# Regional law firms adapt to changing market dynamics



Law firm leaders across the UK are navigating a complex landscape marked by challenges and shifting market dynamics. Managing partners face numerous responsibilities, from ensuring employee satisfaction to tackling competitive pressures and responding to evolving client expectations. Amid these challenges, opportunities are beginning to emerge, particularly for regional and national firms, as larger entities shift their focus towards international ventures.

Notably, firms such as DLA Piper, Eversheds Sutherland, and CMS, which traditionally maintain a strong presence in cities like Manchester, Birmingham, and Leeds, are increasingly concentrating on broader international markets. Nik White, managing partner at North West firm Brabners, commented on this trend, stating, “There’s tons of really, really good opportunities… that means we can now, with more confidence, compete for bigger-ticket work.” Under White's stewardship since 2018, Brabners has seen a significant revenue increase of 40% over the last three financial years.

Brabners has expanded its footprint recently, opening an office in Leeds and exploring potential growth in London. However, White emphasises that their growth strategy is focused on sustainable, organic expansion rather than through mergers or acquisitions. This approach is informed by their commitment to preserving the firm’s established culture and values, which White views as paramount. "The worst thing we could do is to chase growth simply for the sake of it," he stated.

There are signals that other UK firms are seizing similar opportunities. Richard Medd, managing partner of Browne Jacobson, observed in an interview with Legal Business that “a group of firms that might have previously competed with us for work have changed their focus,” thereby opening space for firms like theirs to fill. Keith Spedding, senior partner at Shakespeare Martineau in Birmingham, concurred, indicating that larger firms' focus on international and significant national work is creating a vacuum for mid-sized firms to target.

The trend is substantiated by recent data, indicating that regional and national firms included in the LB100 have outperformed their larger counterparts, which have seen average revenue growth of only 7%. In contrast, firms in the LB100 charted an average revenue growth of 11%, with 60% of these firms reporting double-digit growth last financial year.

This regional resurgence is not solely about competing for larger clients. The customer loyalty to regional firms is also influenced by the tailored client service these firms provide. Roger McMillan, managing partner at Northern Irish firm Carson McDowell, noted a trend of clients returning to more locally focused firms after experiencing the service level at larger international firms. “We’ve had clients come back to us after initially going to an international firm… we were able to treat them as a more important client,” he explained.

The discussion of regional versus national firm identity continues to shape the narrative in legal circles. Jeanette Burgess, managing partner at Walker Morris, asserted that their firm identifies as one of the largest single-site law firms outside London while remaining competitive nationally and internationally. Similarly, TLT, which does not operate international offices, attributes its 50% revenue growth over the past three years to its national focus backed by a strong international network.

The emphasis on firm culture within regional and national firms is also a key distinguishing factor. At Pannone, senior partner Paul Jonson highlighted the firm’s long-standing reputation in the Manchester area as a major strength. Managing partner Nicola Marchant remarked on the importance of firm culture, stating, “Firm culture is the foundation of everything,” promoting a collegiate atmosphere devoid of individual billing targets, which could detract from client service.

As the landscape continues to evolve, the war for talent has intensified, with firms acutely aware of the importance of a supportive work environment. John Wood, managing partner at TLT, underscored the shift in junior lawyers' motivations beyond monetary compensation, noting a greater demand for positive work experiences and opportunities for professional development.

Ultimately, the regional legal market in the UK is poised for transformation, with firms adapting to client needs, leveraging their historical ties, and fostering work cultures aimed at employee satisfaction, which could significantly change the competitive dynamics in the sector moving forward.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.law.com/2024/12/06/adapting-for-success-strategic-insights-for-law-firms-in-2025-and-beyond/> - Supports the need for law firms to adapt to technological disruption, client-centric strategies, and modernizing operations to navigate the future, aligning with the regional and national firms' strategies discussed.
3. <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/business-management/partner-content/key-trends-shaping-the-legal-industry-in-2025> - Provides insights into key trends such as the adoption of fixed-fee billing models, the use of AI, and enhancing client experience, which are consistent with the regional firms' focus on client service and technological integration.
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5. <https://www.law.com/2024/12/06/adapting-for-success-strategic-insights-for-law-firms-in-2025-and-beyond/> - Emphasizes the importance of a supportive work environment and the shift in junior lawyers' motivations, supporting the war for talent and the focus on employee satisfaction mentioned in the article.
6. <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/business-management/partner-content/key-trends-shaping-the-legal-industry-in-2025> - Discusses the trend of larger firms focusing on international markets, creating opportunities for regional and national firms, which is consistent with the observations by Nik White and Richard Medd.
7. <https://www.lawmergers.co.uk/challenges-facing-law-firms-in-the-next-5-years/> - Explains how evolving client expectations, such as the preference for fixed fees and value-based pricing, are driving changes in law firms' pricing strategies, aligning with the regional firms' client-centric approaches.
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