

What's happening below £100m?

We reviewed the websites of 67 firms with revenues of below £100m to see how they performed when surfacing their tech and innovation credentials. Of all the firms we reviewed, just a fifth (15) use their websites to list and/or explain their credentials. The rest – 52 firms, comprising four-fifths of the sample – say absolutely nothing!

Of firms that do say something, these are to be found evenly spread in the higher turnover bands (Table 1). Reviewing listings proportionately when looking at the total number of firms in each band, it was noticeable that more than half of the largest firms (£75-100 million turnover) use their websites to tell their stories. None of the firms in the lowest band (£25-30 million), however, list their capabilities.

TLT tops the list for showcasing technology and innovation. The firm has developed an impressive content hub featuring its approach, products, insights and people. WV Plus underlines the firm's commitment by having a dedicated website. The only firm (below £100 turnover) to do so. Foot Anstey's website clearly shows the firm's commitment by featuring its solutions and approach.

Of the remaining firms (Brodies, Burness Paull, Ince, Keoghs, Plexus, and Shepherd & Wedderburn) reference their approach and solutions. In doing this, some take a broader approach, adding a complementary mix of services (beyond technology) to their legal expertise. Lewis Silkin and Wiggin are perfect examples of this. Their sites feature a broad mix of solutions, products and services. Of the remaining firms (Cripps, Freeths, Keystone Law, Wedlake Bell) each give limited coverage to innovation and technology but its inclusion highlights the importance to the firm and their clients.

Clearly it helps that firms have a story to tell, there is substance behind the promise. TLT for example recently launched TLT Concierge (workflow platform) – the fifth in its portfolio. Widespread press coverage only adds to the impression of TLT being innovative. The firm is maximising the tools at its disposal to create a brand halo for innovation. Other firms can create similar impressions. It's all about packaging. Drawing together everything a firm is doing within innovation, technology and other complementary areas to help create a compelling story. Something to tell your audiences and keep telling them to help positively shape their perceptions.

When it comes to brand positioning, all firms deploy their corporate brand's reputation for legal excellence to package their bundles of services, products and solutions. Only two firms have developed dedicated sub-brands for tech and innovation. Both use the reputation of their corporate brand to endorse their mix of capabilities: Foot Anstey Ingenuity and WV Plus.

Firms use a variety of propositions for packaging their credentials for innovation, some of which are aligned to the overarching firm-wide promise. TLT for example uses 'For what comes next' as short-hand to reflect the firm's approach to supporting the emerging needs of its clients. 'TLT FutureLaw' is a key part in delivering this, focused on the business of law. Other firms use different straplines. Brodies for example, goes with 'Enlightened Thinking'. Shepherd & Wedderburn claims 'Smarter Working' and Burness Paull says it is 'Structured for Innovation'. Others default to purely descriptive terms: 'Technology' (Plexus), 'Tech Innovation' (Cripps), 'Creativity and Innovation' (Keystone) and 'Online Services' (Freeths).

Table 1 / Performance correlating with turnover

£25-30 million turnover (13 firms)

No firms list their capabilities

£30-50 million turnover (28 firms)

Six firms list (21%)

£50-75 million turnover (18 firms)

Four firms list (22%)

£75-100 million turnover (8 firms)

Five firms list (62%)

What does this tell us?

Reviewing websites is, of course, a crude measure of performance. In the absence of hard data, it provides some indications of behaviour. A website is the most important, accessible expression of a firm's brand positioning. For most key audiences – clients, prospects, talent, influencers – it remains the front door.

When firms use their websites to talk about innovation and technology, they demonstrate that they are client-centric, in touch with the evolving needs and behaviour of clients. From the websites of TLT, VWV, Lewis Silkin and Foot Anstey, for example, it is easy to see this commitment. Most if not all clients are seeking greater efficiency, better value for money, cost-effective processes, best use of data and resources and, significantly, a digital-first experience. These trends affect all law firms. A proactive approach to external communications also demonstrates that a firm is committed to engaging with internal audiences. For any client engagement strategy, a key element will be to ensure that partners are fully on board and supported.

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Very large firms, clearly feeling this impact, are responding in an active way. Yet mid-sized firms are not immune from trends, and their responses and behaviour will shape their futures. Right now, only a fifth of the 67 firms we reviewed are adopting a proactive approach to how they communicate their capabilities. Nearly 80% of firms (52) say nothing publicly.

Some firms have decided not to surface their capabilities (Clarke Willmott and Walker Morris for example). Some favour the use of different channels, such as tenders and presentations. Even allowing for this, many firms miss out on the opportunity to burnish their brand.

What's more, firms are also failing to create a brand halo for a digital first mindset through their websites. Resorting to using pdf brochures, impenetrable slabs of text and unsuitable designs for mobile, the behaviour hardly promotes innovation. Being able to tell your story digitally speaks of a firm in-step with how clients are now consuming content and behaving. Short-burst content (podcast, film and animation), short form text, use of infographics and micro-interactions and digital documents, all signal a digital mindset.

The future

We are witnessing the diffusion of innovation. As the use of technology and practice of innovation become mainstream, early adopters are paving the way for more to take the plunge. No doubt this will happen. Potential for demand from clients is huge.

Lawtech UK is the government-backed programme to help support the transformation of the legal industry through tech. In its 2021 report 'Shaping the Future of Law', it predicts that unmet demand from small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) and consumers has the potential to become a market opportunity worth £22 billion annually. The opportunity it says is evidenced in its report "only scratches the surface of the true impact we can have through digital transformation in law".

Law firms face stiff competition for this huge market. Increasing numbers of (well-funded) new tech and service providers are knocking on the doors of all legal buyers. The Big Four, with their big brands and their deep pockets, are growing their legal practices and using their formidable resources to reach most areas of business. These are real threats to established providers, even before other players such as tech giants Microsoft and Amazon extend their reach into legal tech and services. With such temptation, the loyalty of even the most loyal of legal buyers will be tested.

What does all this mean? Now is not the time to be silent or vague about what your firm provides, or why and how you are different and better. Nor is it the time to wait. The market for the business of law is in flux. Put a stake in the ground. Evolve your messaging and brand as the firm's approach unfolds. Innovation and technology are (or should be) key strategic pillars for your business. Choosing the right means and moments to communicate these capabilities will shape the understanding, the engagement and ultimately the commitment of potential clients.

Footnote

When we say 'technology and innovation', this includes a broad definition of products, services, solutions and even separate businesses which sometimes is referred to as 'new law', 'business of law', 'alternative or complimentary services'.

Review of the fifteen firms surfacing their capabilities

(listed in order of turnover as per 'The Lawyer Top 200 UK Law firms, 2020')

Freeths

Listed under About, filed under Online Services, there is limited details on the firm's commitment to technology and innovation, apart from details on its Extranets and Data Rooms.

TLT

Consistent with the firm's overarching brand promise, 'For what comes next', the firm has developed a broad set of capabilities and offerings packaged under the phrase 'Discover FutureLaw'. Describing the firm's approach to technology and innovation, 'Discover FutureLaw' currently has five offerings:

TLT Applied – managed legal services

TLT One – document, task, contract management

TLT LegalSifter – contract review using AI

TLT Intelligent Drafter – drafting solution for preparing documents

TLT Concierge – workflow platform

The content hub for 'Discover Future Law' features links to news and articles alongside bios of key contracts.

The firm's entire approach from developing a bundle of tech products to how the firm uses the website to tell its story, speaks of a firm behaving as an innovative / digital first business.

Ince

Supporting the firm's claim to be 'a proactive business services partner', filed under Solutions (on the main navigation) Ince lists a range of digital solutions (for the shipping and maritime markets). Using Ince to endorse each solution, they include: InceCyber, InceDemurrage, InceEvaluate and InceSanctions. InceSight is an online tool for supplying information for online gaming regulations.

Keoghs

Living up to its claim 'Disputing Insurance Law', Keoghs has developed the first ever AI lawyer called Lauri to manage its low-value personal injury claims. This has centre stage for Claims Management capabilities; but is supported by references to a broad range of additional technology solutions (developed by its parent company, Davis Group).

Brodies

Under the promise, 'Enlightened Thinking' and tucked away on the website, the firm talks about what innovation means at Brodies. Listed under Expertise, the firm quotes several digital and advisory solutions for businesses and individuals. Also included is relevant articles and case-studies. Solutions include online tools – BOrganised (online contract management) and Discover by Brodies (Data Subject Access Requests) tool. The firm also includes Health & Safety App and Advocacy services.

Plexus

The firm boasts 'A Clearer Legal Perspective' and how it works on the forefront of delivering innovative high quality legal but only uses its case management system Vectus to evidence such claims.

Lewis Silkin

Claiming 'Creativity, technology and innovation are at the heart of everything we do', the firm has developed an extensive range of solutions to support its mix of clients many of which are SME businesses drawn from the creative industries. Not all solutions are technology based and include a mix of advisory and resourcing solutions. Listed under Alternative Service Offerings (on the firm's website), its portfolio of services, products and solutions includes a mix of standalone brands and sub-brands. They include:

Adslogans by Lewis Silkin – online database of straplines, taglines and endlines

Cube by Lewis Silkin – legal and business support for start-ups, founders and investors

Eleven – independent brand aimed at media, tech & digital businesses, offering strategic advisory services, corporate finance, data analytics, and special projects

Lewisilkinhouse – flexible resourcing services

LS Assist – provides online support and helpdesk for routine, ad hoc commercial work for a fixed price

LS Netminder – domain name management services

LS Presents – online webinar training packages covering a range of topics

LS Resolve – alternative disputes resolution services provided using transparency on cost and fees

LS Solutions – collection of experts (legal technologists, consultants, project managers) to help improve the delivery of legal services

LS Unlock – service aimed at helping individuals and businesses pursue claims by removing or reducing cost if litigation

Rockhopper by Lewis Silkin – fixed fee employment law and HR support services

WorkspHERE – providing end-to-end HR service (training, consultancy, mediation, investigations and audits).

Burness Paul

The firm includes Innovation under About Us, the website includes limited content, nevertheless, tells a story entitled 'Structured for innovation'. This details how the firm's Transformation and Innovation Group and Change Champions combine to harness and develop new ideas. The firm also talks about its approach to using technology through collaboration with different tech providers, and culminates in a case-study involving the Scottish Ballet.

Shepherd & Wedderburn

The firm uses the term 'Smarter Working' to describe its approach to helping clients meet their challenges. This is centred around using experts and technology (Service Delivery Toolkit) in process analysis, workflow automation, document automation, portfolio management and data and knowledge insights. An accompanying brochure includes several anonymous case-studies to help bring the firm's story to life.

5 tips for using your website effectively

From our insights of helping shape and tell firms' story about tech and innovation, here are five tips to help you get the most from your websites:

1. Make it easy to find

Create a separate section dedicated to innovation and technology. Remember, make it easy to find and accessible, not tucked away.

2. Tell your own story

Include what technology and innovation means for the firm. Refrain from clichés. Dig deep to find something compelling to say. Tell your story persuasively.

3. Make it easy to engage with

Unfold your story so it is easy to understand. Establish a structure to logically group your list of solutions, products and services. Use a naming system to make it easy for users to understand what each does.

4. Support your claims

Use evidence to support your claims. Don't say, 'we are innovative' without using proof-points to bring this to life. Include awards, accolades, testimonials, case-studies, scenarios, bios, articles and interviews.

5. Adopt digital first mindset

Implicit in the meaning of innovation and technology is the concept of digital first. Be mindful of this when designing your website and other applications to deliver your marketing communications. Clients increasingly expect a digital experience from lead generation to closing a matter.

Keystone Law

The firm boldly claims “We believe in being different” and goes on to say “Keystone Law is a firm that uses technology and modern working practices to drive productivity and deliver results – we are structured differently, we operate differently and we think differently. Creativity, passion and innovation form the very foundations of our DNA.” Technology forms one of the pillars for delivering its promise. The firm’s website briefly summarises its approach. But beyond this, there is limited information on how the firm uses technology and innovation to support its claims.

VWV

VWV is one of the few firms to have a dedicated brand (VWV Plus) and website for its digital solutions and capabilities. Both act as a clear beacon to demonstrate the firm’s commitment to supporting the evolving challenges of its clients. Featuring current and planned digital solutions for different sectors, it covers – eLearning, Policy Tracker, HR Review, Immigration Manager and Privacy Notice Template.

Foot Anstey

‘Powering your ambition’ is the firm’s promise for clients. Help driving this claim, the firm has developed a range of business and personal solutions. This includes Foot Anstey Ingenuity, the firm’s approach to innovation. It tells a story of how the firm connects people, process and technology to provide clients with a digital first experience. Listed under Our Solutions (on main navigation), the content covers the firm’s approach and benefits (to providing a digital experience) with links its products (each using the Ingenuity name) in real estate, employment and private equity.

Cripps

The firm describe its approach its clients under the title ‘Your lawyers for business and life’ and references ‘innovation’ and ‘creativity’. The firm sheds some light on its approach of using technology with a section entitled ‘Tech innovation’. Here the firm reaffirms its commitment to using technology to helping solve client problems, and talks about its approach to harnessing new ideas for delivering legal services (Spark programme) and fostering an innovative culture.

Wedlake Bell

Under About, the firm describes its approach and commitment to innovation and technology. It talks of a firm already using key technologies around AI, Data Science, Automation, Workflows and Collaboration Systems and its structure for developing new solutions across the firm. While short on content and evidence, its inclusion nevertheless indicates the importance to the firm.

Creativity, technology and innovation are at the heart of everything we do.

Wiggin

This specialist firm in media, technology and IP has built on its market knowledge by developing a series of businesses and products to complement its legal services. The firm has co-founded, co-invested and spun off ventures and solutions. Providing a range of technology solutions and advisory services, most are standalone brands with no or little reference to Wiggin. Full list includes:

Overmorrow – strategic advisory group to connect financiers with opportunities in tech, media and entertainment

Incorpro – one-stop protection & anti-counterfeiting services

Cirkus, Curio & Kritic – subscription on demand channels

Reviewed & Cleared – legal editorial clearance, 24/7

Viewfinder – executive producing & strategic advisory services

Wiggin Date Services – data protection compliance & cybersecurity services with on-demand data protection officers and managers

IR35 Manager – online tool to help companies effectively manage contractors. Won ‘Future Legal Services Innovation – Small Sized Practice at 2022 Legal Innovation Awards.



















Table 2 / Which UK firms are using their websites to showcase their tech and innovation credentials?

(firms with revenues between £25 million and £100 million)

£100m

| | | | | | |
|------------|---|------------------------------|---|--------------------|---|
| 1. Freeths |  | 4. Keoghs |  | 7. Brodies |  |
| 2. TLT |  | 5. Hill Dickinson |  | 8. Browne Jacobson |  |
| 3. Ince |  | 6. Pennington Manches Cooper |  | | |

£75m

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---------------------------|---|---------------------|---|
| 9. Stewarts |  | 15. Burness Paull |  | 21. Fladgate |  |
| 10. Farrer |  | 16. Birketts |  | 22. Walker Morris |  |
| 11. Blake Morgan |  | 17. Forsters |  | 23. BDB Pitmans |  |
| 12. Shakespeare Martineau |  | 18. Knights |  | 24. Hugh James |  |
| 13. Plexus |  | 19. Howard Kennedy |  | 25. Clarke Willmott |  |
| 14. Lewis Silkin |  | 20. Shepherd & Wedderburn |  | 26. Bevan Brittan |  |

£50m
















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|-------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|
| 27. Bristows |  | 37. Harbottle & Lewis |  | 47. Russell Cooke |  |
| 28. Keystone Law |  | 38. VWV |  | 48. Devonshires |  |
| 29. Kingsley Napley |  | 39. Michelmores |  | 49. Wiggin |  |
| 30. JNW |  | 40. Digby Brown |  | 50. Sackers |  |
| 31. Foot Anstey |  | 41. Cripps |  | 51. Fletches |  |
| 32. Capsticks |  | 42. RMK Goodman |  | 52. Simpson Millar |  |
| 33. Ashfords |  | 43. Wedlake Bell |  | 53. Minister Law |  |
| 34. Dickson Minto |  | 44. Ward Hadaway |  | 54. O'Neill Patient Solicitors |  |
| 35. Leigh Day |  | 45. Brabners |  | | |
| 36. Winckworth Sherwood |  | 46. HCR Law |  | | |

Table 2 / Which UK firms are using their websites to showcase their tech and innovation credentials? (cont.)

£30m

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|------------------------|---|--------------------|---|
| 55. Harper Macleod |  | 60. Stevens & Bolton |  | 65. Gunnercooke |  |
| 56. Thorntons |  | 61. Fox Williams |  | 66. Bond Turner |  |
| 57. Boodle Hatfield |  | 62. Express Solicitors |  | 67. Wilkin Chapman |  |
| 58. DMH Stallard |  | 63. Thrings Solicitors |  | | |
| 59. Bates Wells |  | 64. PHB |  | | |

Listed in order of turnover.

Source: The Lawyer Top 200 UK Law firms, 2020

Who we are

Group of experts specialising in branding and design for law firms. Done this for the past 23 years. More and more we are helping firms brand their capabilities in technology and innovation. Few of our clients include Baker McKenzie, Goodman Derrick (now RWK Goodman), Harneys, Hogan Lovells, Fox Williams and White & Case.

For a fuller details of our capabilities, please follow the link www.soukiasjones.co.uk/credentials/branding-legal-tech-innovation/

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