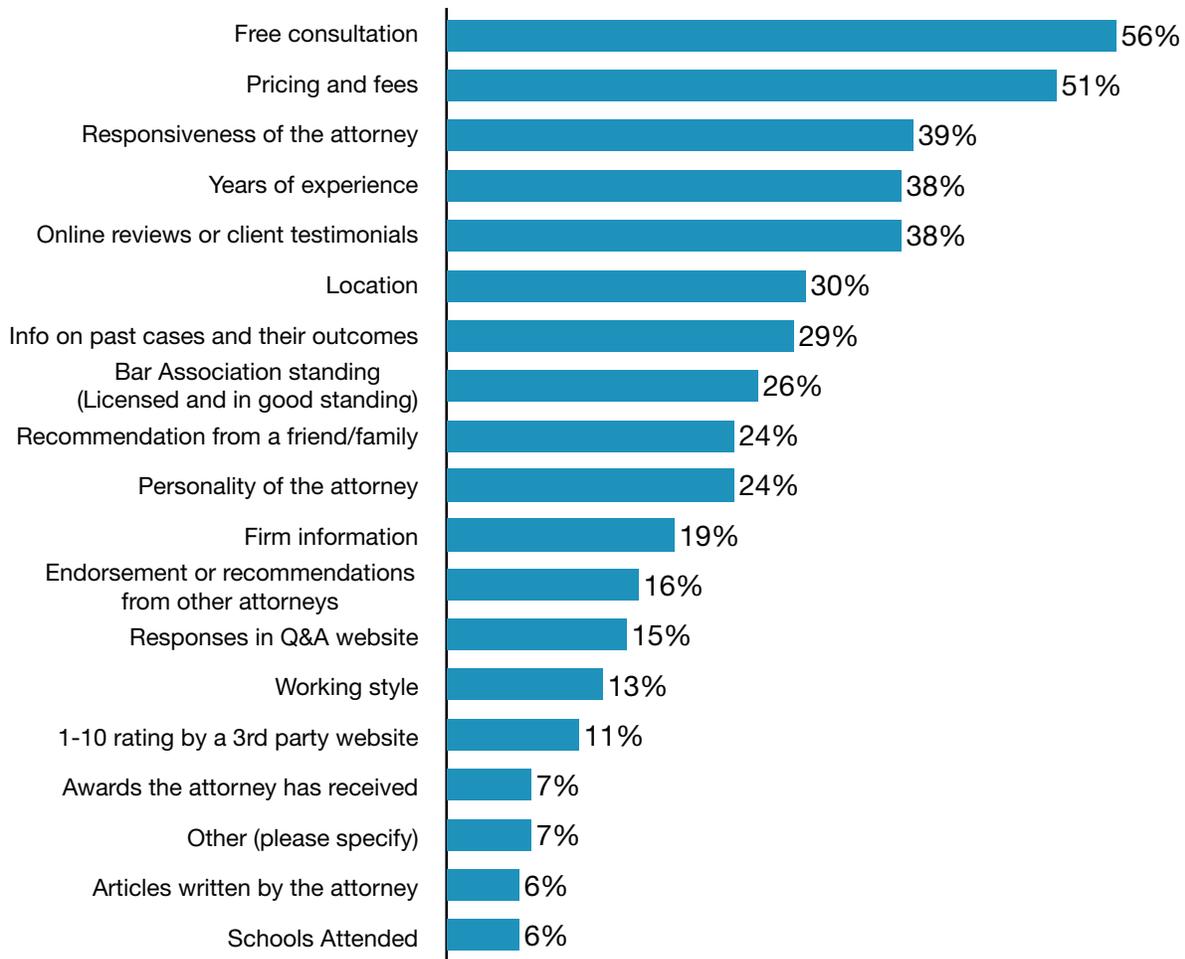


More than one-fifth (21%) of those surveyed were experiencing two or more legal needs. A majority (54%) were currently experiencing at least one legal issue. Divorce or separation was the number one legal issue consumers experienced, moving from the number two spot in last year's report. Personal injury moved into the top five legal needs.



# The decision criteria list

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

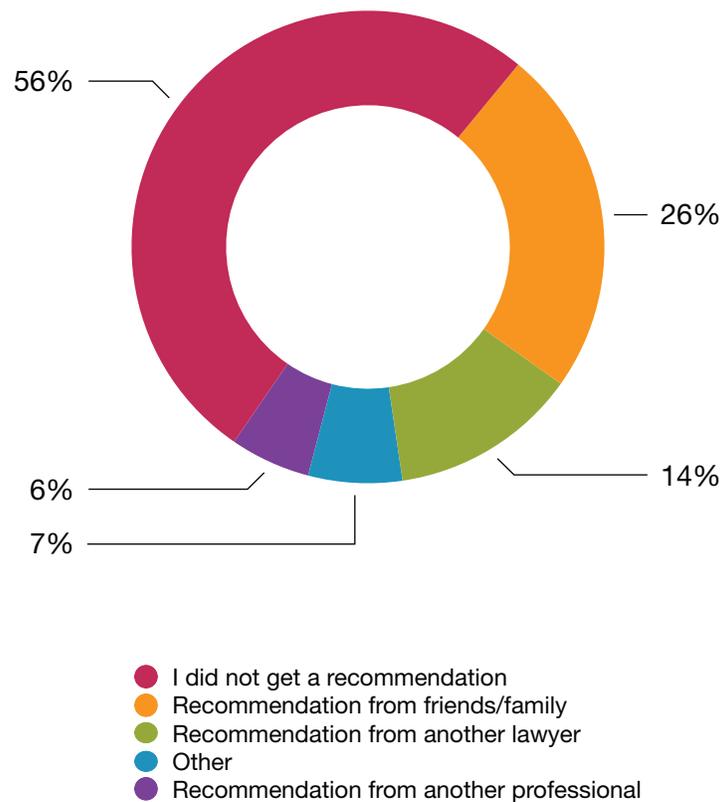


Year over year “free consultation” and “pricing and fees” were the most desired information. This was followed by responsiveness of the attorney, years of experience, and online reviews / client testimonials. Those with incomes of \$50K+ were more likely to desire a quick response, with those at the lowest end (<\$16K) slightly less likely to expect this.



# Some consumers tapped friends and family

Did you get any recommendations when starting your search for an attorney?  
(select all that apply)



A majority of respondents (56%) did not get any recommendations when starting their search for an attorney. Among those who did, getting recommendations from friends or family was the most popular method (26%). Those aged 44 or younger were more likely to seek recommendations this way.

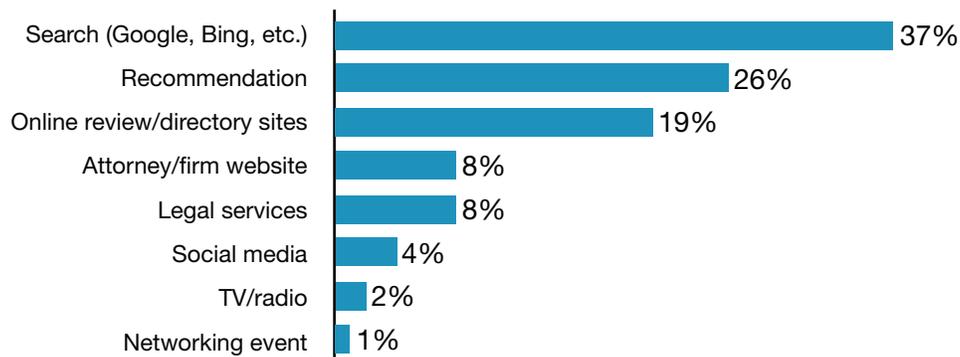


# Consumers cast a wide net

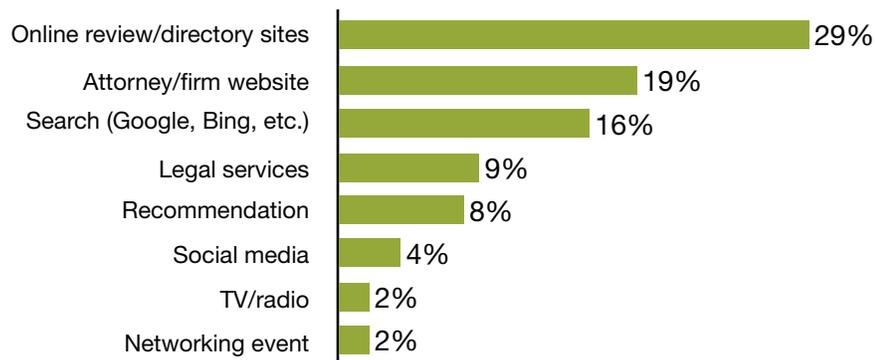
**Please number the first three resources you used when finding an attorney.**

Excludes respondents who selected more than one option per step.

**Consumers indicated the first step they took when researching an attorney.**



**Consumers indicated the second step they took when researching an attorney.**

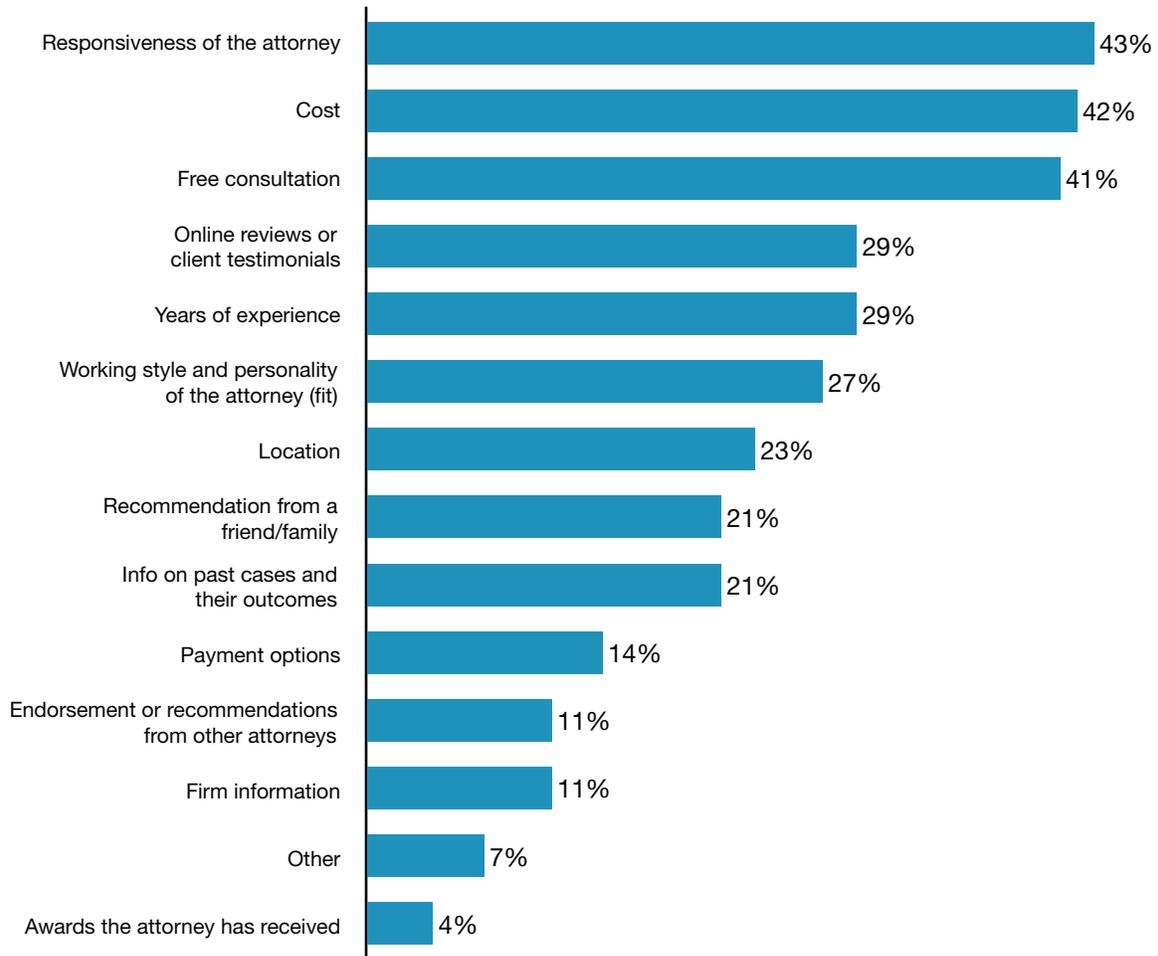


Finding an attorney is a journey composed of multiple steps. It will come as no surprise that the majority of legal consumers start their hiring research using either a search engine (36%) or a recommendation from a friend or family (26%). For most, this then takes them to online review/directory sites (29%) to find out more, or to the actual attorney/firm website (19%). Social media or advertisements are rarely a focus.



# What the final decision boils down to

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



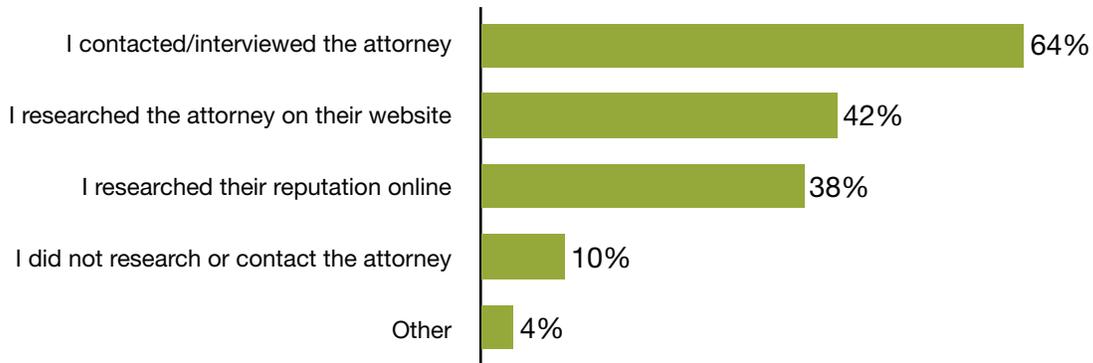
When asked what the most important factors in their hiring decision were, most respondents indicated one of the following: attorney responsiveness (43%), cost (42%), or free consultation (41%). Respondents also valued reviews / testimonials, years of experience, and personality fit.

Awards were the least considered factor. Only a few (4%) of respondents felt they were vital to their decision-making process.

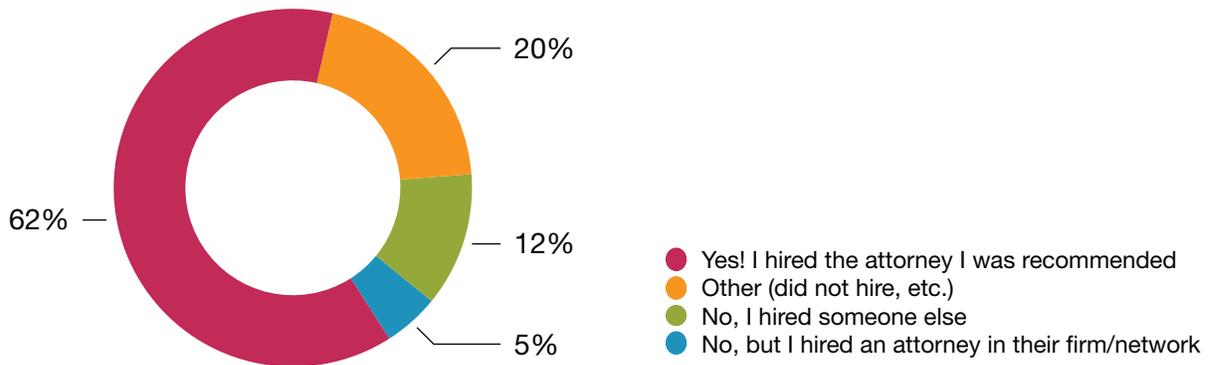


# Referrals received additional vetting

## Did you research or contact the attorney you were recommended?



## Did you hire the attorney you were recommended by a friend, family member, or colleague?



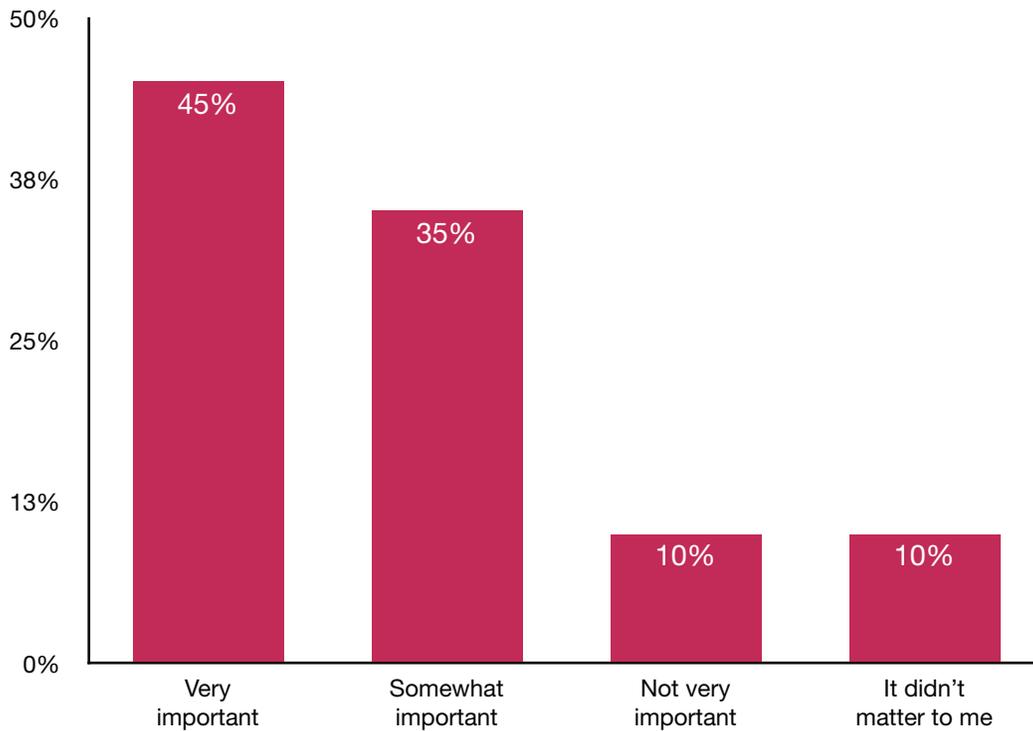
If consumers received a referral, they did not automatically accept the recommendation at face value. Many researched the attorney on their own, with 42% looking at the attorney's website, and 38% doing research online.

64% reported contacting/interviewing the recommended attorney, and 62% reported hiring the recommended attorney, suggesting that if a recommendation progresses to the contact phase, the potential client is very likely to hire.



# Client reviews play a critical role

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



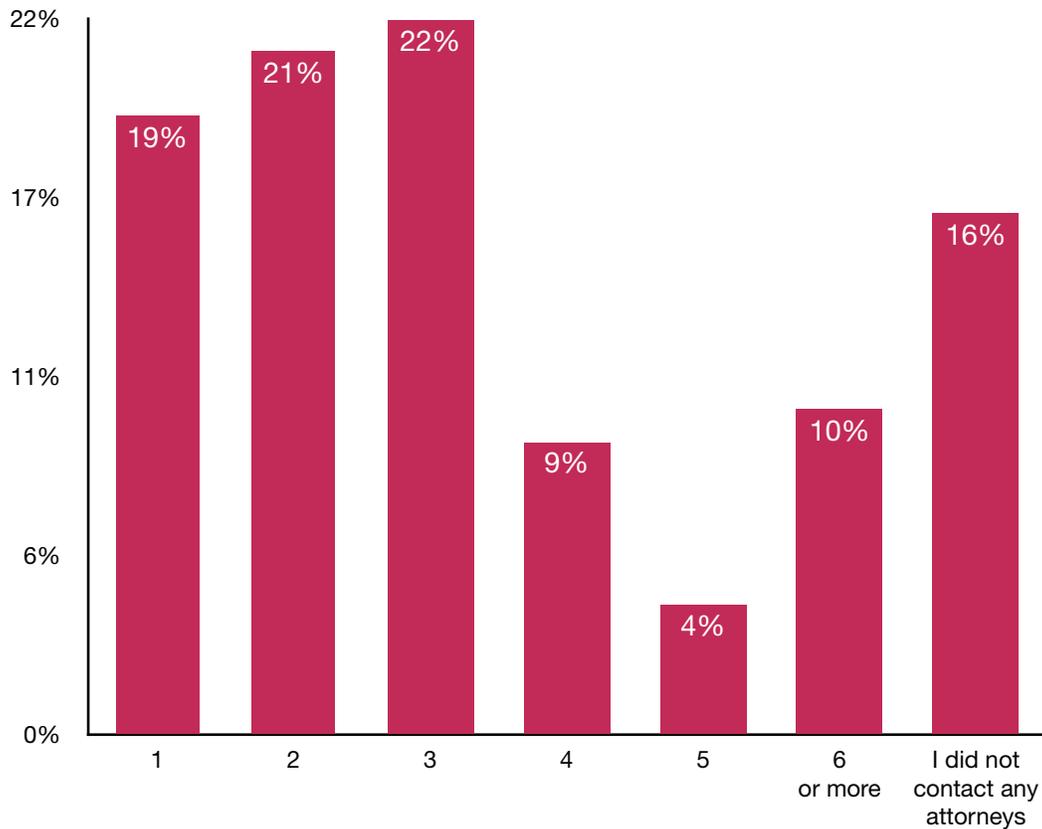
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Reviews continue to grow in importance for prospective clients, particularly with younger generations. They both complement in-person referrals and serve as a proxy for consumers who don't have a referral in hand. Nearly half (45%) said that reviews 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 shopped around

How many attorneys did you contact before deciding whom to hire?

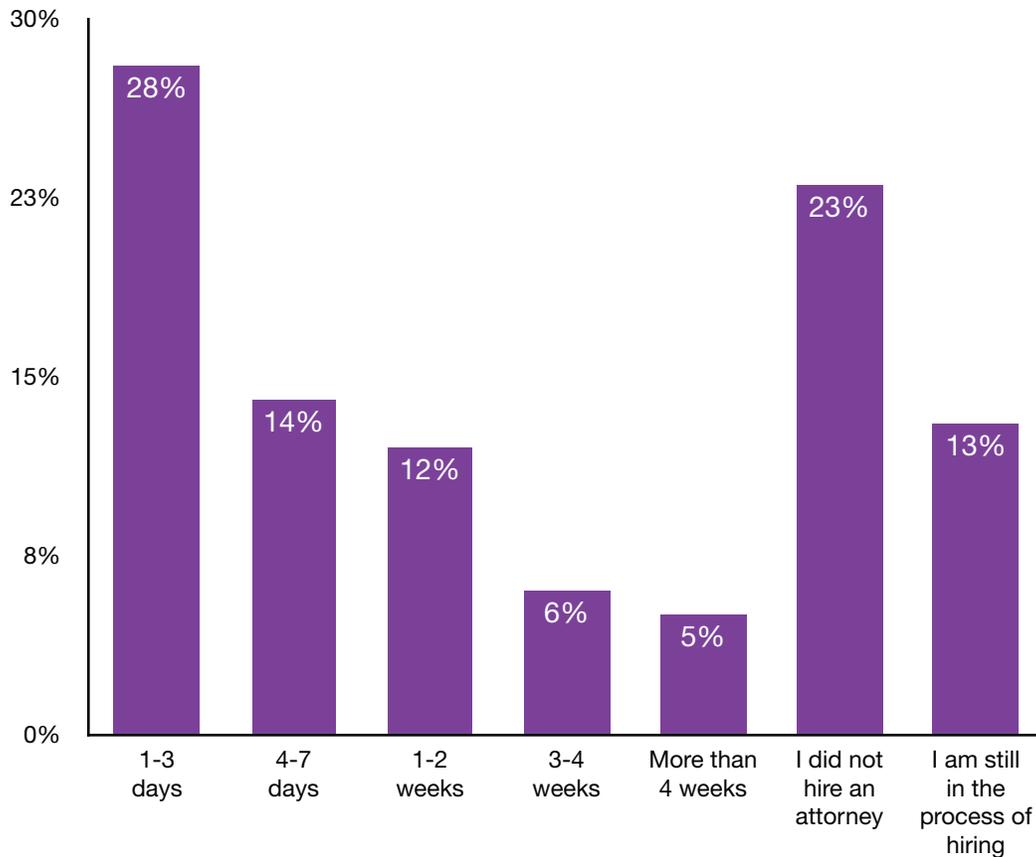


62% contacted 1 to 3 attorneys before making a decision. Proximity also played a role in the selection process, with 35% wanting to hire an attorney within their city. Almost two-thirds (63%) of consumers prefer to hire an attorney in their city or region. Consumers seeking an immigration attorney were noticeably more likely (14%) to say location was not a factor.



# ...but then they made 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)?



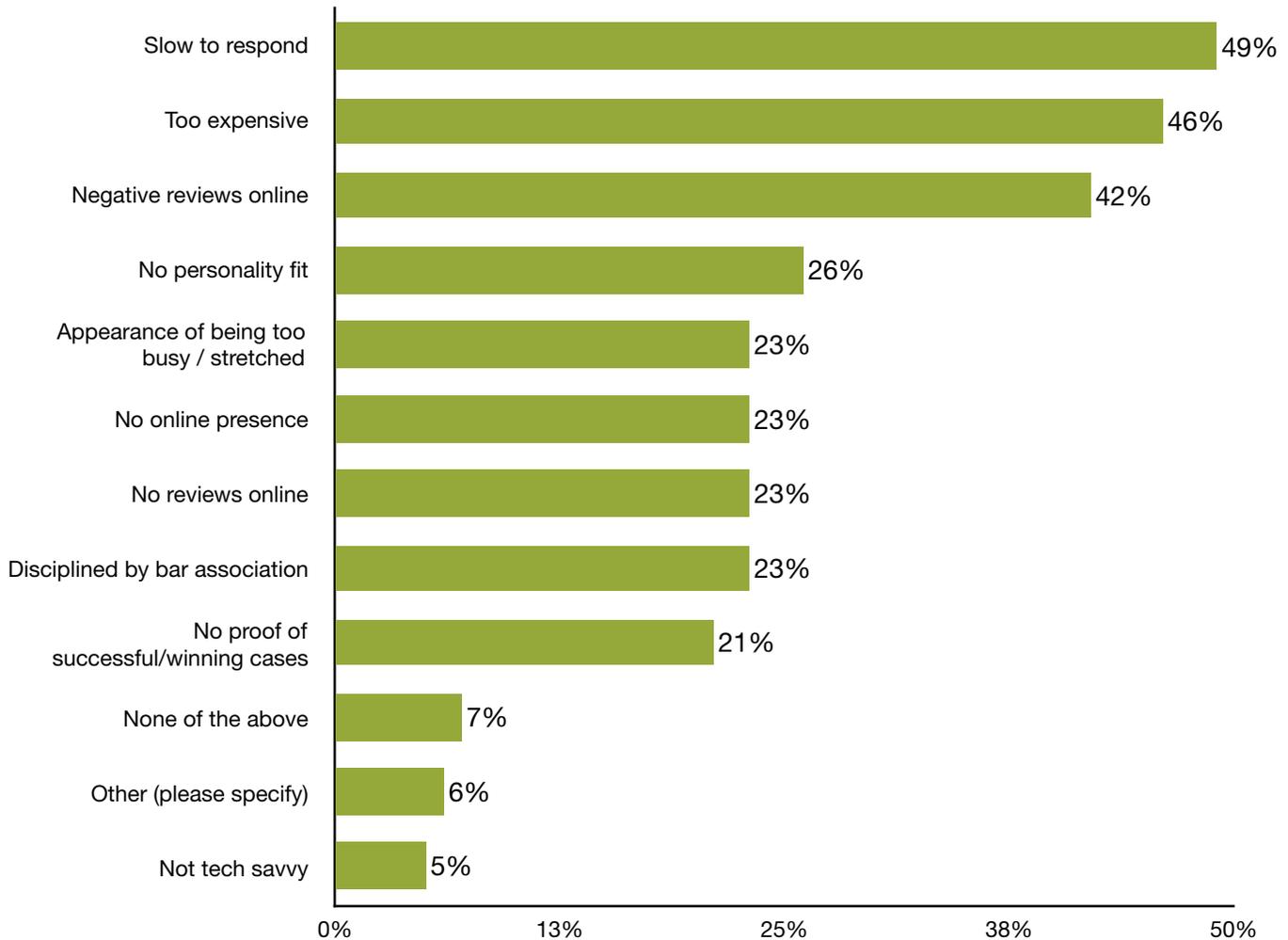
Consumers most commonly chose an attorney within 1 to 3 days of realizing they needed one. Additionally, more than half (54%) hired an attorney within two weeks.

When respondents who did not hire an attorney were asked to explain, most (27%) said that it was too expensive. This matches with findings where 46% of respondents said 1 of the 3 biggest barriers to hiring was “too expensive.” Consumers also named a variety of other reasons as to why they had not hired, which included getting a court-appointed lawyer, deciding to handle their case on their own, and not having calls returned.



# Speed remained key in client conversion

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



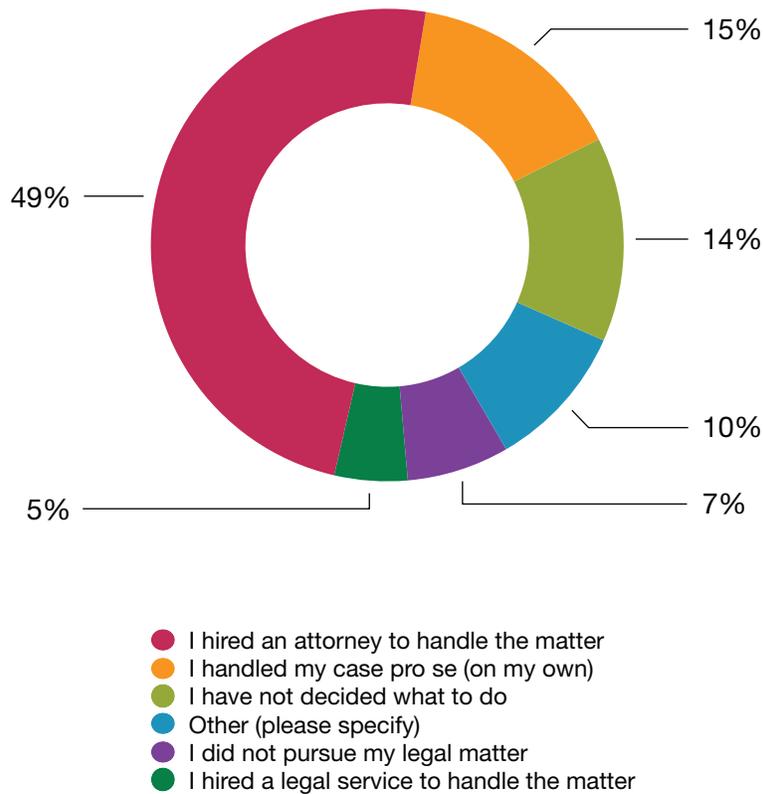
As with the prior year's report, "slow to respond" was rated as the biggest red flag. Half (49%) of respondents indicated this was a major deterrent to hiring an attorney. "Too expensive" (46%) and "negative reviews online" (42%) were also significant concerns. The majority (35%) of attorneys responded within one day after being contacted by a potential client, while 13% of consumers never heard back from the attorney they contacted.

Phone and email were the most popular methods consumers used when contacting an attorney, with in-person dropping from the second to the third spot since last year's report. Both real-time chat and video calls increased in usage year over year.



# Over 50% of consumers worked with an attorney to resolve their issue

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

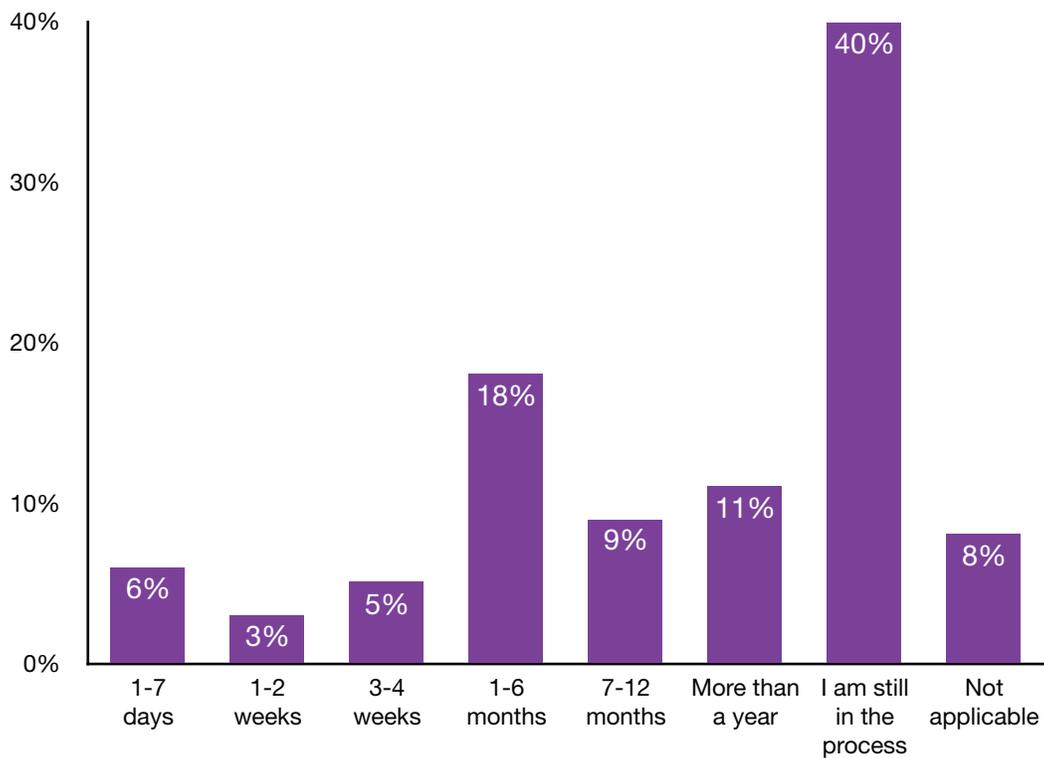


A majority decided to hire an attorney (49%) or work with a legal service (5%) who could provide them with an attorney. 15% went it alone, handling their case pro se.



# Some matters resolved quickly

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

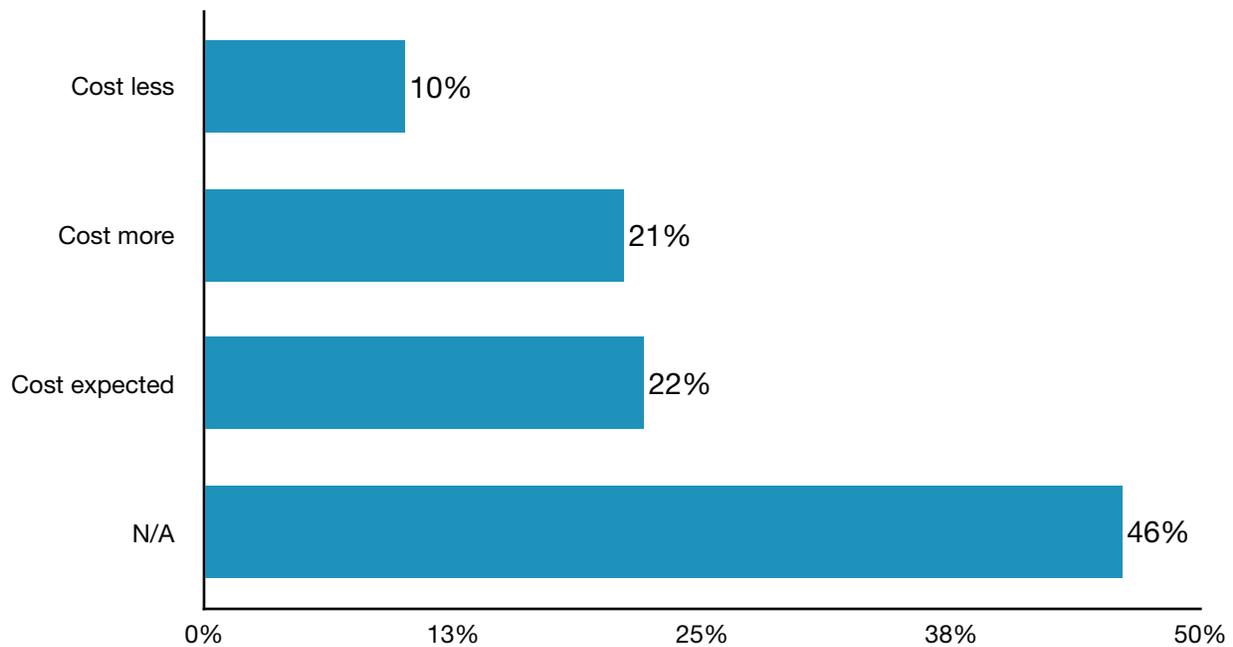


Nearly a quarter (23%) of legal consumers had their legal matter resolved within three months or less. Overall, 40% of respondents were still involved in a legal matter.



# Did cost meet 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 \$3,000 or less to resolve their legal issue.

Respondents most commonly said the cost of their legal issue was what they expected (22%), followed by users who said it cost more than expected (21%). 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: 3,029 consumers completed the survey.



Data Collection Period: 5/20/20 to 6/26/20



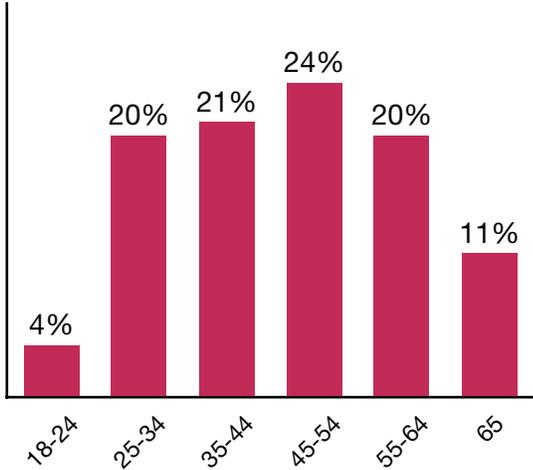
Survey Method: Online survey of legal consumers in the Martindale-Avvo database



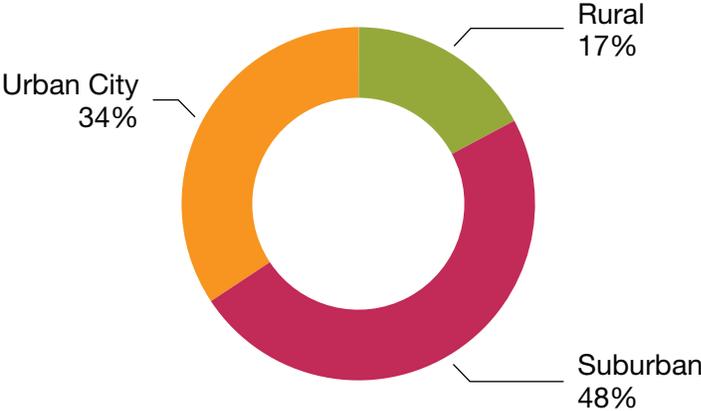
Sampling Error: The margin of error for the full-time employed respondents was +/- 1.78% at a 95% confidence level using a point estimate of 50%.



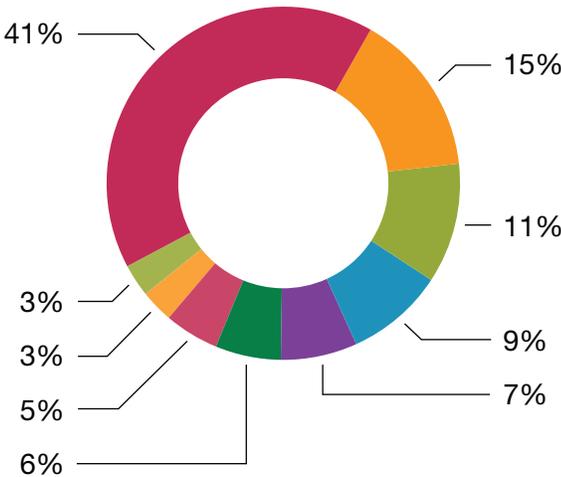
Age Demographics



Location Type



Employment Status



- Full-time employment
- Unemployed (seeking work)
- Part-time employment
- Unemployed (not seeking work)
- Student
- Retired
- Self-employed
- Other
- Home-maker

# KEY TAKEAWAYS



**Consumers value the opportunity to speak with an attorney** for a free consultation before hiring to determine if the fit is right.



**Consumers worry about cost** and are concerned about being able to afford the help they need.



**Referrals are no longer** the first step in finding an attorney.



**An attorney's response time remains critical.** Consumers' anxiety about their legal issue prompts them to need a speedy call back or they'll move on to someone else.



**Client reviews are no longer** nice-to-have; they are a prerequisite to being considered.



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