farrer kane & co

UK Legal Sector Share of Voice Report 2026

Which leading law firms dominate the headlines and why?

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Foreword

Having spent several decades advising law firms on how to build their profiles through the press, we've seen PR strategies of all shapes and sizes. Those that transformed longstanding market perception, campaigns that turned regional firms into nationally recognised names, and initiatives that delivered the holy grail of direct client instructions.

We have also seen PR strategies that consumed significant time and budget but generated very little lasting value; not because those involved lacked talent, nor were their ideas misplaced, but because assumptions about the legal press were inaccurate.

This report provides an overview of the current landscape of the UK's legal media. The bedrock of the report is an analysis of a combined dataset of 9,768 pieces of positive press coverage achieved by the UK's 50 largest law firms within the UK legal trade press over a 12-month period.

We wanted to understand not just which firms obtain the most column inches but crucially what type of coverage they achieve. That analysis enables us to question the status quo and provide data-led insight into how firms, both large and small, can gain a greater share of voice within the UK's legal market.

> ***We hope this analysis is of interest to in-house legal PR teams looking to navigate the evolving legal press landscape with hard evidence to help them demonstrate what makes the news and, crucially, why.***

We hope this analysis is of interest to in-house legal PR teams looking to navigate the evolving legal press landscape with hard evidence to help them demonstrate what makes the news and why. So, the next time a partner asks you to secure a bylined article in the legal press, keep calm and show them this report.

We appreciate that it is easier to achieve traction if you are a top 50 law firm, but we have expertise in helping far smaller firms carve out a distinctive profile within the legal trade press.

If our findings resonate with challenges you are facing, we would love to talk them through with you.

Alex & Beth – founders of Farrer Kane & Co

Executive Summary

9,768 Items of press coverage tracked across 2024 & 2025	**55%** Of all coverage across the two years is passive mentions	**-27%** Set-piece interviews, year-on-year **Sharpest active-category fall**	**+68%** HSF Kramer volume growth **Biggest individual gainer**

The true spotlight is shrinking

Total press coverage of the UK's 50 largest law firms rose by 4% between 2024 and 2025 - from 4,782 to 4,986 articles. That apparent stability conceals a structural shift. Passive mentions increased by +19%, while every firm-initiated coverage category fell: matters -8%, laterals -10%, set-piece interviews -27%, market commentary -35%, bylines -58%. The legal media stage continues to grow but the true spotlight is shrinking.

A new metric for genuine media profile

The study includes a headline rate metric, which is the proportion of articles in which a firm's name appears in the headline rather than just the body text. This is a revealing proxy for coverage prominence. Several firms that gained significantly in volume of coverage also saw their headline rates fall sharply. For example, Simmons & Simmons grew from 109 to 216 items of coverage from 2024 to 2025 but its headline rate dipped significantly from 48% to 16%. A&O Shearman's coverage count dropped by 181 pieces but its headline rate rose from 44% to 55%, suggesting the coverage it shed was largely peripheral.

The merger wave distorted the rankings in both directions

Unsurprisingly, the single most powerful driver of coverage in 2025 was merger activity among law firms. HSF Kramer +68%, Ashurst +83%, Hogan Lovells +46% all benefited from sustained merger narrative coverage. A&O Shearman, whose 2024 coverage dominance was built on the A&O/Shearman combination story, fell 43% as that news cycle ran its course. Firms not involved in merger activity were, in effect, competing for a shrinking share of editorial attention due to the increased focus on merger mania.

The gap between top-tier and mid-market is widening

Matter coverage is heavily concentrated in the top tier. Freshfields, Clifford Chance and A&O Shearman together account for more than 30% of all matter coverage in 2025. Below the top ten, most firms record single-digit coverage counts for their matters. Lateral coverage follows a similar pattern. For mid-market firms, the data makes clear that neither deal flow nor hiring activity is generating much meaningful press visibility. There are two factors in play - the bigger firms are working on more big-ticket mandates and more active in the lateral market. That means less easy column inches for smaller deals and smaller name hires.

You can outperform your market position

There is, of course, much correlation to the biggest firms getting the most coverage. This adds up; they are often working on the biggest deals, hiring the biggest names in the market, reporting eye-watering financial results, and usually supported by larger PR teams with substantial budgets. However, there are firms that buck this trend by consistently punching above their weight. They share common characteristics: sector specificity, accessible partners willing to speak on the record, communications functions that operate ahead of the news cycle, and a willingness to say something genuinely distinctive. These are all strategic choices that any firm can make, and one that all firms can learn from.

The Big Picture Analysis

Growing volume with a shifting structure

Total items of press coverage achieved by the Top 50 rose from 4,782 in 2024 to 4,986 in 2025. The legal sector was clearly busy, as were the journalists who write about it. The merger wave generated sustained editorial interest and firms of all sizes were visible in the coverage landscape.

However, raw volume is an inadequate measure of success. The key structural analysis is not just how many articles mentioned a firm but what kind of articles they were.

2,933 Passive mentions in 2025 **+465 vs 2024 (+19%)**	**932** Matter articles in 2025 **-81 vs 2024 (-8%)**
676 Lateral articles in 2025 **-78 vs 2024 (-10%)**	**5** Byline articles across all 50 firms **Down from 12 in 2024**

Mentions – the category requiring nothing proactive from a firm's PR function – grew by nearly 500 pieces and now account for 59% of all coverage, up from 52%. Every category that requires proactive effort fell. This highlights a structural shift in how the legal press write about the profession and it has implications that many firms have not yet absorbed.

The merger cycle

Making sense of 2025's coverage rankings requires recognition of one dominant editorial reality – the merger narrative.

The HSF Kramer combination, the Ashurst-Perkins Coie tie up, the Taylor Wessing-Winston & Strawn union and the continued A&O Shearman integration collectively generated hundreds of articles.

Not just at the time of the announcement but in sustained waves of analysis, reaction, and follow-up coverage that lasted months and continues to perpetuate.

For the firms at the centre of these stories, the effect on volume of coverage was dramatic. For example, HSF Kramer rose from 186 to 314 articles from 2024 to 2025. Ashurst nearly doubled from 106 to 194.

The corollary is equally important. A&O Shearman's 43% coverage volume decline – the sharpest fall in the study – is not a sign of a firm fading away. It is evidence of a merger narrative that has been fully consumed by the press.

For firms outside the merger conversation, the data reveals a more uncomfortable truth: in a year dominated by consolidation stories, organic performance – deal flow, laterals, client wins, sector expertise – was systematically underrepresented by the press. The editorial bandwidth that might have gone to a mid-market firm's strong year went instead to the latest instalment of the merger mania.

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Volume versus quality: the case for the headline rate

One of the key findings of this research is that volume metrics are insufficient as a measure of media profile. The headline rate – which shows whether the firm was the subject of the story or incidental to it – offers a potential solution.

Consider two firms from the 2025 dataset. Simmons & Simmons generated 216 articles, more than any firm outside the top seven. Its headline rate was 16%. Slaughter and May generated 156 articles. Its headline rate was 51%. Based on volume alone, Simmons appears better covered but using the headline rate measure Slaughters is substantially more visible.

Concentration at the top of the lateral market

Lateral hiring coverage fell 10% in aggregate from 2024 to 2025. Within that decline, a concentration story is playing out. DLA Piper generated 72 lateral articles in 2025, up from 53. Hogan Lovells generated 70, up from 45. Clifford Chance generated 66, up from 43. These three firms alone accounted for around 30% of all lateral coverage in the study.

Whereas, the mid-market lateral story shrank significantly. Bird & Bird fell from 29 to 9. Kennedys from 18 to 5. Mishcon de Reya from 18 to 4. The structural logic is clear, the press covers lateral moves at firms whose names carry intrinsic news value. A partner move to or from Clifford Chance is viewed as inherently more interesting, editorially, than the same move to or from a firm outside the top ten. As the top-tier firms remain the most active hirers, they generate even more lateral coverage, further crowding out the space for mid-market hiring stories.

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Size matters

The same concentration dynamic is visible in matter coverage. Freshfields generated 143 matter related articles in 2025, the most of any firm in the study. A&O Shearman generated 81. Clifford Chance 83. Together, the top five firms by matter coverage accounted for nearly half of all matter related coverage.

Below the top ten, the numbers become thinner. Most firms in the middle and lower tiers of this study achieved fewer than fifteen matter related articles for the full year. This is not because these firms are not doing good work, it is because the legal press tends to cover the biggest transactions and the most prominent names, and both of those criteria systematically favour a narrow group of firms at the top of the revenue ranking.

Matter coverage... is functionally less accessible as a primary driver of media profile.

For mid-market firms, the implication is significant. Matter coverage, which allows firms to demonstrate their capabilities directly through the work they are doing is functionally less accessible as a primary driver of media profile. Mid-market firms require an altogether different strategy.

Lessons From The Overachievers

Several firms are generating consistently strong, high-quality coverage well above what their revenue ranking would predict. They are not doing so by accident, and the approaches they share are neither complicated nor expensive. This section sets out what the data shows about what works, and why, for firms of any size.

> ***The firms that are genuinely better covered in 2025 than in 2024 are those whose headline rates held or improved alongside their volumes. Freshfields is the clearest example: volume flat, headlines up 60%. The coverage didn't grow but their time in the sun certainly did.***

Volume is not the same as visibility

A crucial finding of this data is the distinction between volume and prominence. The firms that are genuinely better covered in 2025 than in 2024 are those whose headline rates held or improved alongside their volumes. Freshfields is the clearest example: volume flat, headlines up 60%. The coverage didn't grow but their time in the sun certainly did. That's the benchmark that firms could be challenging themselves to achieve.

> ***The headline rate data is unambiguous about what drives prominence for smaller firms: sector or market position specificity.... The implication for PR is clear – identify your real USP and stick to the plan for the long term.***

A clear identity drives headline rates

The headline rate data is unambiguous about what drives prominence for smaller firms: sector or market position specificity.

The firms with the strongest headline rates relative to their size – Knights (91%), Gateley (80%), Gowling WLG (67%), TLT (62%) – are not doing so through generalist PR. They are doing so because they have established themselves, in the minds of journalists, as the go-to firm for a specific type of story.

The implication for PR strategy is clear – identify your real USP and stick to the plan for the long term. Journalists have limited bandwidth; they work with a small list of trusted sources for any given story type. The objective is to get on that list and stay on it.

Invest in your journalist relationships

The aggregate volume of set-piece interviews fell 27% from 2024 to 2025. The firms that maintain strong interview counts are those where senior partners have invested in journalist relationships over time, not transactionally. By being available, useful and candid on background before they are needed for a feature or before the firm is looking to tell the market about a new strategic development.

> Set-piece interviews fell
> **27%**
> from 2024 to 2025

The distinction between a relationship and a pitch is considerable. A pitch asks a journalist for something. While a relationship gives the journalist something – context, insight, access, introductions – before any request is made. The editorial outcome tends to be significantly better, and the lead time is measured in months or years rather than days. For firms where the managing partner or senior partner is genuinely willing to invest time in building those relationships, the return on that investment, as this data shows, is real.

Preparation pays off

While market commentary coverage fell 35%, the firms that maintained stronger commentary counts – CMS (11 articles), Freshfields (11), Norton Rose Fulbright (8) – share a common characteristic. They have a well-established process for identifying upcoming legal and regulatory developments, and positioning spokespeople ahead of the news cycle, not behind it.

The practical requirement is not sophisticated. It is a calendar with major cases listed for hearing, regulatory consultations closing, legislative timetables, economic data releases with legal implications etc. A firm whose communications function maintains that calendar, identifies the relevant spokespeople, and contacts journalists in advance of the news – not after it – will generate more market commentary coverage.

Mark commentary coverage fell

35%

from 2024 to 2025

The AI narrative and its limitations

Shoosmiths received notable coverage for the launch of its AI bonus scheme, illustrating a broader principle – unique organisational decisions generate coverage that no amount of deal flow or lateral hiring can replicate.

It was coverage of the firm as an organisation with a distinctive culture and an unconventional approach to managing its people and use of technology.

The caveat is that AI stories, like all PR-driven narratives, have a shelf life. A firm that announces an AI initiative in 2025 and makes no further moves will soon find they've run out of road. The firms that extract sustained coverage from the AI theme will be those with genuinely evolving stories to tell. A tool that goes from pilot to deployment, a productivity claim that is independently verifiable, a client application that generates its own news. The announcement is the beginning; it doesn't need to be the end.

Simmons & Simmons have earlier this summer (June 2026) announced a very similar scheme to much fanfare. Let's see what follows.

The League Tables

The following data covers all 50 firms in this study, ranked by their 2025 volume of coverage. For each firm, the table shows total volume in both 2025 and 2024, headline rate, and a breakdown by coverage category for 2025.

The top-tier

The top 15 firms by 2025 volume are a list of household names, with one important exception. Simmons & Simmons' appearance at eighth represents the most striking volume gain in the group but, as noted, is driven largely by passive mentions. The firm's headline rate of 16% is the lowest in the tier and one of the lowest in the entire study, giving food for thought on how best to measure a firm's media profile.

Hogan Lovells is the most improved firm on quality metrics: volume up 46%, headline count up 87%, with 200 headline appearances in 2025 making it second only to Freshfields on that measure. A&O Shearman's volume decline – from first to sixth – is offset by retaining the highest headline count in the study, confirming that the coverage it shed was largely peripheral. Freshfields' headline count growth of 60% against flat volume represents the cleanest quality improvement in the tier.

#	Firm	Volume 2025	Volume 2024	Headline 2025	Headline 2024	Mention	Matter	Lateral	Interview	Award	Headline rate 2025
1	Freshfields	376	376	228	143	131	143	53	7	31	61%
2	Linklaters	339	297	146	170	209	79	32	4	11	43%
3	Hogan Lovells	335	230	200	107	178	50	70	16	19	60%
4	Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer	314	186	157	102	206	57	29	6	9	50%
5	Clifford Chance	265	295	161	112	91	83	66	6	13	61%
6	A&O Shearman	240	421	132	187	114	81	26	4	12	55%
7	DLA Piper	232	205	91	117	88	45	72	1	22	39%
8	Simmons & Simmons	216	109	34	52	161	11	29	9	6	16%
9	Eversheds Sutherland	194	142	119	89	98	25	45	12	13	61%
10	Ashurst	194	106	95	73	142	21	22	7	2	49%
11	CMS	175	109	83	61	115	36	5	3	0	47%
12	Slaughter and May	156	218	80	105	82	65	1	3	4	51%
13	Norton Rose Fulbright	137	134	65	79	65	26	19	5	14	47%
14	Pinsent Masons	135	129	60	71	98	18	12	1	6	44%
15	Addleshaw Goddard	118	112	61	59	83	11	13	4	7	52%

The mid-tier

The middle tier is where the volume-quality gap is most acute. Kennedys' decline is the starkest data point – from 93 to 45 pieces of coverage, from 53 to 25 headlines, and from 16 to just 1 matter article in a full year. That last figure – one matter related article – is a significant indicator of reduced commercial visibility.

Taylor Wessing confirms the merger theory – both volume and headline count grew as the firm spent much of the year managing its merger narrative. Macfarlanes' volume decline from 96 to 67 – a firm known for deliberately measured communications – could be a strategic choice given its headline rate grew from 30% to 52%.

#	Firm	Volume 2025	Volume 2024	Headline 2025	Headline 2024	Mention	Matter	Lateral	Interview	Award	Headline rate 2025
16	BCLP	115	81	58	46	82	14	18	1	0	50%
17	Taylor Wessing	98	72	52	38	77	4	8	2	6	53%
18	Clyde & Co	91	49	43	25	55	4	22	4	4	47%
19	Shoosmiths	82	55	51	30	64	7	9	0	2	62%
20	Bird & Bird	81	97	35	57	62	4	9	2	4	43%
21	DWF	80	56	49	44	49	9	19	1	2	61%
22	Travers Smith	79	88	41	50	53	11	8	3	4	52%
23	Macfarlanes	67	96	35	29	47	17	1	0	2	52%
24	Womble Bond Dickinson	65	83	33	45	39	9	14	2	1	51%
25	Mishcon de Reya	61	93	32	52	39	10	4	2	4	52%
26	Fieldfisher	60	78	40	40	32	13	12	2	1	67%
27	RPC	58	55	28	28	42	9	2	3	2	48%
28	Osborne Clarke	54	66	25	28	35	9	4	0	6	46%
29	Gowling WLG	51	63	34	33	30	17	3	0	1	67%
30	Stephenson Harwood	49	58	21	24	33	8	5	1	2	43%

The final-tier

Shoosmiths is the standout in this group - growing volume by 49%, growing its headline count by 70%, and demonstrating what a single distinctive PR initiative can do for a firm's legal press profile. Watson Farley's headline rate fall from 62% to 20%, against largely flat volume, indicates a shift from an active to more passive approach.

Trowers & Hamlins lost 60% of its volume. This could have been caused by the merger narrative crowding out space that firms in the lower tiered firms would usually occupy.

#	Firm	Volume 2025	Volume 2024	Headline 2025	Headline 2024	Mention	Matter	Lateral	Interview	Award	Headline rate 2025
31	Charles Russell Speechlys	49	47	21	21	32	3	9	0	4	43%
32	Kennedys	45	93	25	53	33	1	5	2	4	56%
33	HFW	41	52	21	24	30	0	5	3	2	51%
34	Withers	40	42	20	16	28	1	9	1	1	50%
35	Hill Dickinson	35	39	16	24	27	5	0	1	2	46%
36	Freeths	32	40	13	22	24	1	4	1	1	41%
37	TLT	29	34	18	11	22	1	2	1	3	62%
38	Irwin Mitchell	29	28	14	12	23	2	0	2	1	48%
39	Burges Salmon	26	39	13	23	16	5	1	1	3	50%
40	DAC Beachcroft	26	37	16	20	22	1	3	0	0	62%
41	Watson Farley & Williams	25	24	5	15	20	0	1	0	3	20%
42	Browne Jacobson	21	28	8	11	13	3	0	2	3	38%
43	Weightmans	12	14	6	2	10	0	0	2	0	50%
44	Knights	11	7	10	4	4	6	0	1	0	91%
45	Trowers & Hamlins	10	25	3	14	7	2	0	0	1	30%
46	Gateley	10	21	8	10	4	1	3	2	0	80%
47	Ampa (Shakespeare Martineau)	10	16	5	9	5	3	0	1	1	50%
48	Mills & Reeve	9	17	6	7	6	1	1	0	1	67%
49	Brodies	8	15	4	8	7	0	0	0	1	50%
50	Keoghs	1	5	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	100%

10 Key Takeaways

1. Proactive coverage is increasingly harder to secure

Total press coverage rose 4% in 2025. But nearly all of that growth is in passive mentions – articles where a firm is referenced rather than written about in depth. Every proactive category fell: matters -8%, laterals -10%, set-piece interviews -27%, market commentary -35%. Getting your firm's news covered is becoming harder in an increasingly crowded market.

2. Coverage volume alone is not an accurate measure of success

The headline rate – the proportion of coverage in which a firm's name appears in the headline – is often a more reliable indicator of genuine press prominence. A firm with 200 articles and a 16% headline rate is less visible, in any meaningful sense, than one with 150 articles and a 51% rate.

3. The merger cycle dominated 2025 but it will conclude

The merger narrative was the dominant editorial story of 2024 and 2025. HSF Kramer's coverage grew by 68%, Ashurst up 83%, A&O Shearman down 43% as its merger narrative cycle concluded. Merger-driven coverage is thematic and it does not persist once the narrative runs its course. Planning for what comes after is as important as capitalising on what is happening now.

4. Sector specificity is one of the most reliable routes to a stronger headline-rate

The firms with the strongest headline rates relative to their size – Knights (91%), Gateley (80%), Gowling WLG (67%), TLT (62%) – are those the press has learned to associate with a specific type of story. Choosing a sector or specialism and being consistently available as the authoritative voice on it is one of the single most effective levers available to firms outside the top tier.

5. Mid-market firms require a different playbook

The three largest firms by revenue account for more than 30% of all matter coverage in 2025. For firms outside this elite group, building a strategy around transactional PR alone is unlikely to deliver the coverage the firm deserves. The outperformers in the mid-market are using sector positioning, relationship-led interview coverage, and the conversion of internal strategy into external news to move the dial.

6. Interview coverage is declining but it is still worth the legwork

The number of set-piece interviews fell 27% in a single year. This is among the highest-value coverage formats available to firms looking to lay out their strategy to their lawyers, clients and potential new recruits. The firms maintaining higher interview counts are those where senior partners have built genuine journalist relationships over time and are willing to say something beyond the norm. The return on investment, as this data shows, is real and measurable.

7. Being ahead of the news cycle is essential for market commentary

Market commentary fell 35% overall but the firms with the higher numbers in this category share a common characteristic - they track forthcoming legal and regulatory developments and position spokespeople before the story breaks, not after. A firm that calls a journalist two weeks before a significant judgment with context and an available expert gets the quotes. A firm that issues a comment on the day it runs may get lucky, or nothing at all.

8. Distinctive internal strategy is among the most accessible routes to coverage

Shoosmiths boosted its headline count by 70%, largely driven by a single initiative - its AI prompt bonus scheme. A unique internal decision, communicated proactively to the right publications. For firms without the deal flow to generate matter-related coverage, identifying and communicating these moments is an avenue worth exploring.

9. Press partnership generates better coverage

Editorial teams have contracted while the market they cover has expanded. The communications approach that works in this environment makes a journalist's job easier. Such as material that arrives already shaped into something usable, spokespeople who will say something specific and quotable, and timing that respects a working deadline. The firms that have understood this are generating consistently better coverage regardless of their size.

10. Next year could offer more open editorial space

As the merger wave matures, the structural stories that dominated the legal press for two years will begin to ease. The column inches they occupied will gradually open up. For communications teams that have prepared – sector positioning in place, journalist relationships maintained, internal story pipeline active – that shift represents a genuine opportunity to increase both the volume and quality of coverage.

Methodology & Glossary

The data set was compiled using the media monitoring platform Meltwater, with an individual analysis for each firm for 2024 and 2025, across a group of selected trade publications covering the legal sector: *Law.com International, The Lawyer, Legal Business, Law360, Global Legal Post, and Financial News*.

These publications were selected because we consider them to be at the forefront of reporting on the UK's legal industry. Naturally, we recognise that the nationals and broadcasters do also cover law firms but it's generally less granular and very often a business angle that includes commentary from a lawyer, rather than stories specifically about firms and the legal market itself.

Every piece of each firm's press coverage was assigned to one of seven mutually exclusive categories, based on the primary focus of the firm's citation within the article:

- **Awards or accolades** – awards, rankings, league tables, or shortlists
- **Matter** – coverage of a specific deal, case or regulatory proceeding in which the firm acted as adviser
- **Lateral** – any hire into the firm, regardless of seniority or role type
- **Interviews** – set-piece interviews with a named lawyer; leadership profiles; articles with substantive direct input from a named individual at the firm. i.e. not articles where quotes came from a press release or written comments
- **Market commentary** – expert analysis by a lawyer on a development within the legal sector or a broader business issue
- **Byline** – articles written by a firm's lawyer
- **Mention** – all other coverage in which the firm appears

Negative articles were excluded

We excluded negative articles because this is all about understanding how to build positive profile for your firm.

The headline rate

Our analysis also calculated the proportion of total coverage where a firm's name appears in the article's headline. A higher rate indicates the firm is the primary subject of coverage, rather than just a contextual reference. While this metric doesn't appear in most media monitoring reports, we consider it a useful method of determining who is receiving the true spotlight rather than simply raw volume.

Firm name ambiguity

Firms' nicknames were also used in the searches to ensure as high a percentage of relevant articles were captured as possible. e.g. 'Clydes' for Clyde & Co.

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Disclaimer

This report represents independent analysis of press coverage identified using a media monitoring platform. We recognise that not all coverage will have been captured through the analysis but we have applied a consistent approach throughout for all firms to make the research as accurate as possible. Firms were not consulted in the preparation of data or commentary.

All classification decisions are based on the editorial judgement of the research team. The report is intended as a guide to coverage patterns and should not be relied upon as a complete record of any firm's media activity.