



Understanding the Legal Consumer 2022

How prospective clients
decide who to hire



Introduction

To help understand what matters most to potential clients, Martindale-Avvo surveyed legal consumers across the United States in the spring of 2022. We made sure to connect with consumers in our database who were currently dealing with a legal need, or who had dealt with one within the last year.

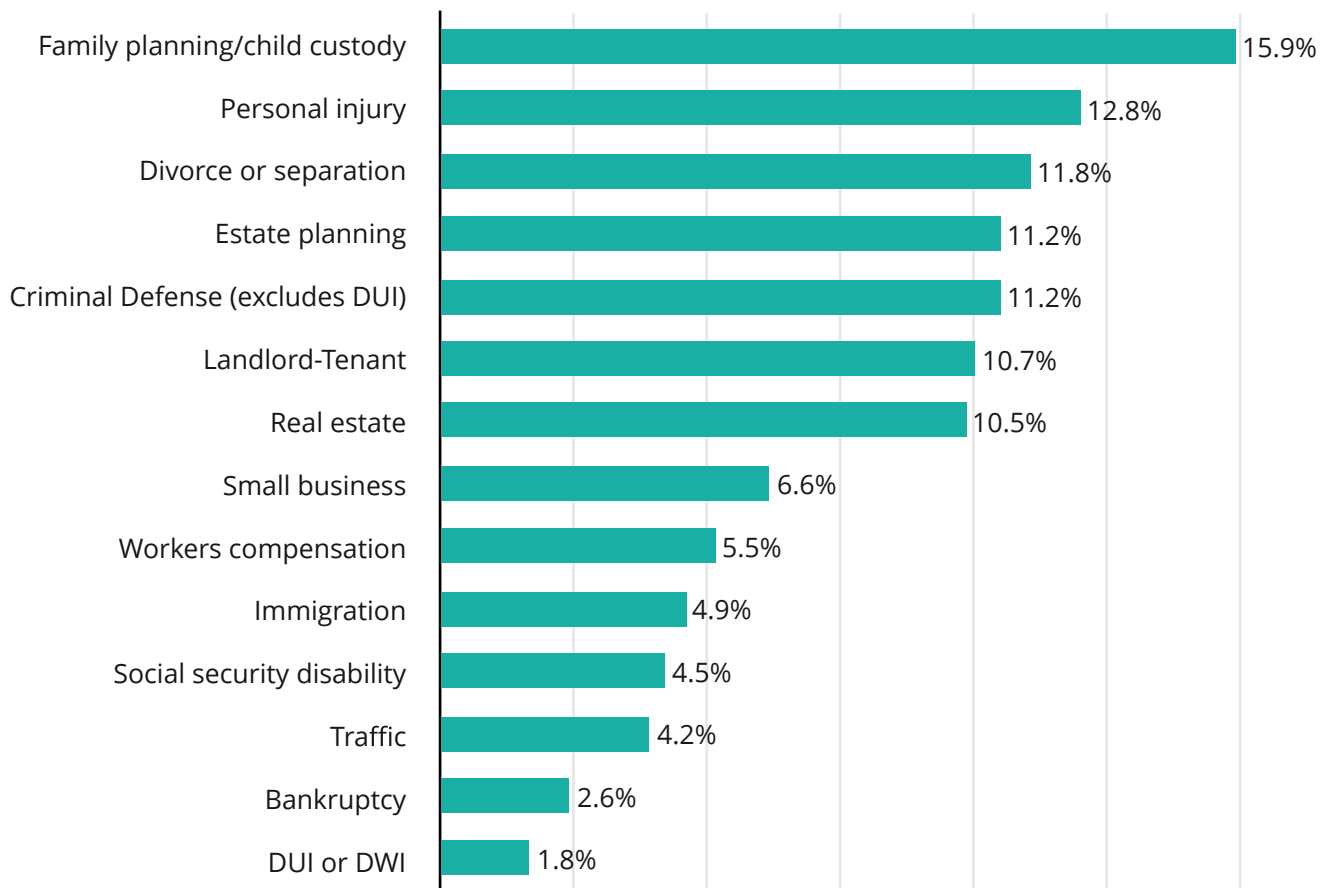
We set out to answer the following questions: How does a legal consumer find the attorney they want to hire? What tools do they use to research lawyers and how quickly do they make their hiring decisions?

Our report discloses data that supports each part of a potential client's journey. In line with our previous surveys, legal consumers made it clear that they value attorneys who respond promptly to their calls and have invested the time in obtaining online client reviews. These, alongside typical criteria such as cost and experience, make up the how and why people choose a specific attorney.

We encourage you to use this information to attract and convert online searchers into new clients, along with your digital presence across the Martindale-Avvo network of legal brands.

The leading legal need? Family law.

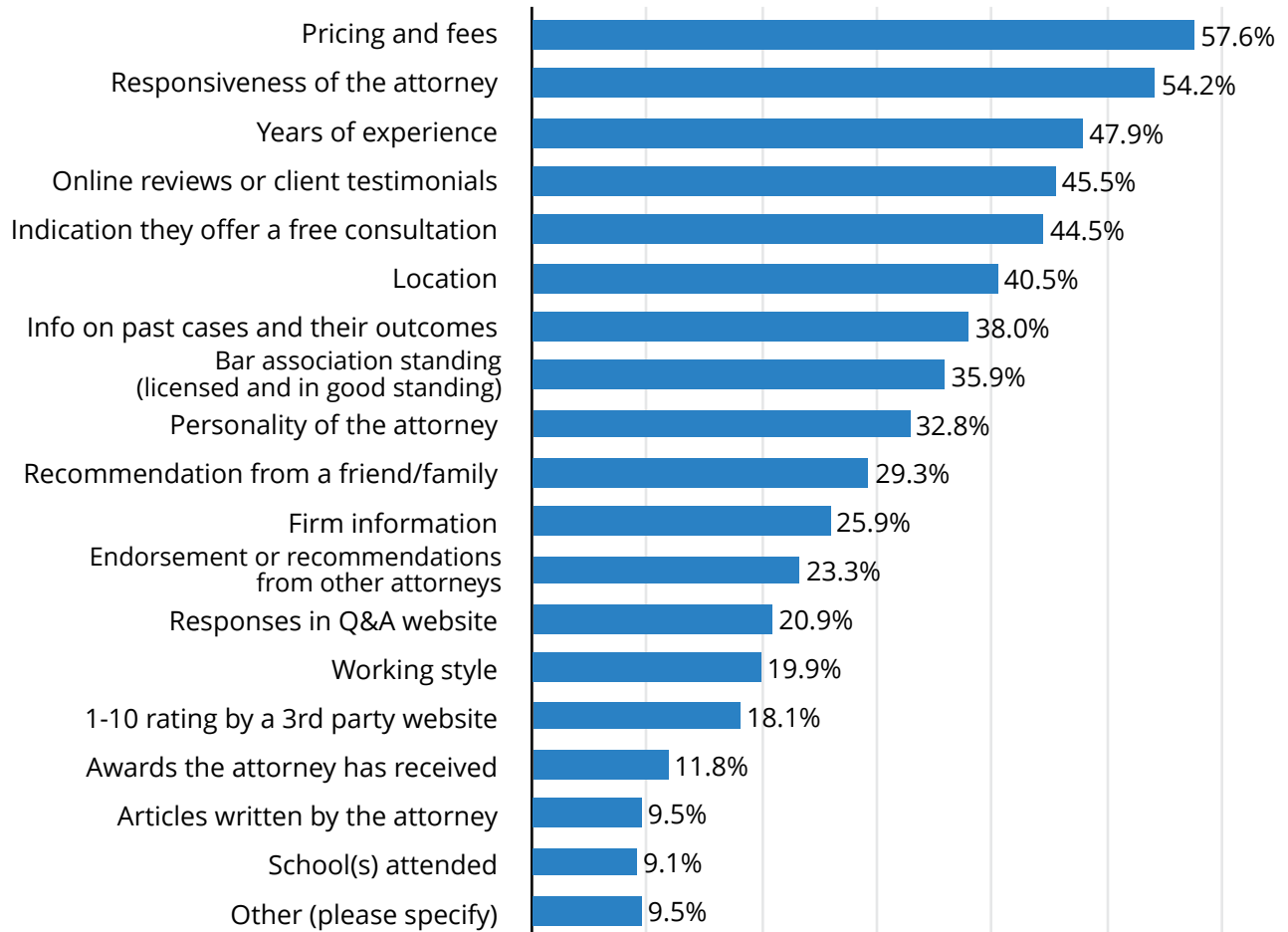
What legal needs have you experienced or dealt with? (Select all that apply)
[Chart shows responses of “currently experiencing”]



Three of the top six spots comprised consumers seeking to address highly personal matters — family law (family planning/child custody), personal injury, and divorce/separation, with family law number one. Estate planning and criminal defense dropped in popularity, and — perhaps optimistically — bankruptcy and DUI/DWI were down from last year also.

Considerations for contacting an attorney varied.

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



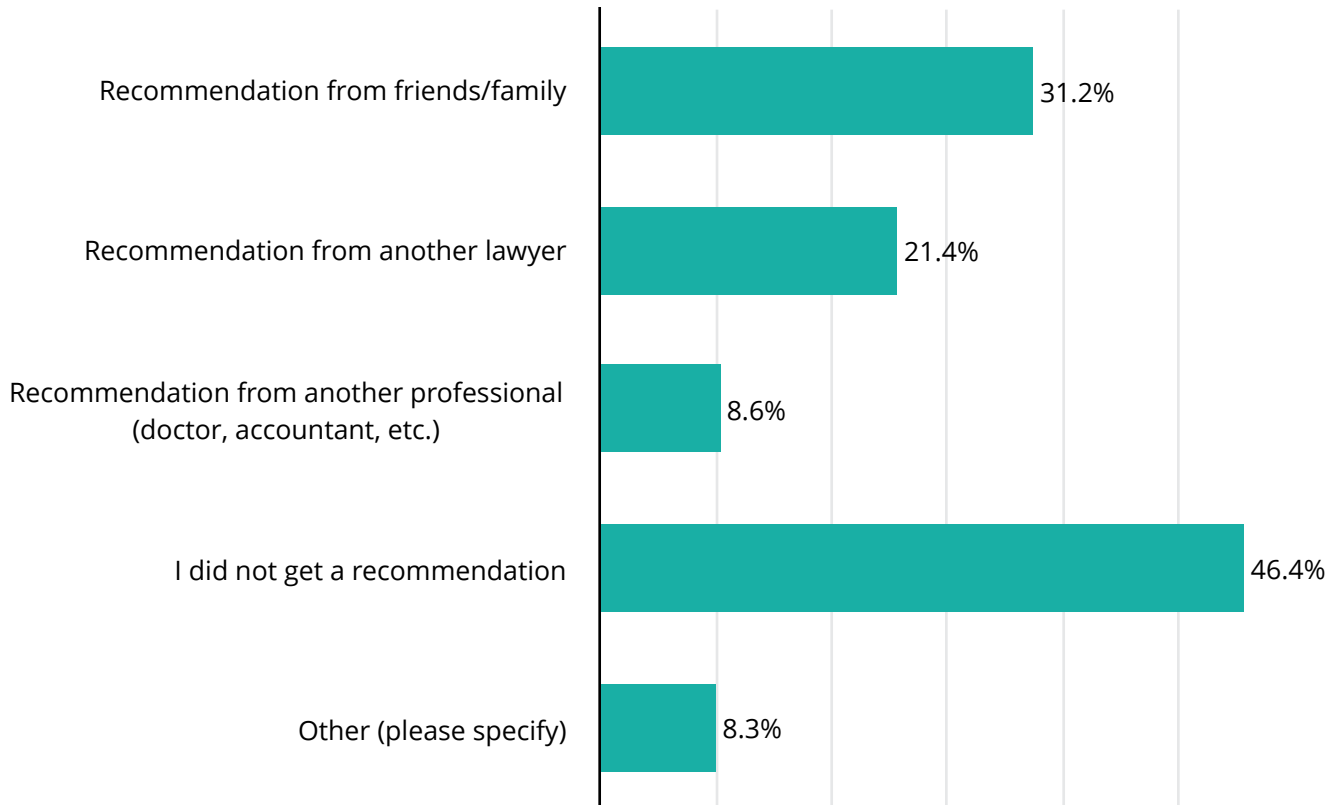
Again this year, an understanding of “pricing and fees” ranked as the top decision criteria as legal consumers want to know if they can afford an attorney’s services. In tandem, a “free consultation” is fairly high on the list as well.

Much like last year, “responsiveness” ranked second. Because legal issues are time-sensitive, prioritizing a potential client’s case by promptly answering and returning calls or emails is of utmost importance in hiring.

Consumers also considered years of experience and the presence of online reviews/client testimonials as key factors to be included in consumers’ decision-making.

Nearly half of consumers didn't start their search with a recommendation.

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

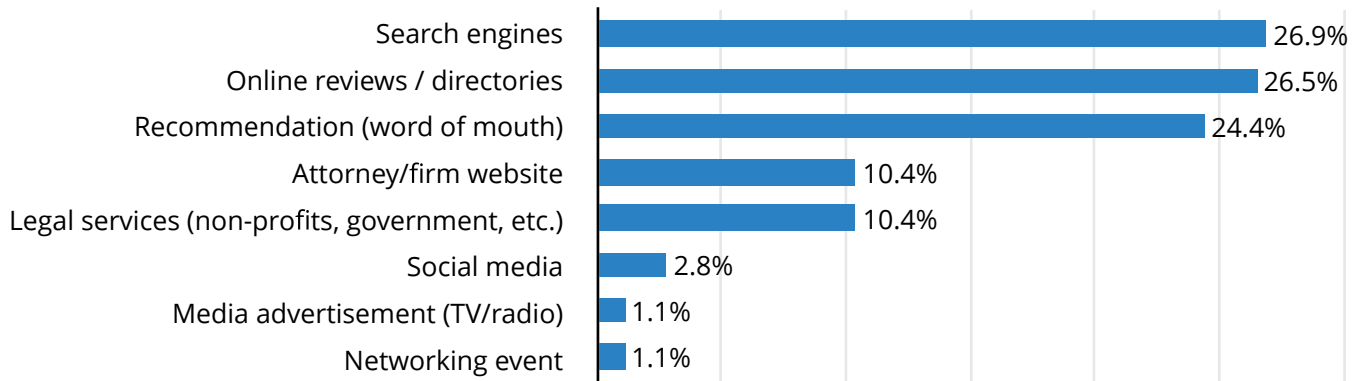


Almost half of respondents (46.4%) did not get a recommendation at all, whereas 31.2% pinged friends and family and 21.4% received a recommendation from another lawyer.

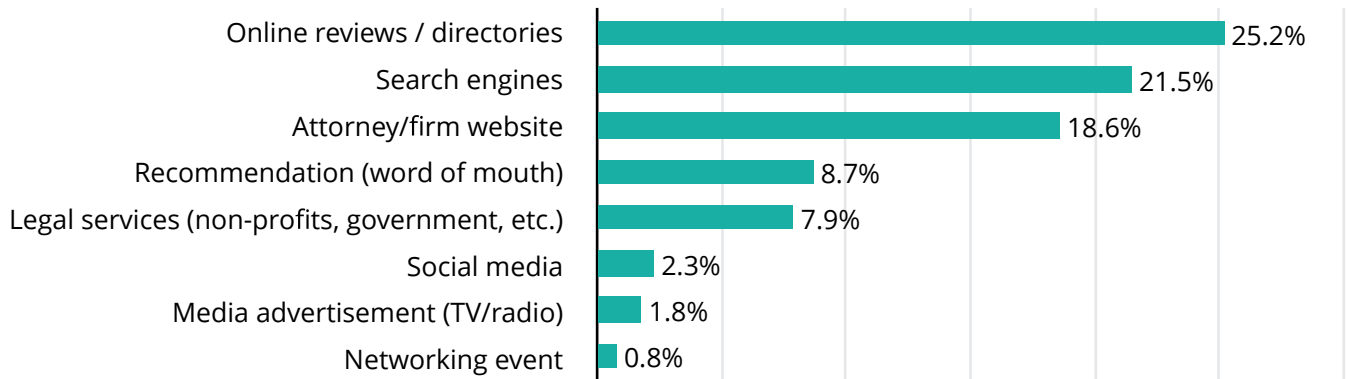
We noticed that in demographic data, adults from 35-44 favor the recommendations from family/friends, whereas this drops off with older consumers.

Most people searched online for an attorney.

1st resource used when finding an attorney



2nd resource used when finding an attorney

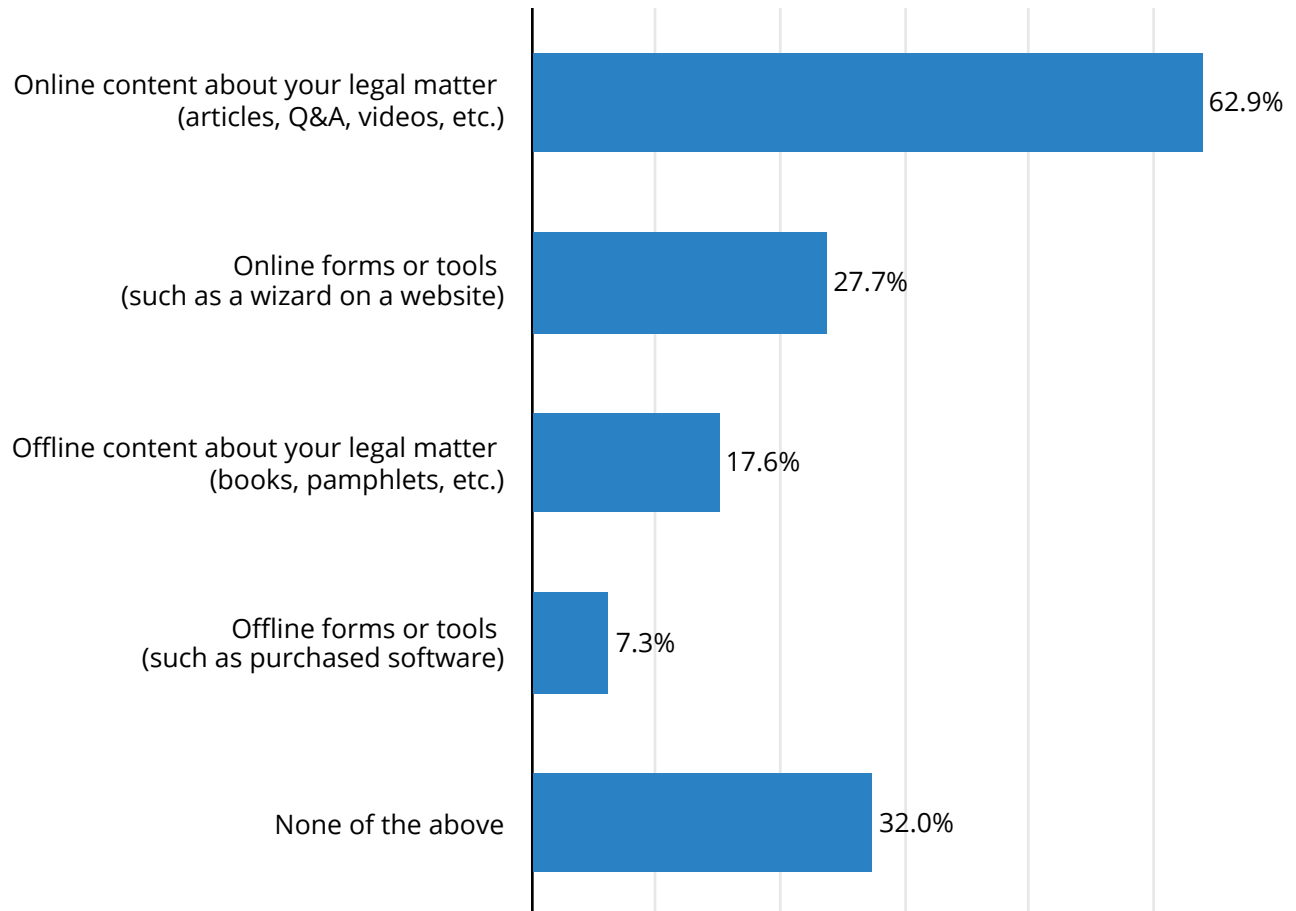


When looking for an attorney, online dominated. A majority of consumers begin by using a search engine (26.9%) or online reviews/directories (26.5%). Throw in websites and social media, and a digital presence is necessary for marketing your firm.

Recommendations (word of mouth) slipped this year, thus solidifying the championing of any and all things on the internet.

Further resources centered around online content.

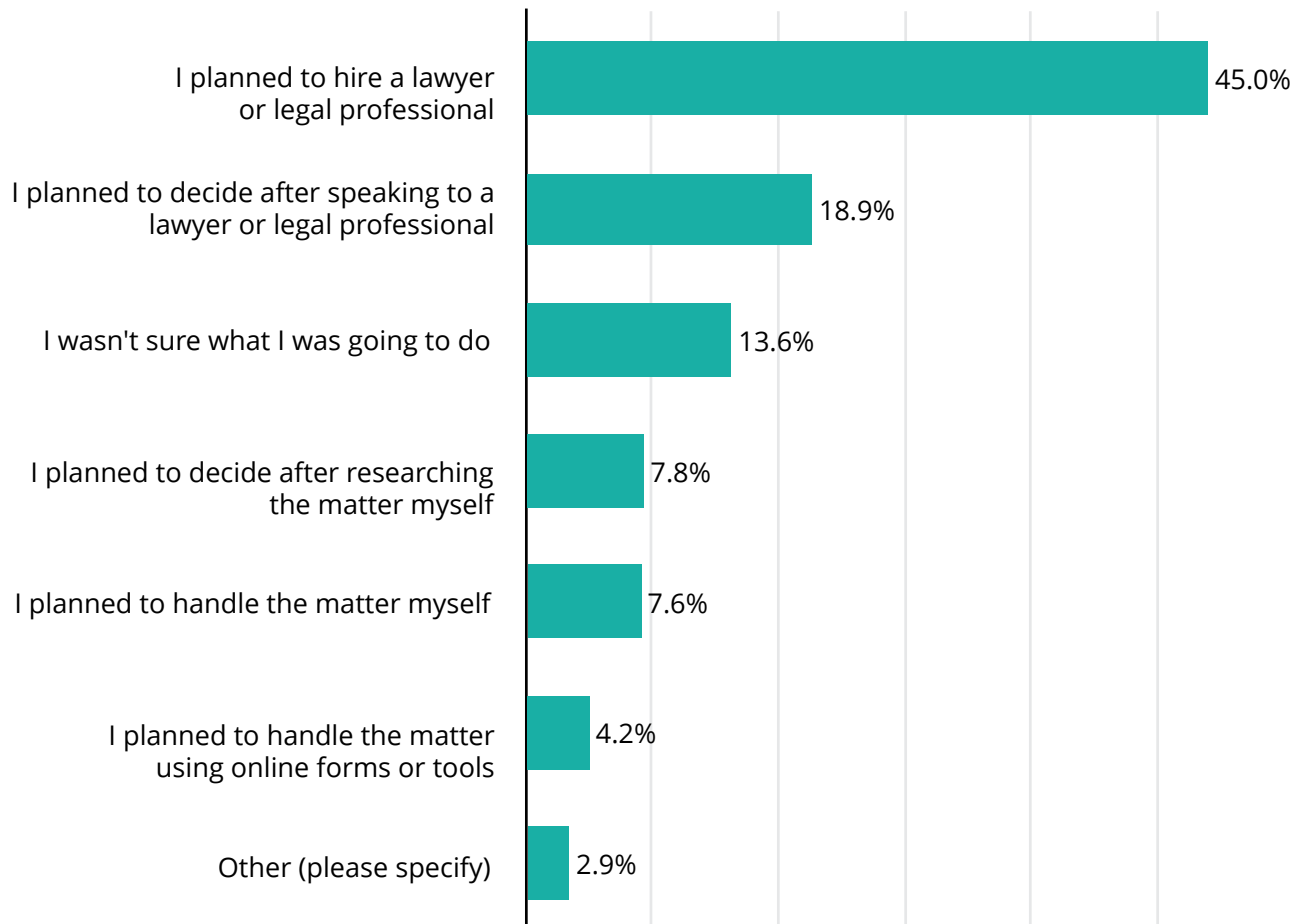
Did you use any of the following resources when handling your legal matter?
(select all that apply)



Nearly two thirds (62.9%) reported using online content to come to fully understand their legal issue, followed by online forms or tools. While offline research was not popular, “none of the above” took a good portion of respondents’ answers. We believe that consumers didn’t necessarily employ secondary research or that these options didn’t satisfy what they did.

Most consumers planned to hire an attorney.

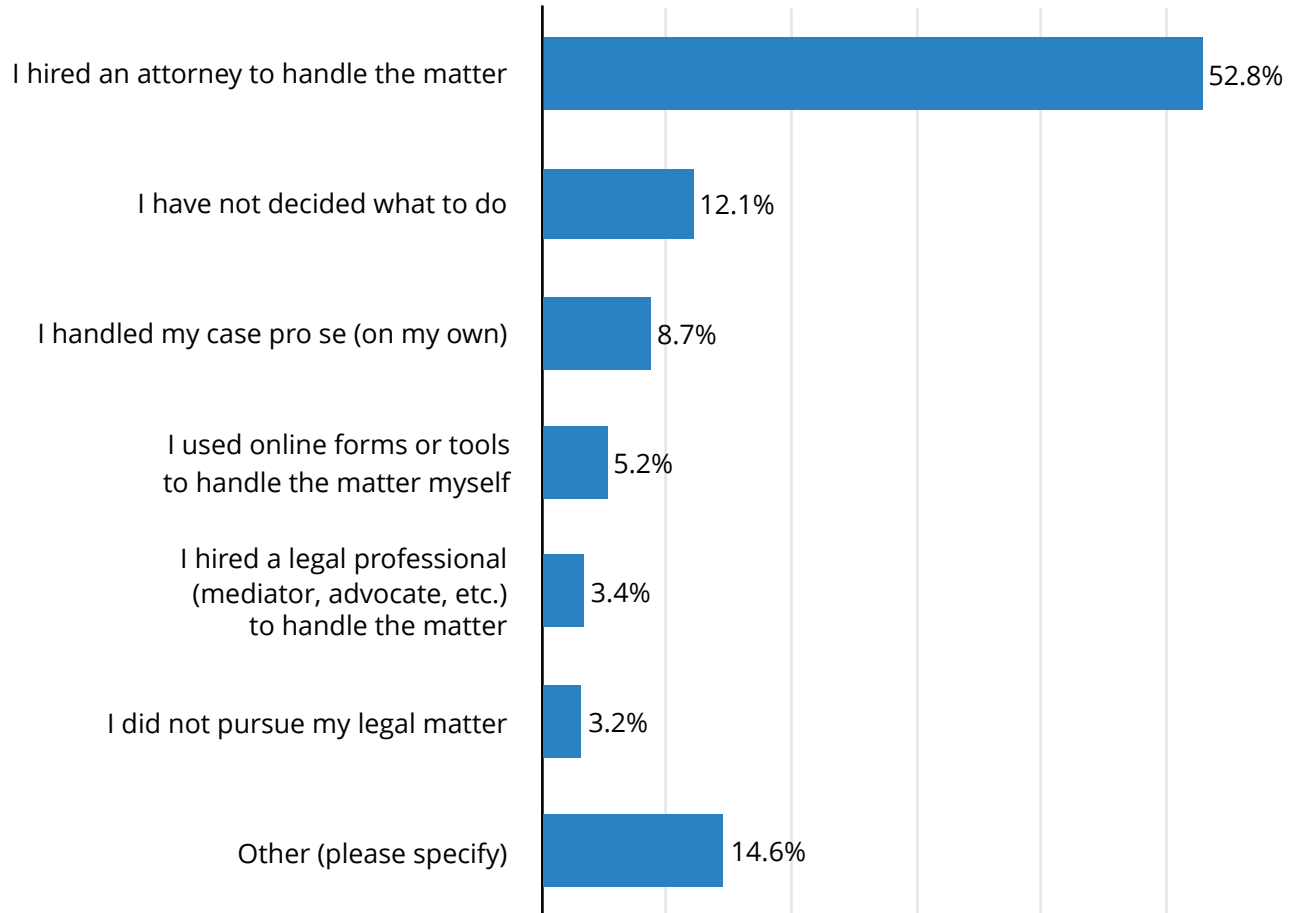
How did you initially plan to handle your most recent legal matter?



When asked how they thought they would handle their legal matter, 45% of those surveyed answered that they were planning to hire an attorney, and 18.9% wanted to speak to a legal professional prior to hiring. A little over a third did not set out to hire an attorney (although some did in the end, as the next page will show).

More than half hired an attorney.

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

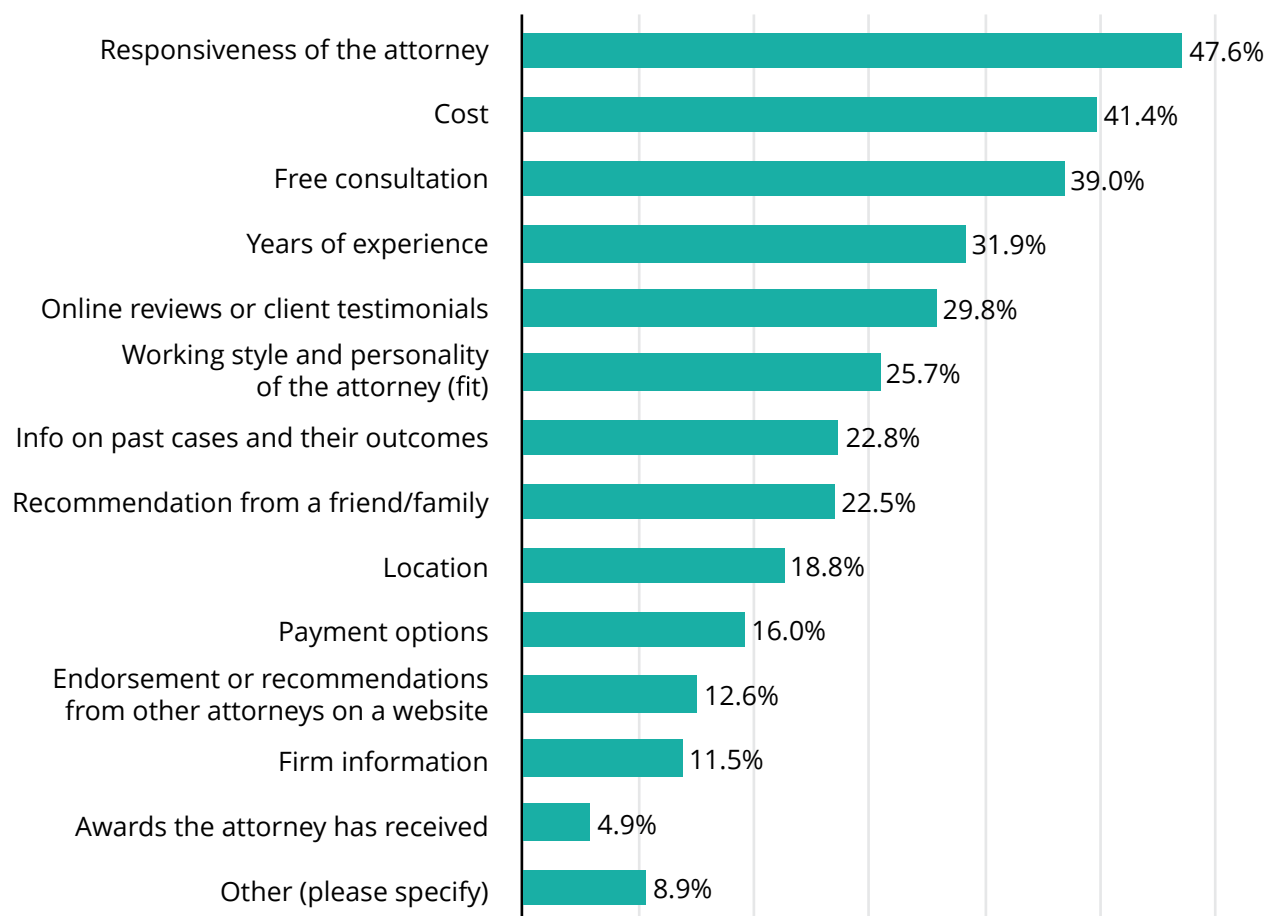


Only 12.1% were still undecided after researching attorneys. While 52.8% did hire an attorney, that's a drop from 2021 (56%). The "other" answer at 14.6% included responses such as being assigned an attorney (e.g. public defender, insurance company attorney, etc.) and still trying to locate an attorney.

Consumers who did not immediately plan to hire an attorney to handle their legal matter nonetheless went on to hire an attorney at a rate of 42%. (This category includes both those who were opposed to hiring an attorney, as well as those who were uncertain and wanted more information before deciding what to do).

Prompt response & affordability dominated consumer hiring decisions.

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

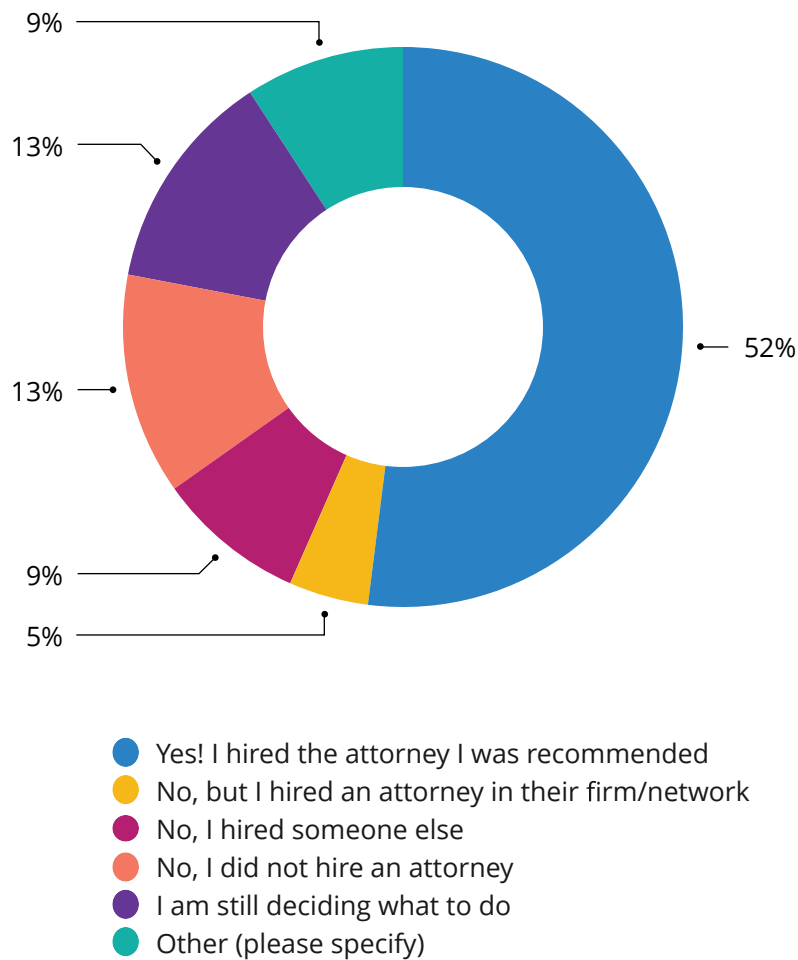


Attorney responsiveness ranked as the number one most important attribute consumers required for hiring an attorney, the same as the prior year. In fact, the other major factors — cost, free consultations, years of experience, and online reviews or testimonials — were all represented in the top five again.

We'd like to point out that the several top entries are inversions of what people listed as red flags or blockers to hiring, which are reported later in this document. Compare the first hiring factor "responsiveness of attorney" to the first red flag "slow to respond" and the second hiring factor "cost" with the second red flag "too expensive."

Recommendations matter.

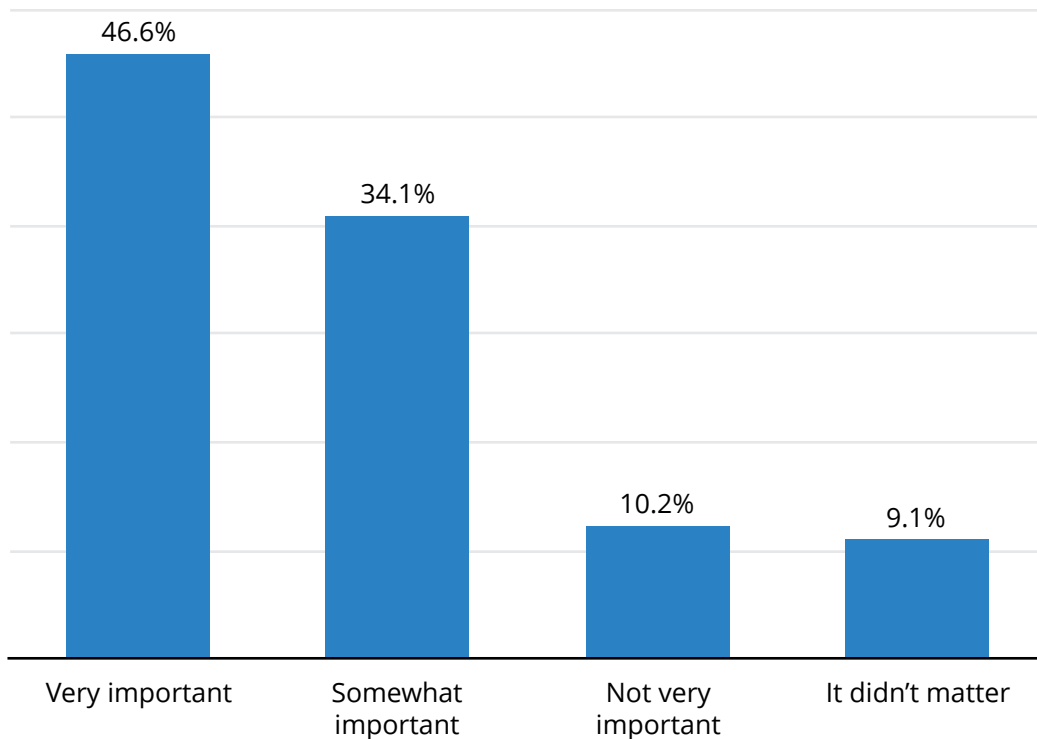
Did you hire the attorney you were recommended?



Among those who received a recommendation for an attorney to use, more than half (52%) ultimately went on to hire that attorney.

Online reviews matter, too.

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

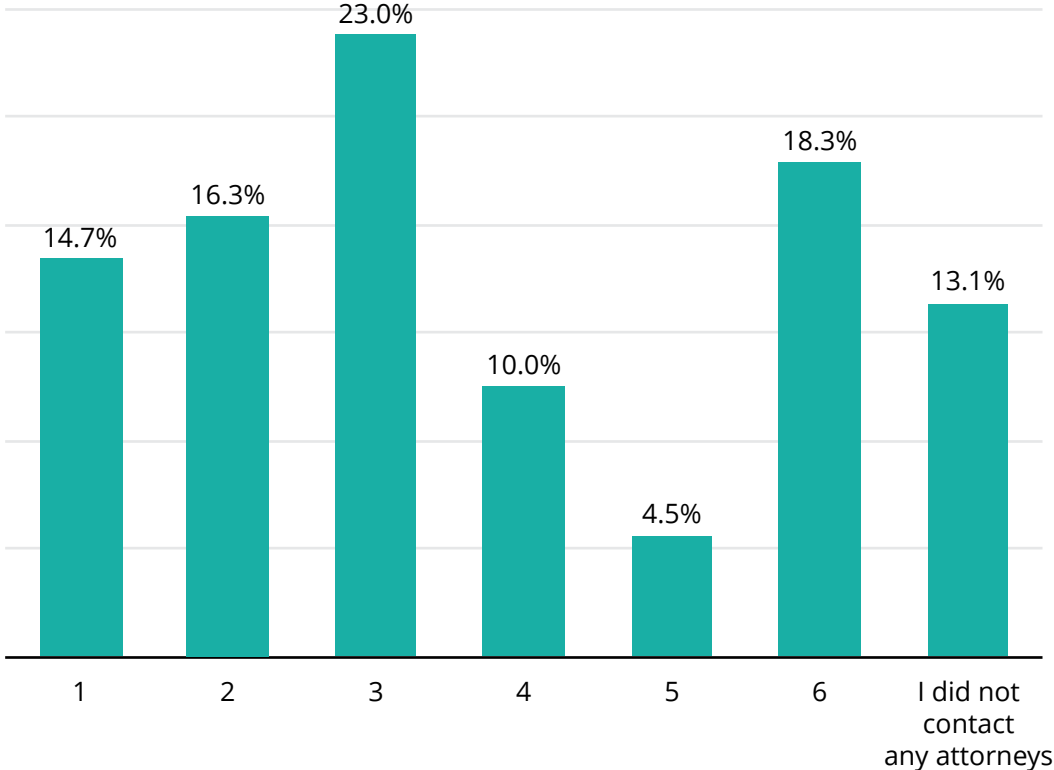


Reviews continue to be very important for prospective clients (46.6%) to somewhat important (34.1%).

In our demographic data, we discovered that younger respondents (aged 25-34) were most likely to place higher importance on reviews and ratings.

Consumers research multiple attorneys.

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

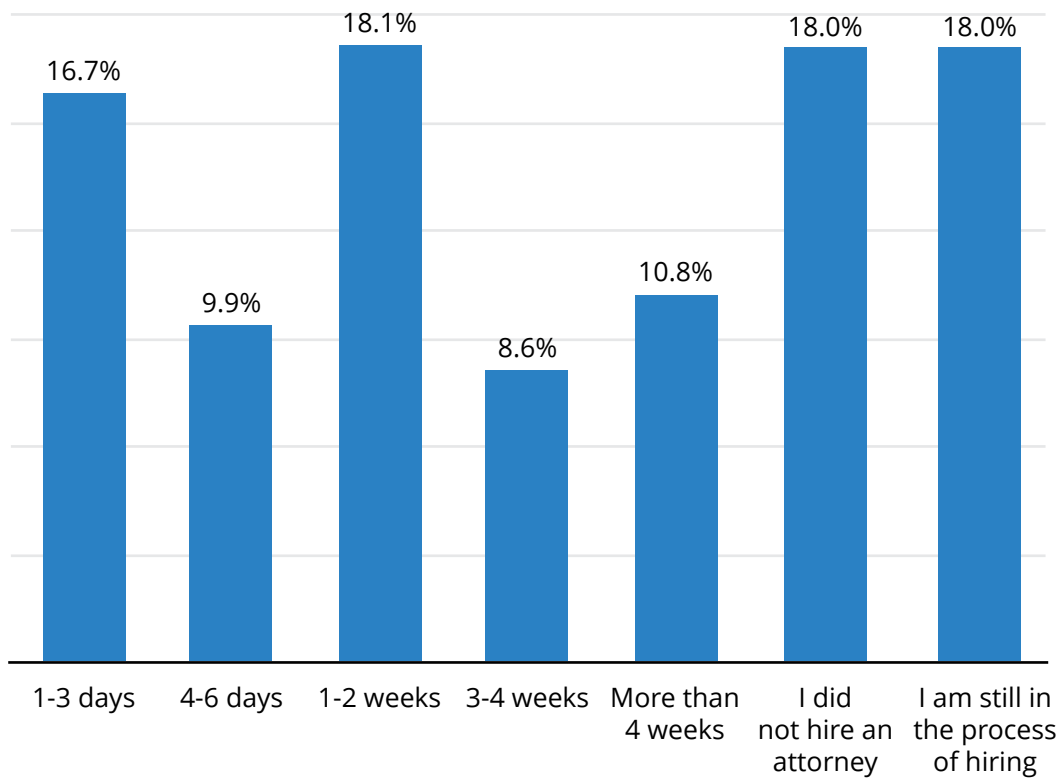


In years past, two-thirds of consumers (60%) contacted one to three attorneys before making a final decision; this has dropped to just above half (54%) with 23% preferring to contact three total. Quite a few prospects contacted 6 or more (18.3%), proving that some of our respondents were very thorough in their research.

A sizeable number (13.1%) did not contact any attorneys.

One in four consumers hired an attorney within a week.

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).



Overall, more than half of consumers (53.3%) hired an attorney within a month.

Among consumers who did not hire an attorney, the most common reasons were cost (26%), being able to resolve the matter without an attorney (23%), being unable to find an attorney to take the case (15%), or not hearing back from any attorneys (14%).

What not to do.

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

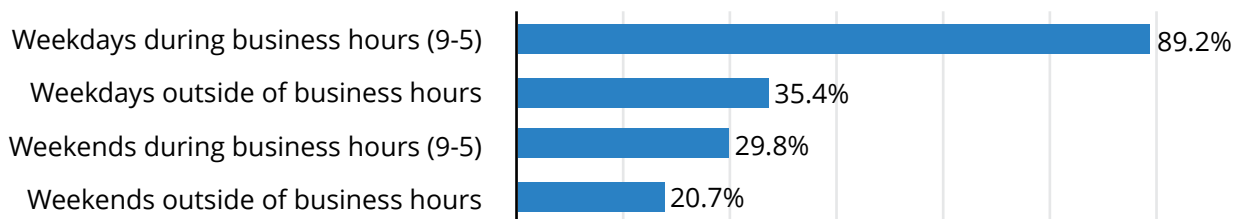


Continuing the trend over multiple years, “slow to respond” is the biggest red flag when hiring an attorney. Just over half (52.6%) of respondents indicated this was a major deterrent, just above too expensive (47.7%) and negative reviews online (42.1%).

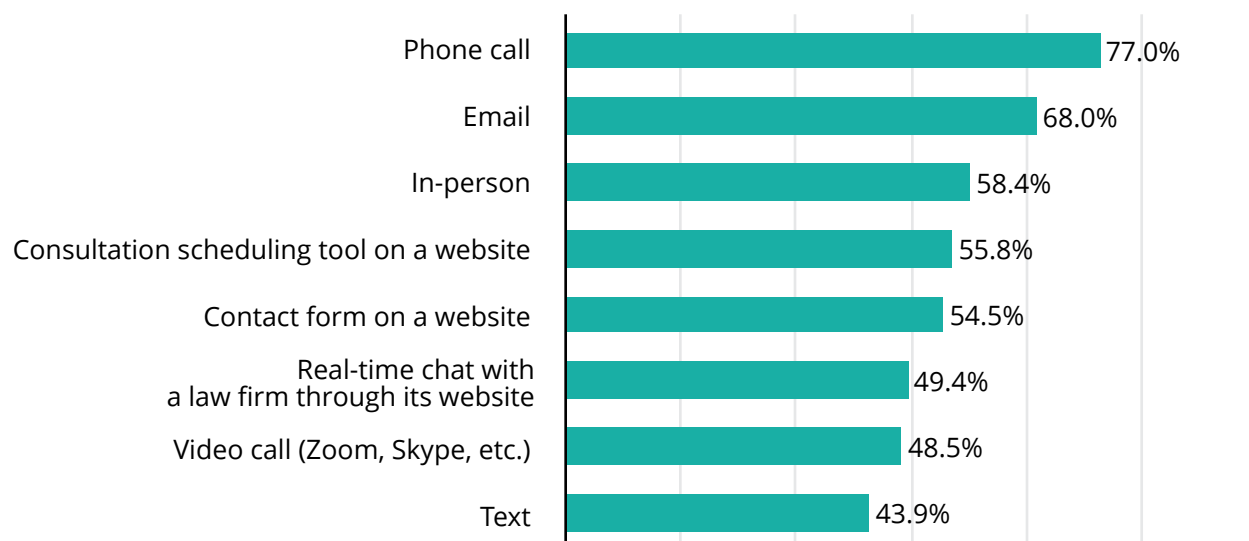
These numbers are practically identical to last year’s report, with minimal change in percentages.

Time of day & method of communication.

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 combined totals for responses of “very likely” or “likely”]

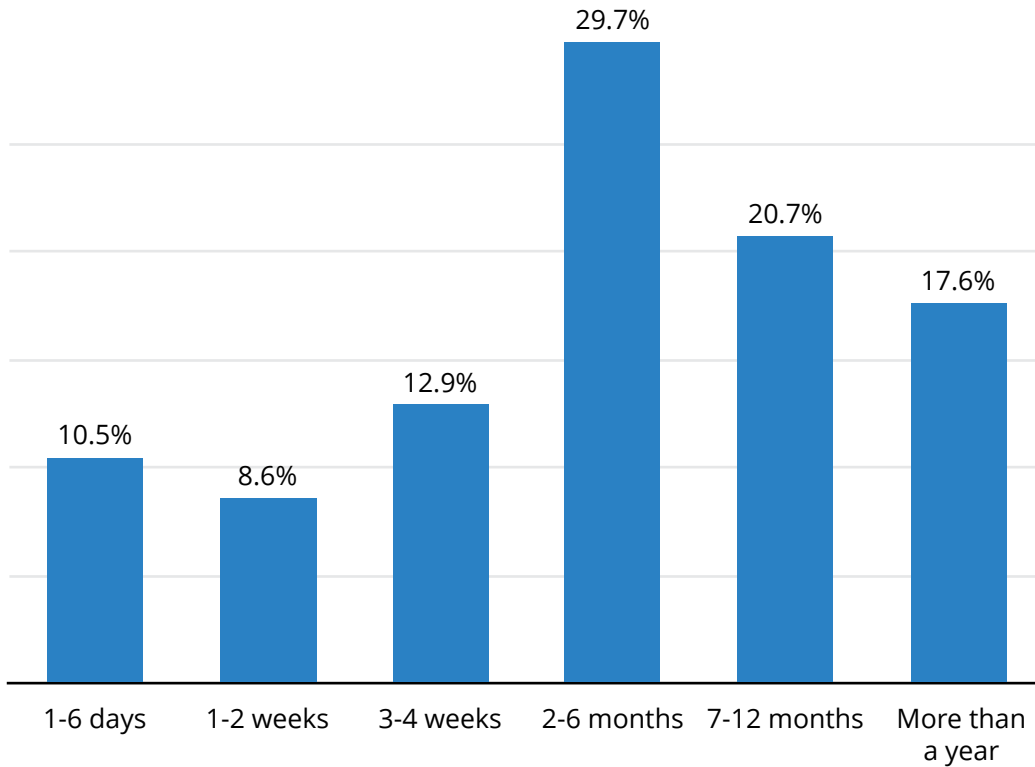


Most consumers (a whopping 89.2%) will contact an attorney/firm during weekday business hours, although smaller segments will attempt connections after business hours or on weekends.

Phone remains the preferred method of initial contact for consumers (77%), followed closely by email (68%). All the methods of contacting attorneys remained fairly high, with the least popular option being mobile text (43.9%; still very close to half), so having a variety of ways to speak with potential clients is a good idea.

Most consumers resolved their issue in less than 6 months.

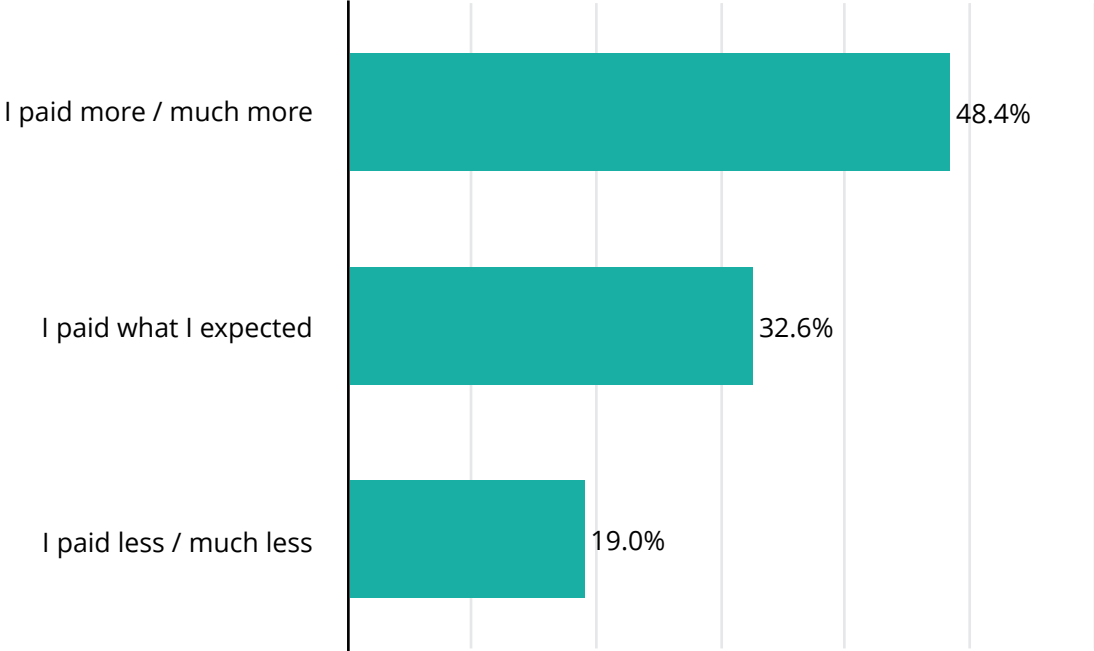
How long did your most recent legal matter take to resolve?
[Chart shows responses from those who have resolved their legal issue]



Among consumers who had resolved their legal issue, more than half (61.7%) resolved it in less than 6 months. Just 17.6% said their issue took more than a year to resolve. However, 52.9% of surveyed consumers were still in the process of handling their legal issue.

Cost versus expectations:

How did the expected cost compare to the cost you paid to resolve your legal matter? [Chart excludes responses of "N/A"]



Unfortunately, nearly half of those surveyed paid more — or much more — than what they expected to (48.4%). Only 32.6% paid what they had expected, and a small chunk of people (19%) paid less or much less.

This coincides with the importance of transparency in legal fees and attorney cost throughout this survey. Potential clients are very worried about the cost, and perhaps this is rightfully so.

Methodology



Sample Size: 618 consumers completed the survey.



Data Collection Period: 6/14/22 to 7/29/22



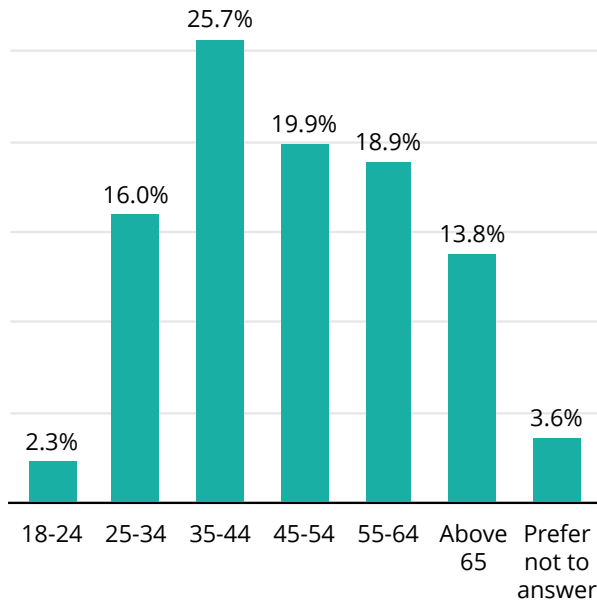
Survey Method: Online survey of legal consumers in the Martindale-Avvo database who had a current legal need or dealt with one in the past 12 months.



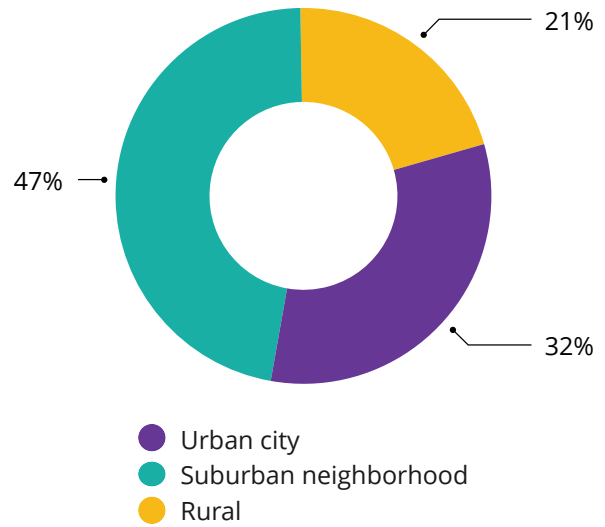
Sampling Error: The margin of error for the respondents was +/- 3.94% at a 95% confidence level using a point estimate of 50%.



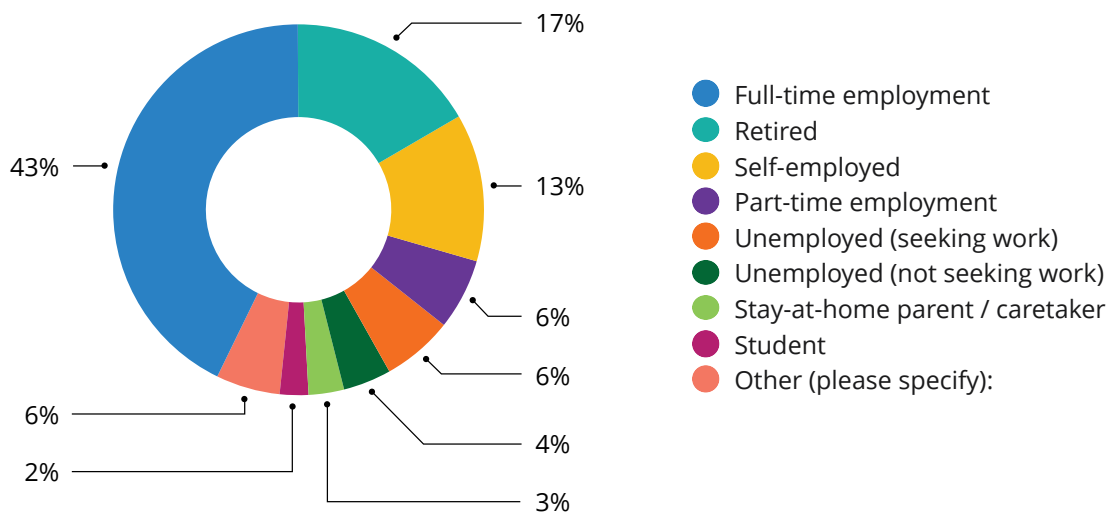
Age Demographics



Location Type



Employment Status



Key Takeaways



No surprise here! Over the years, consumers have had the same top reasons for selecting one attorney over another: cost, responsiveness, legal experience, online reviews, and location.



Whether it's an online search, review, or content about a legal matter, the internet is king. While recommendations may influence the first step, the world of Google, social media, and our own Martindale-Avvo sites take precedence over all.



Being found and then responding is of utmost importance when converting a potential client into a customer. Almost all the methods of connecting with an attorney ranked at about 40% and higher — this includes phone calls, emails, and live chat — proving variety of communication is key.



While the big red flags were cost and slow response times, don't discount how you're marketing yourself! Negative reviews, the appearance of being too busy, and personality clashes are nearly as important when it comes to hiring an attorney.



Be found. Be chosen. Be confident.

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