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LEGAL 500 DATA

## Revealed: what top tech clients want – and the law firms delivering on that



Theresa Hargreaves · 22 May 2026 · 7 min read

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AI AND TECH

UNITED STATES

KIRKLAND & ELLIS

ORRICK



Exclusive new data from GCs at the world's top tech companies has revealed the most important factors governing their choice of external counsel – as well as highlighting the firms most effectively delivering on their demands.

Legal Business has analysed responses from more than 10,000 US GCs and other referees canvassed during the latest Legal 500 research cycle, isolating feedback from the world's 20 biggest tech companies to uncover what these clients really think of their external law firms.

The research includes referees at household names such as Apple, Google and Microsoft, with the findings offering unparalleled insight into the views of some of the most influential and demanding – clients in the world.

Findings include the aspects of law firm service they value most and the law firms they rate most highly – covering the full gamut of practice areas from corporate and finance, to disputes and IP.

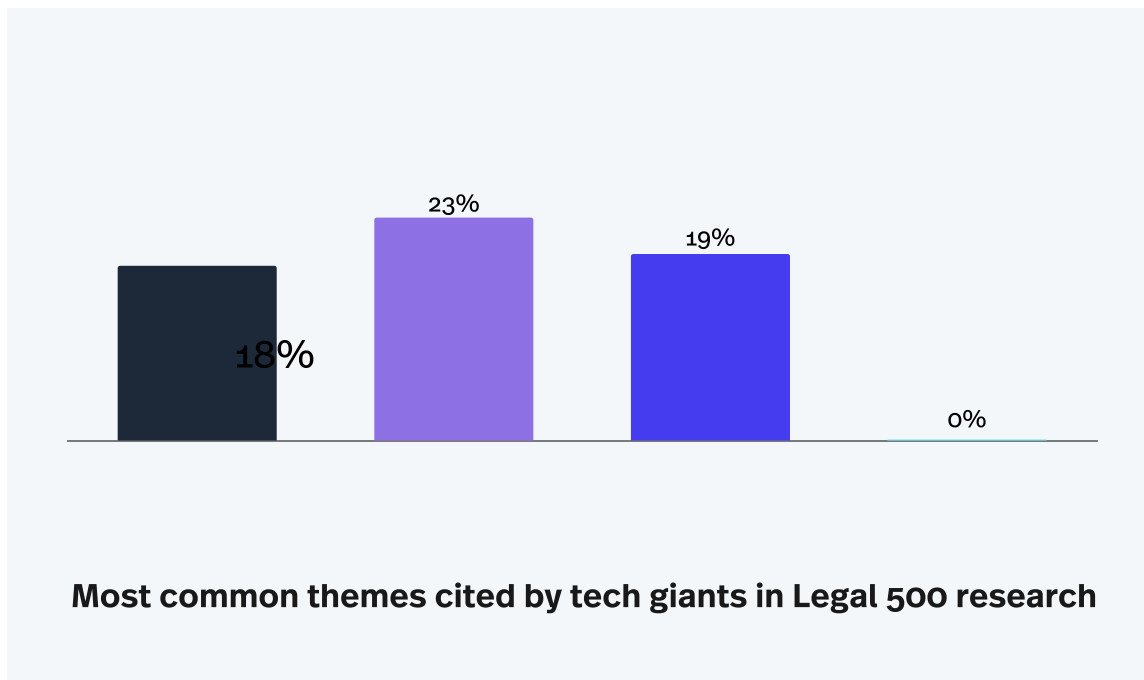
Key data points include which firms are providing the best overall client service to elite tech clients; which are seen as having the highest quality partners; and how effectively firms are leveraging new technology such as AI to provide a better service to these key clients.

The firms receiving the highest scores for overall client service from respondents at large tech businesses are Willkie Farr & Gallagher, WilmerHale, Orrick, White & Case and Perkins Coie.

On the aspects of client service these tech leaders value most, there is a clear premium placed on commercially savvy, strategic leadership, with this emerging strongly in a thematic analysis of client responses.

### Top five firms for client service: as rated by the tech giants

- Willkie Farr & Gallagher
- WilmerHale
- Orrick
- White & Case
- Perkins Coie





Silicon Valley-based Orrick partner Matthew Gemello (*pictured*), who formerly led the firm's global corporate practice, has advised clients on major tech transactions including SAP's \$1.5bn acquisition of AI software company WalkMe.

He sums up why tech companies have different needs to other types of client. 'They move at hyper-speed, and they need to see around corners – more so than most traditional businesses, as innovation frequently outpaces regulation.'

Gemello stresses the importance of being aware of the commercial realities these companies face. 'There is a real focus on commerciality. We strive to get to the business answer, risk-adjusted for a client's particular business, as efficiently as we possibly can.'

Mindy Sooter, who co-chairs WilmerHale's IP litigation practice, is another partner with direct insight into the priorities for tech giants, given her experience acting for clients such as Intel and Comcast in high-stakes disputes.

She underlines Gemello's point – that tech clients want firms to prove they have a deep understanding of their business and the wider industry.

'A firm must be willing to invest the time and resources to develop that deep knowledge. This requires a closely coordinated and multi-disciplinary team, including regulatory expertise, contacts in government, technical skills, as well as an understanding of the law and litigation in the various venues they service.'

The data collected from Legal 500 research includes scores across the entire range of client service metrics, covering service delivery, lawyer quality, sector knowledge, billing transparency and value for money, among many others.

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## Top five for partner quality: as rated by the tech giants

Kirkland & Ellis  
Latham & Watkins

The data also identifies potential areas of improvement for law firms, with the scores from tech clients – notoriously among the most demanding – highlighting that there is room for improvement on factors such as resourcing and delivery.

Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton  
White & Case  
Orrick

Perkins Coie partner Miranda Cole, who leads the US firm's EU and UK antitrust practice from London, says that in her experience, tech clients are looking for strategic input that only experienced advisers with a deep understanding of the sector can provide.

'They're looking for help to address the "so what" questions, such as "What does it mean?", "How can we use this to best effect?", and "What's the best way to move this forward?" That's not the sort of guidance that an army of junior lawyers can provide.'



Matthew Berger (*pictured*), Willkie Farr's Palo Alto-based chair of IP, technology and commercial transactions, has worked with an array of tech companies including Meta, Salesforce and Samsung. He points to the vast legal resources that many tech companies already have in-house – and how that means the imperative is on specialist tech partners to add value by bringing something extra.

'A lot of the clients we're representing have extraordinary legal departments; not just in terms of size, but also in terms of expertise', he says. 'We're being asked to come in and help by adding depth and breadth in certain areas – we're giving them additional input into critical decisions. We're asked not only to really know the technology, but also to really know the business.'

At Kirkland & Ellis, which was identified by referees as one of the top five firms for quality of partners, corporate partner Edward Lee – who has worked with bluechip tech clients such as OpenAI and Uber – echoes that point.

‘The legal teams at the top tech companies are, in many cases, as good as any law firm. They do not need to be taught the law; they need a counterparty who can pressure-test their thinking, bring a cross-deal pattern view they cannot get from inside one company, and push back when warranted. The value-add is judgement.’



One hugely important factor in all of this is, of course, AI, and Legal 500 data shows that tech clients are considerably happier with the utilisation of AI by their external counsel than clients in other sectors.

Perkins Coie’s Cole (*pictured*) explains: ‘As tech companies themselves develop AI, they’re focused on making sure their lawyers – both in-house and external – are using it in a smart fashion. That’s the key point here – they’re looking to their external lawyers to be thoughtful and to exercise judgement about how and where we use AI.’



There is also a growing impetus on firms to demonstrate exactly how they are adding value with AI, with clients increasingly asking for specifics on how AI is being used in order to

assess what law firms are delivering.

Cole continues: ‘With some tech companies, if they see their external counsel using people to do something that they think could and should be done much more quickly and efficiently by AI, they just won’t pay for it. They really do put their money where their mouth is.’

Gemello explains: ‘Tech clients prioritise tech adoption more than traditional industries because it is their core business and it is part of their DNA. Clients are looking for advisers who really speak the language, understand how products work, but also understand the business drivers. AI literacy is table stakes in tomorrow’s law firm.’



The findings from Legal 500’s data demonstrate that tech leaders are among the most demanding clients, and that delivering the basics is not sufficient – they need their lawyers to go above and beyond.

Kirkland’s Lee (*pictured*) summarises: ‘Every sophisticated client wants judgement, responsiveness and partnership. Tech giants want all of that, compressed into a tighter timeframe, layered over more novel facts, and delivered by advisers who can credibly operate in the world they are actually building – not the one described in last decade’s casebook.’

*Legal 500 surveys more than 300,000 client referees around the world every year – the data drawn on for this article was gathered during the US research cycle from December 2025 to March 2026, focusing specifically on responses from referees working at the largest 20 tech companies in the US.*

