MELAND | BUDWICK

Midsize Demand for Talent Remains Even as AI Adoption Grows

https://melandbudwick.com/2025/08/06/midsize-demand-for-talent-remains-even-as-ai-adoption-grows/

By Amanda O'Brien and Brenda Sapino Jeffreys | August 6, 2025

When generative AI first entered the legal market, it was expected to take the entire industry by storm, exponentially increasing efficiency while cutting into talent needs. For midsize firms, those hiring cuts haven't appeared just yet.

But that doesn't mean that firm leaders aren't thinking about generative AI when it comes to recruiting and hiring. Leaders of four midsize firms based around the country indicated that generative AI hasn't impacted recruiting or hiring decisions in recent months, with a fifth firm leader acting as a notable exception.

"In the legal industry, where so much of what is sought after is reading, writing and researching, those are things AI does really well," said Texas-based Munck Wilson Mandala global managing partner William Munck in an interview. "It's going to eviscerate the industry as we currently know it, and, yes, it definitely is affecting how we're looking at things and how we're recruiting. AI is going to change the model from a pyramid to a structure where it's going to be much more linear."

In particular, Munck said, the firm has seen smaller summer associate classes and has cut down on its staffing head count in response to AI use.

"I know our summer classes have gotten smaller—not necessarily the firm itself, but our summer classes," Munck specified. "We've maintained our size, our revenue and profits have increased, and our head count has gone down in terms of nonlawyers. At the same time, we've invested significantly in onsite IT, cybersecurity and PR, marketing and business development folks."

"Our overall head count is down in large part because technology is constantly improving," he concluded.

Still, of the firm leaders who commented for this article, Munck was an outlier. Leaders at Northeastern firm Hinckley Allen, Washington, D.C.'s Beveridge & Diamond, Texas firm Munsch Hardt, and Florida boutique Meland Budwick each indicated that while generative AI was certainly something worth thinking about in terms of firm operations, the technology hasn't impacted their thinking around recruitment or around their summer associate class sizes.

> "Where we are right now, AI tools can be useful, but they're not a point yet where they're replacing attorneys or even support staff in many ways," said Meland Budwick managing partner Eric Ostroff.

"Right now it's more of an assistive technology. … It hasn't, at this point, impacted our recruiting. I could see that happening in the future, but for now, it hasn't affected recruiting."

The general consensus among firm leaders is that AI will prove to be an important tool in the industry. Being able to use those tools will be an important asset moving forward, and according to Ostroff, the next generation of attorneys "will have more exposure and more experience with AI."

"The core skills that make a successful lawyer haven't changed. We're looking for people who have the skills that are going to thrive at our law firm," Ostroff said. "The firm believes that AI is a powerful tool and it's important for law firms to stay current with it because it offers a lot of benefits for client service, efficiency and things along those lines."

Firm leaders are generally cognizant of the advantages AI can provide their firms and individual legal practices; however, they said, those advantages, while helpful in a highly competitive legal market, don't translate into a lesser need for talent at both the summer associate and associate levels.

"The challenge at the end of the day, AI is a tool I think that will allow midsized firms to be competitive with Big Law. I don't think it is impacting our thoughts on numbers of attorneys. We generally, as a midsize firm, staff our deals very efficiently," said Munsch Hardt CEO David Coligado.

Patrick Rogers, managing partner of Hinckley Allen, said AI has had no impact on the size of the firm's summer program, which included four associates in 2025. He said the firm in fact plans to expand its summer program in the future.

And Marc Goldstein, managing principal for Beveridge & Diamond, said firm leaders have thought about the impact of GenAI, but it has not affected its strategy or its numbers. The firm in particular views its summer program as an "important pipeline" in growing associate numbers and reducing that program would push the firm into the lateral market, Goldstein explained.

From a larger market perspective, recruiters are also failing to see AI have a noticeable impact on midsize firm hiring. While it's possible that AI could impact hiring, said Raj Nichani, president of the RMN Agency in Atlanta, associates are crucial for midsize firm and boutique performance.

"It all has to line up properly, right? The client has to agree with it. The firm itself has a little bit of an issue because if they do that, then how do they train their associates? The associates don't learn, so there's a bottleneck of how do you train associates to get them where they need to be in the capacity and quality of work?" Nichani asked. "Especially for midsize firms and the boutiques that rely on their associates heavily, that's not going to be possible. Also, you need people to go to court and those kinds of things that, obviously, you need the associates to learn how to do that."

Nichani said in three to five years—or sooner—conditions may change. But he said he has not seen a slowdown in hiring of associates this year because of concerns about AI's impact.

"As a company, we're not seeing that," he said. "For right now, second-years all the way to fifth-years, it's a very hot market for them."

Read more:
https://www.law.com/pro-mid-market/2025/08/06/midsize-demand-for-talent-remains-even-as-ai-adoption-grows/