



WESTLAW REPORT

What Law Firm Practitioners Really Think About Doing Legal Research



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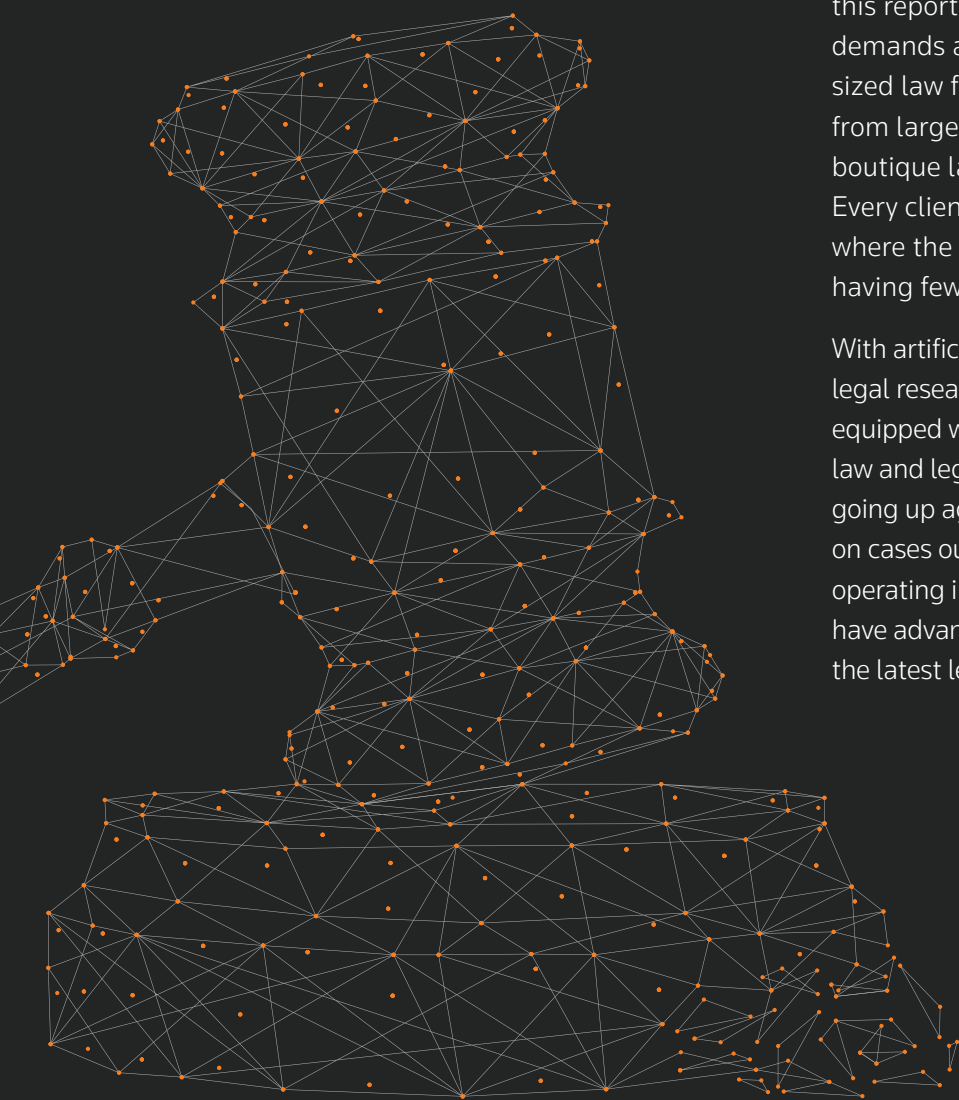
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian legal profession has been adopting legal research technologies at an accelerated pace, particularly in recent years. From boutique to mid-sized practices, headlining success usually comes from the ability to fit more tasks into the billable hour.

Thanks to technologies grounded in artificial intelligence – allowing you to retrieve advanced legal research facts and results in seconds – firms can now serve their clients with a reduced number of legal research hours without compromising on quality and thus gain time to focus on driving business.

Thomson Reuters has sought to better understand what practitioners really think about legal research to capture their insight and experiences. This report showcases results from a targeted survey of sole to mid-sized law participants based in Australia and New Zealand. The emerging themes drawn from this report offer a unique perspective. While the demands and pressures placed on boutique to mid-sized law from the outset may not seem so different from large law firms – to compete in the market – boutique law firms are expected to stay resourceful. Every client is crucial and small firms tend to go where the business is, wearing many hats due to having fewer lawyers on deck.

With artificial intelligence abilities now a major part of legal research technology, smaller firms can be better equipped with a wealth of expert knowledge on case law and legislation when they need it most. From going up against a larger firm in a courtroom to taking on cases outside their usual brief, legal practitioners operating in an independent capacity or at a small firm have advantages to gain by doing legal research with the latest legal research technologies.



Report snapshot



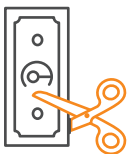
Time is valuable and more is needed

For the average boutique law professional, the ideal working day should offer more time to do the two things that are valued most: serving clients more cost-effectively and improving work-life balance.



Disjointed research experience

If you're a solicitor or barrister who finds it absurdly difficult to retrieve a relevant legal answer through online research, you're not alone. The prevalence of irrelevant search results is a common problem, as indicated among our survey respondents.



Limited resources

Smaller firms and sole practitioners simply do not have the luxury to splash out on legal solutions like larger firms can, according to our research. That said, the survey findings indicate that many practitioners do not know how much they would be prepared to spend on legal technologies, suggesting a gap in their familiarity with the costs involved for the benefits gained.

Legal research credentials



In 2018, Thomson Reuters Legal interviewed 118 participants from a range of organisations in Australia and New Zealand. The majority of those surveyed were legal professionals working in firms with less than 10 practitioners, followed by sole practitioners including barristers, regional law firms and in-house legal departments in the public and private sector.

Thomson Reuters
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RESEARCH**



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MONEY TALKS, THOUGH DOING FREE LEGAL RESEARCH COMES AT AN INVISIBLE COST

When you are running your own law firm, every dollar from your legal spend is one less from your hip pocket.

Many of our respondents are researching for legal matters of their own accord, often without the most extensive legal databases at hand. Imagined costs or real legal budgets could be at play here, with 25% of survey respondents revealing they were prepared to spend up to \$1,000* annually, signalling the lack of awareness of how legal research technologies can offer a return on investment. As the saying goes, you have to spend money to make money. However, for the respondents on smaller budgets, cash flow is not something those affected will easily jeopardise.

Looking at the money question overall, more than 52% of the law firms and sole practitioner survey participants would happily spend more than \$1,000 on legal research capabilities. Among firm sizes of up to 10 practitioners, 34% would be prepared to spend at least \$10,000 on an annual basis for a legal research solution. One even declared it would purchase legal technology up to the \$100,000 mark on an annual basis. Overall, these results show that firms are still prepared to invest in legal research, despite their varying budgets.

Then there is the 20% of respondents who declared they did not know how much they were prepared to spend on legal research capabilities. On the plus side, the payments landscape is changing in response to the expectations of the average small law professional. For those in the market to buy legal research technology, some providers offer flexible payment options. Rather than coughing up too much upfront before the rewards start to show from the hours saved per week, small law professionals can now join the legal tech revolution with ease, increase their competitive edge and serve their clients more effectively.

**Figures in Australian dollars*

LEGAL RESEARCH SPEND

25%

of survey respondents revealed they were prepared to spend **UP TO \$1,000 * ANNUALLY**

52%

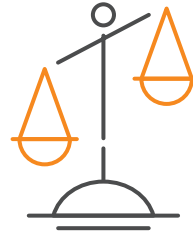
of the law firms and sole practitioner survey participants would happily spend **MORE THAN \$1,000**

34%

of firm sizes of up to 10 practitioners would be prepared to spend **AT LEAST \$10,000** per annum

20%

of respondents **DID NOT KNOW** how much they were prepared to spend on legal research capabilities



Trials and tribulations in research

When a practitioner uses a legal technology platform to conduct their research, the most common problem when it comes to user experience is that the search results are too narrow, or that they do not provide the search results they are after.

Understandably, this user experience can cause practitioners to use multiple legal research tools rather than one, which is less than ideal when researching on the go. Also, practitioners who utilise free resources online to conduct their legal research may not be retrieving reliable information, so it is not only more efficient but better practice to obtain search results from one, reliable solution.



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THE IDEAL LEGAL RESEARCH PICTURE

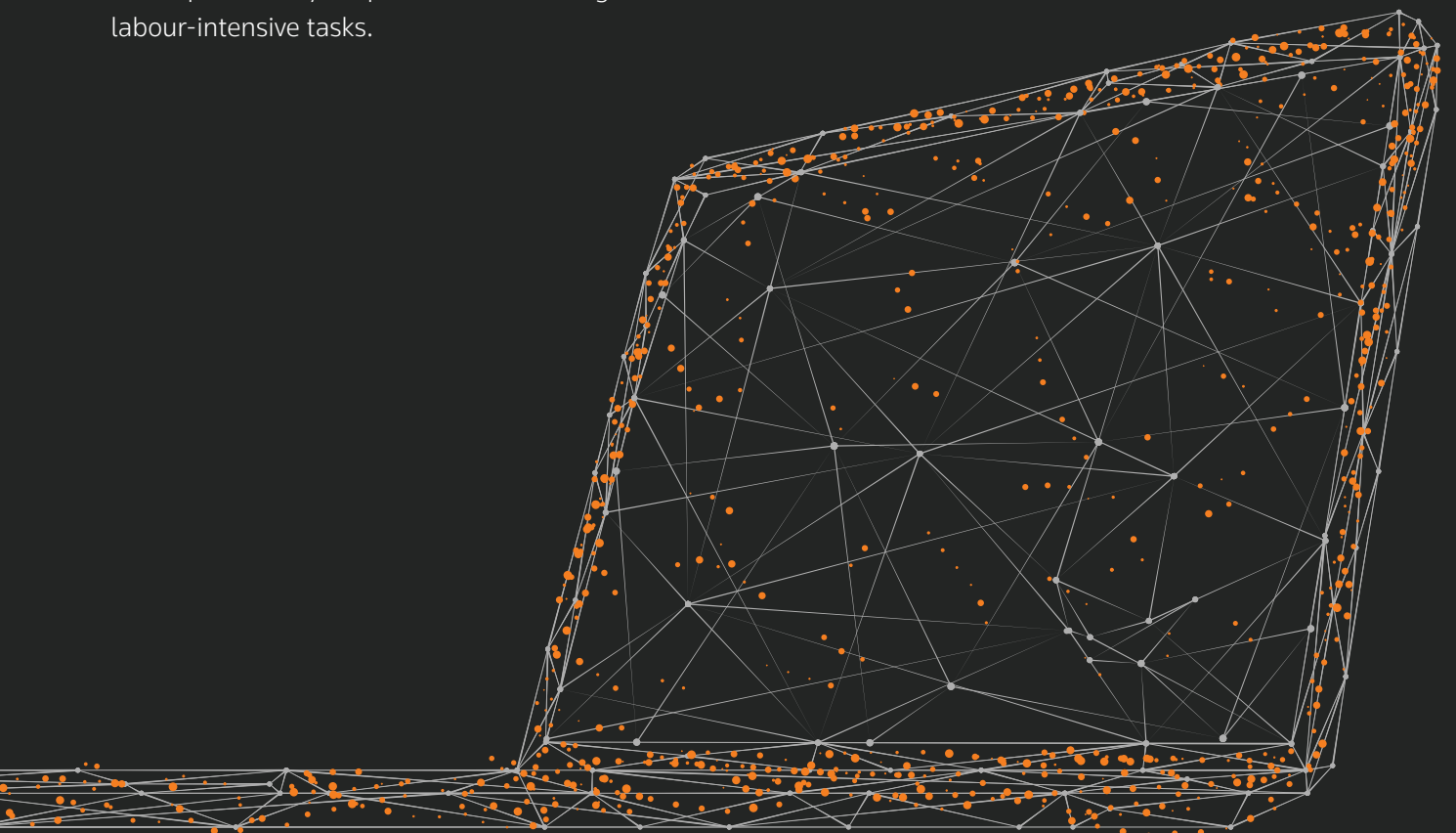
Over 75% of our research participants believed that there is great value in reducing the time spent trawling through legal research results for the answer.

Reducing your legal research hours can offer lots of benefits. However, the two main ones the survey responses highlighted were the ability to serve their clients more cost-effectively and improving work-life balance.

As a sole practitioner, wouldn't it be nice if you could cut down a few hours of laborious legal researching every week to put back into the things that matter most to you? This could include upskilling in a professional development course, attending a conference for networking opportunities or taking on more clients. This time-saving can also extend to the sole practitioner or boutique legal professional gaining their weekends back, due to fewer hours spent hand-picking legal search results on cases. Whatever your differentiator, it can be honed or developed when you spend less time doing other labour-intensive tasks.



Did you know? In a 2019 report conducted by Momentum Intelligence in partnership with *Lawyers Weekly*, it was revealed that the satisfaction of staff towards their law firm employers had fallen to its lowest point since 2015. The survey measured the attitudes, perceptions and priorities of legal professionals, including work-life balance. It is worthwhile considering whether investing in time-saving resources to improve the legal research experience for staff may increase their professional satisfaction with their employers.



While legal research is a mandatory task for lawyers, the technical side of the process can be demanding if free search engines are being used. But with an algorithmic, natural language-driven legal research tool at your fingertips that brings you a trusted answer quickly, your skills as a lawyer will be put to better use for the benefits of your clients and law firm revenue.

For example, picture yourself doing legal research to map out a legal matter in which you have little expertise. This can be a painstaking process at the best of times – particularly if you do not have adequate legal research technology there to support you. This could mean more weekends spent in your chambers or office. Conversely, a more empowering experience is being equipped with technology that will help you produce more accurate results in minutes, even seconds. This is what sole practitioners and smaller firms are moving towards, judging by their individual preferences indicated in this research.



Legal research picture moving forward

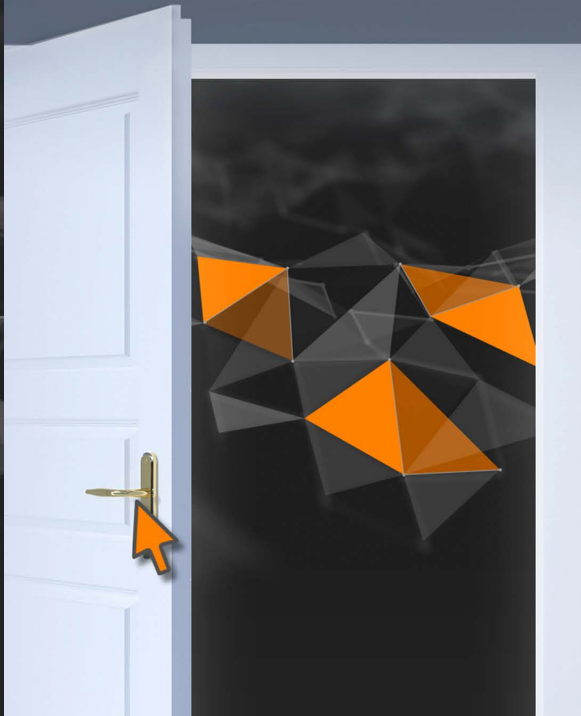
Based on our survey findings, it's evident that more must be done to educate key decision-makers in the small law firms, on the legal research advantages they appear to be missing out on. Reaching the relevant answer with utmost speed and having a technology that weeds out irrelevant results for the legal practitioner offers an array of benefits to the legal profession, whose time is precious, works in an environment where they are incredibly self-reliant and time-wasting tasks such as traditional searching are a clear liability.

More must
be done to
**EDUCATE KEY
DECISION-
MAKERS**
in small law firms



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