

The Customer Experience Divide in Legal

Same conversation.
Different story.



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About the research

To understand the gap between what businesses believe they're delivering and what customers experience, Moneypenny commissioned research among two complementary audiences across the UK in January 2026.

- **200 legal sector leaders**
- **UK consumers: 5,001 adults**

Both surveys were conducted online. Where themes overlap, questions were aligned to enable direct comparison - with gaps reported as percentage-point differences to quantify the customer experience divide.

Results are shown as percentages. Figures may not total 100% due to rounding; totals may exceed 100% for multi-select questions.

CENSUSWIDE
+
THE SURVEY CONSULTANTS

Research conducted by Censuswide, a member of the MRS and British Polling Council, in line with the MRS Code of Conduct and ESOMAR principles.



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In legal, it's easy to assume client experience is judged mainly on what happens once a matter is underway, the quality of advice, clarity of communication, and the sense that a client is being handled with care. These things still matter enormously. But this research suggests that, for many firms, the real test comes much earlier.

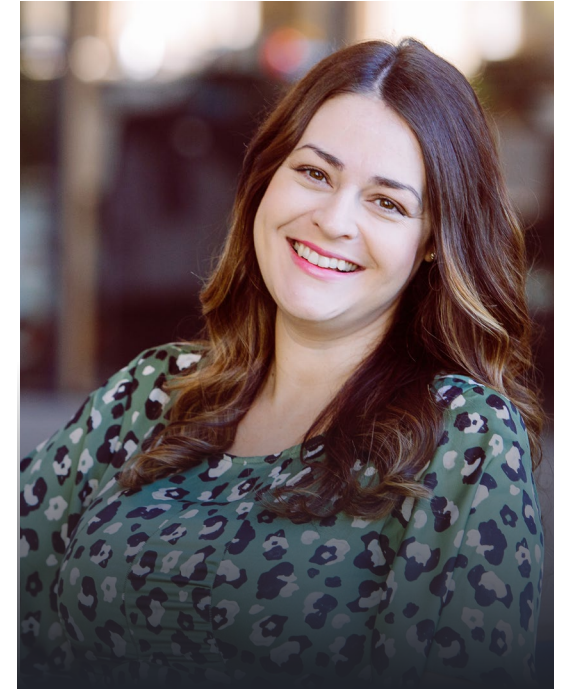
Clients rarely begin by evaluating legal expertise. They begin by testing something more immediate and tangible, how the firm responds when they first reach out. That moment carries weight because it often happens when people feel uncertain, stressed, or under time pressure. They are not just looking for a solution. They are looking for signals that their situation matters, that they will be taken seriously, and that they are not simply another enquiry in a queue.

A slow response, an unclear next step, or an impersonal digital touchpoint rarely feels minor. It often shapes a client's first impression of how dependable and trustworthy the firm will be.

What stands out in our findings is that legal leaders do value service. The sector scores strongly on empathy, expertise, and managing expectations. But clients do not encounter those strengths first. They encounter the mechanics, the web form, the first call, the first reply, and how clearly the next step is explained.

Clients do not separate these early moments from the wider service. To them, it is one continuous experience. Increasingly, those first signals determine whether a firm feels organised, responsive, and easy to trust.

The opportunity is not to become more polished, but more accessible. The firms that stand out will be those that make early interactions simple, clear, and reassuring, because in legal, confidence often begins at first contact.



Bernadette Bennett
Head of Legal Sector
Money Penny

The experience gap starts at first contact

On first contact, legal firms and UK consumers are broadly aligned on what good service looks like. Across both groups, speed of response (91% legal sector vs 83% consumers), expertise (91% vs 82%), empathy (90% vs 82%) and clear communication (91% vs 85%) rank highly, suggesting the sector already understands client expectations.

However, legal businesses consistently place greater importance on these factors than consumers themselves. The largest gap appears around personalisation (+19pp), while communication and resolution show much closer alignment. This points to a sector that is highly aware of service quality, but not always consistent in how that quality is experienced.

That is where friction begins to appear.

While firms prioritise human strengths such as responsiveness, professionalism and specialist expertise, clients often encounter systems before people. Web forms, messaging channels, email and live chat shape impressions before any conversation takes place.

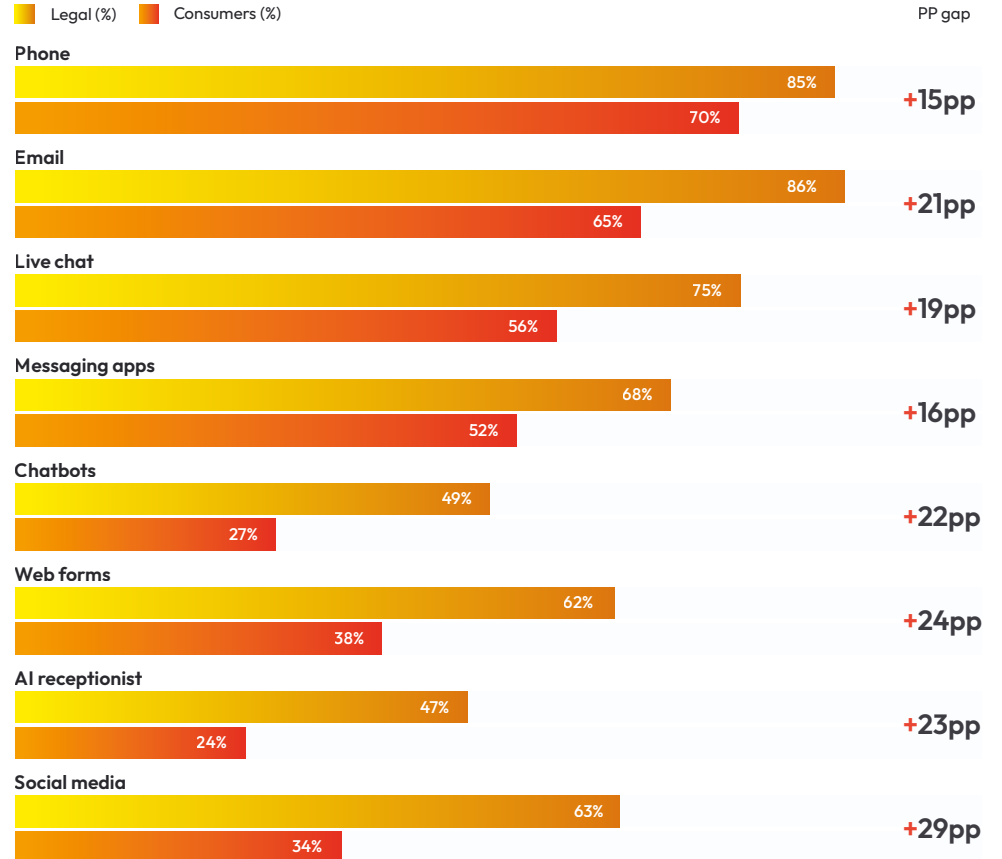
Clients form their first impression before any conversation begins, based on how simple, fast and clear it is to reach the firm.

In legal services especially, first contact rarely happens in a neutral moment. Clients are often under pressure, uncertain about what happens next, or dealing with stressful situations. In that context, even small delays or unclear communication can quickly affect confidence.

The gap is not between what firms' value and what clients value. It is between what firms intend to deliver and what clients experience first.

KEY pp = percentage points. The gap shows the difference between the highest and lowest scores.

First contact channels meeting expectations



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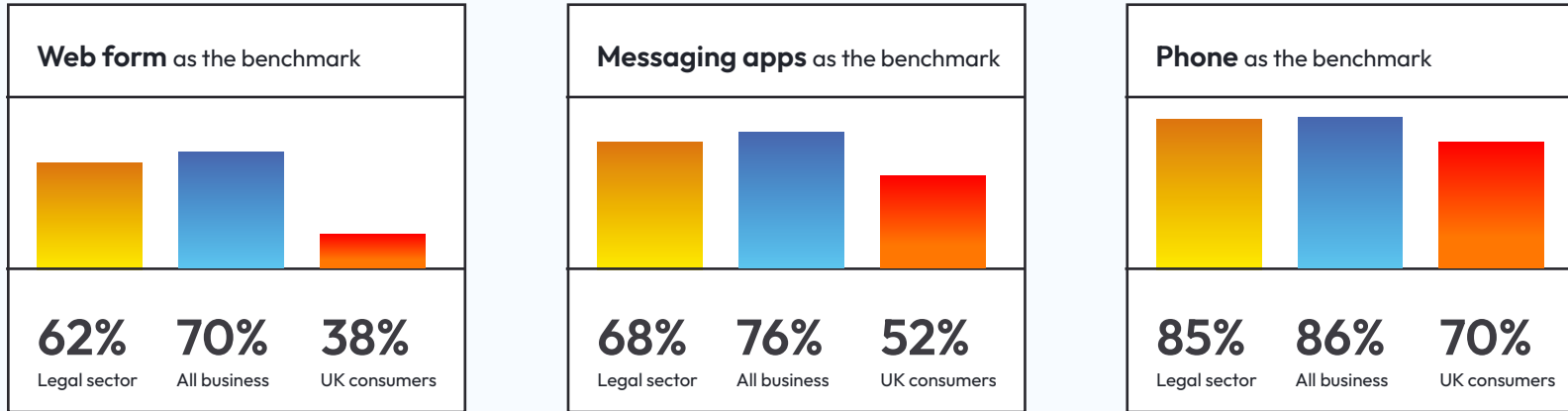
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Legal sector vs the wider benchmark on first-contact channels



The comparison with the wider market reinforces the point. Webforms meet expectations for 62% of legal decision-makers, compared to 70% across all UK business decision-makers and just 38% for consumers. Messaging apps show a similar pattern, with legal at 68% versus 76% across business and 52% for consumers.

Phone contact tells a different story. Here, the gap between legal, wider business and consumers narrows significantly, identifying phone as the strongest first-contact channel. Compared to digital channels.

The commercial impact sits at the front end.

For legal leaders, the question isn't whether service matters. It's whether clients can feel those strengths early enough for them to count.

Because in legal, the first challenge isn't proving expertise. **It's proving accessibility.**

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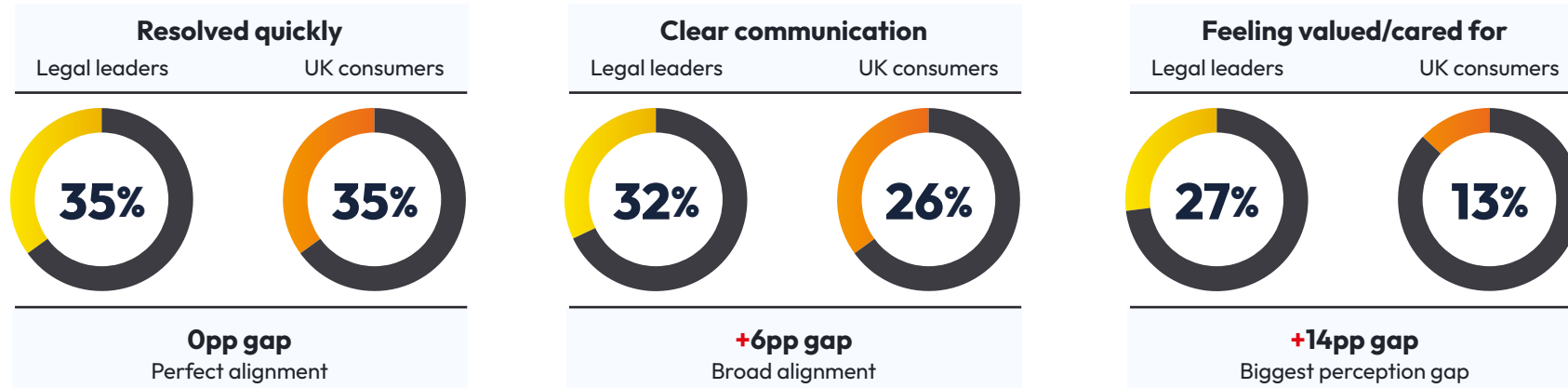
Same client, different reading

Clients value certainty more than sentiment.

Legal lenders tend to associate reassurance with care, empathy and personalisation. Clients place more weight on something more practical: clarity, progress and being able to reach someone when it matters.

What matters most for a memorable service? % selecting each as what makes service most memorable

KEY pp = percentage points.



Resolving issues quickly matters most to both groups, with complete alignment at 35% (Opp). Clear communication is also a strong consumer signal and a clear firm priority (+6pp). But the largest perception gap appears around emotional reassurance, with legal leaders placing significantly more emphasis on customers feeling genuinely cared for than consumers themselves (+14pp).

When it comes to what makes service memorable, legal firms are closely aligned with consumers on outcomes and clarity. But beyond that, the gap begins to widen. Consumers are more likely to remember visible progress, straightforward communication and being able to reach someone when it matters than emotional reassurance alone.

Empathy matters, but only when backed by clarity and visible progress.

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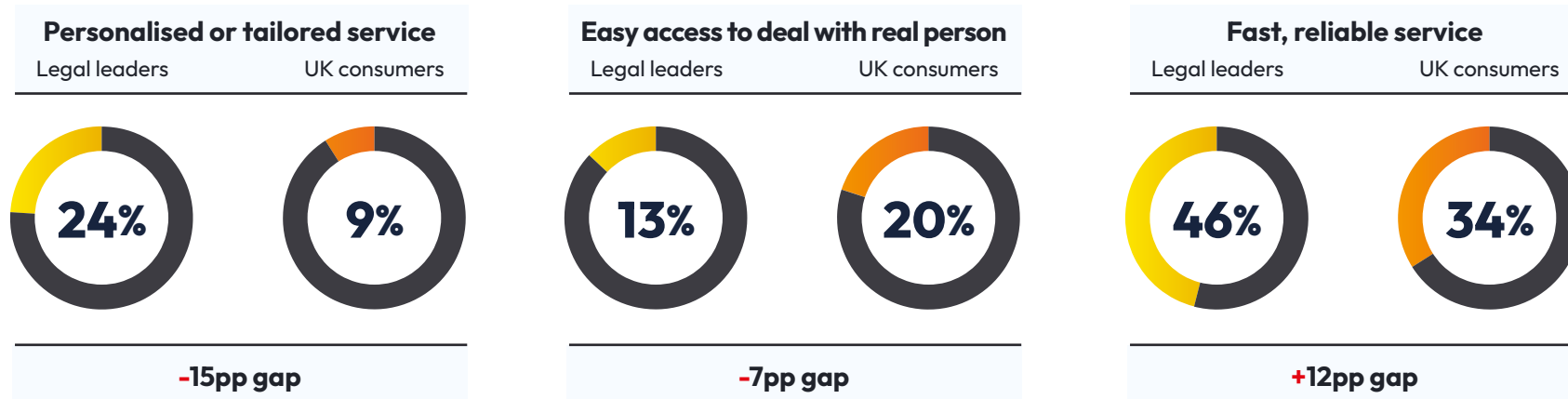
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Loyalty is driven more by reliability and access than tailored service

What drives loyalty?



While 24% of legal leaders believe personalisation service drives loyalty, only 9% of consumers agree. In contrast, consumers place greater importance on being able to reach a real person when needed than firms expect. Across both groups, fast, reliable service remains the strongest loyalty driver.

Consumers are more likely to stay loyal because a service feels dependable and accessible than because it feels highly personalised.

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Where legal is closely aligned

Resolved quickly, makes service more memorable

Opp gap

Clear communication matters

+6pp gap

Empathy matters on first contact

+11pp gap

Legal is strongly aligned with consumers on the core principles of good service.

Where the gap appears

Personalised or tailored service drives loyalty

+15pp gap

AI receptionist meets expectations

+22pp gap

Messaging apps meet expectations

+16pp gap

The biggest disconnects are practical and operational not emotional.



Consumers are more likely to value accessibility and responsiveness than highly tailored experiences alone.

The average journey is not always the real journey.

At headline level, the legal findings can appear manageable. But the averages mask a more important pattern underneath. Confidence, trust and comfort with digital-first interactions vary sharply by age, particularly among older audiences where reassurance carries more weight.

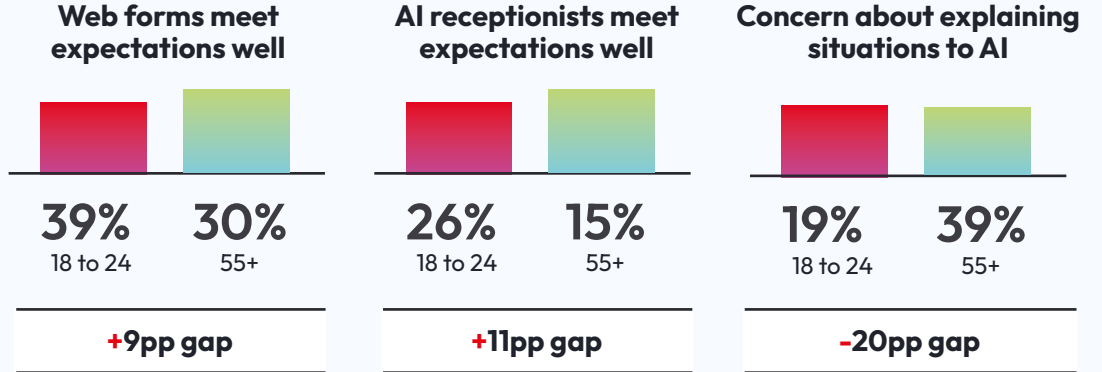
Younger consumers are broadly comfortable with digital contact routes. But among those aged 55+, confidence drops significantly across key entry points. While 39% of consumers aged 18–24 say web forms meet expectations, that falls to 30% among over-55s. Confidence in AI-led contact drops even further, from 26% to just 15%.

At the same time, concern about explaining personal situations to AI nearly doubles with age, rising from 19% among younger audiences to 39% among older consumers.

This changes how the experience is felt. A journey that appears functional on average may still create friction, hesitation or drop-off among the audiences who often need reassurance most.

For legal firms serving private client, probate, conveyancing or family law audiences, those differences become commercially significant.

Where confidence changes by age



27% of consumers aged 55+ say they would stop trying or go elsewhere if they don't get a response.



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What the average hides

What the average suggests

Digital channels are performing reasonably well

AI could improve speed and efficiency

The front-end journey looks serviceable overall

What older-skewing firms may actually be dealing with

Key routes may still feel awkward or confidence-draining

AI may feel distancing or harder to trust in sensitive situations

The lived experience may be slower, less clear and less reassuring

This is not just a demographic nuance. It is a structural risk, particularly for firms in areas like private client, probate or family law.

In these moments, clients are not just judging convenience. They are deciding whether the firm feels approachable, clear and trustworthy. That brings the earlier findings into focus. Firms may be strong once contact is made, but if the first step feels difficult, those strengths may never come into play.

The key question is simple.

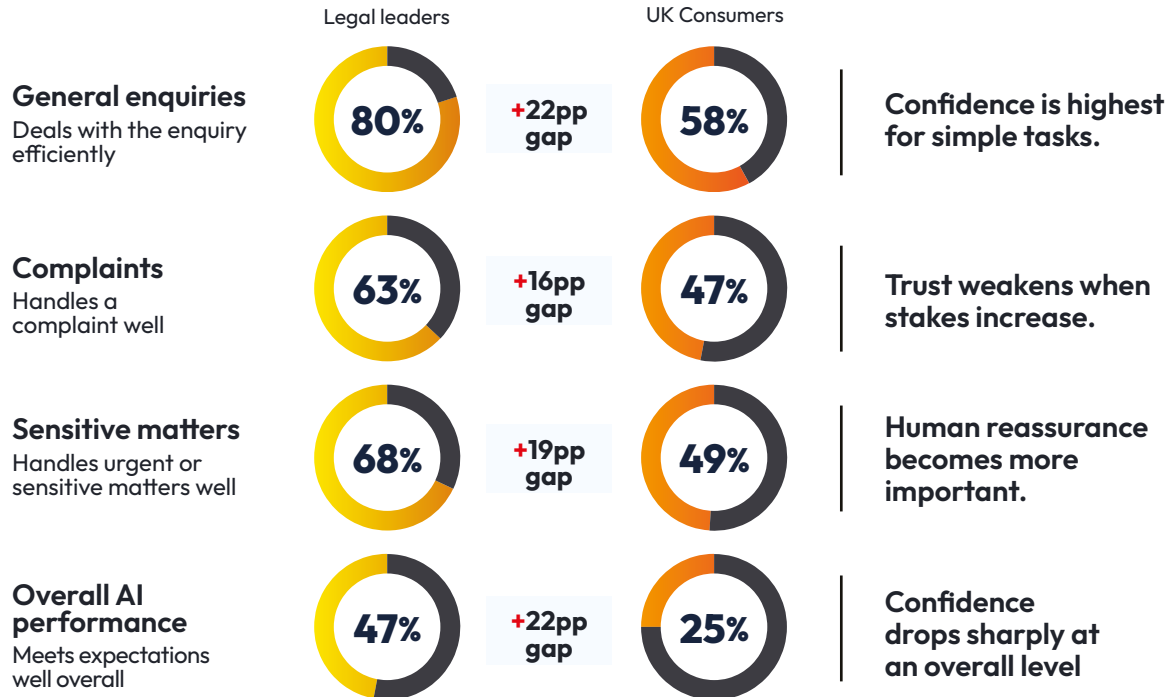
When you assess client experience, whose experience are you measuring?

Because the biggest risk is not the average journey. It is the one your core clients are actually having.



Human control still matters

Legal leaders are right to see potential in AI. Consumers want the reassurance of human control. Consumers are less confident in AI-led interactions than legal leaders expect, particularly as situations become more sensitive or emotionally charged.



This isn't just about capability. It's about control.

Clients are comfortable with AI for simple, fast tasks, answering questions (57%), booking appointments (55%) or handling basic queries. But comfort drops as interactions become more nuanced.

68% of consumers are comfortable with AI if they can switch to a real person at any point



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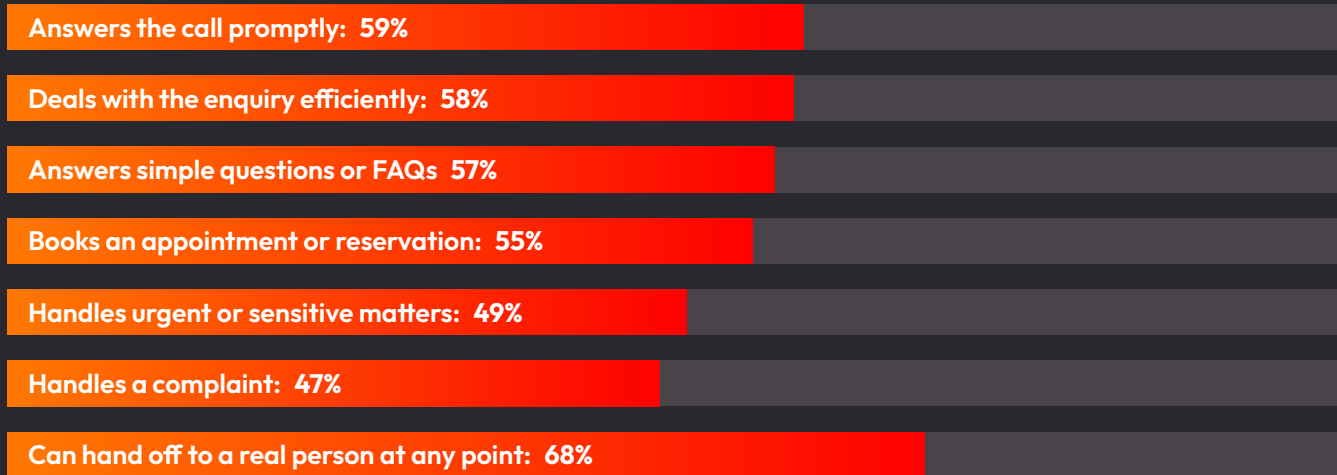
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AI works best when human support stays visible

Consumer comfort with AI receptionist scenarios



Consumers are most comfortable with AI when it reduces friction without removing human reassurance.

When interactions are high-stakes or unfamiliar, access to a real person is not a bonus. It is part of what makes the experience feel safe.

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Same conversation, different story

Legal firms and clients can move through the same interaction and come away with very different impressions.

Firms see effort, empathy and professional intent. Clients notice something more immediate: how easy it was to get in touch, how quickly someone responded, whether the next step was clear, and whether a real person was within reach.

That difference sits at the heart of the findings.

Legal does not have a service values problem. The sector performs strongly on empathy, expertise and the human side of service. But those strengths are not what clients experience first. They experience the mechanics of the journey, and that is where confidence begins to form.

Across the report, the same pattern appears.

Early moments still carry friction. Speed and clarity matter more than many journeys are built around. Certainty carries more weight than charm. Older audiences face more barriers and are less likely to keep trying when firms do not respond. And while AI can improve access, clients still want human control close at hand.

This creates a clear challenge.

The goal is not to become more polished or to follow every new service trend. It is to make the firm easier to reach, easier to understand, and easier to trust in the moments that matter most.

Because in legal, client experience does not begin when the advice starts. It begins the moment someone decides to get in touch.

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**Every conversation is an opportunity.
Make sure you're ready for it.**

Money Penny is the UK's leading customer conversations partner, blending exceptional people with proprietary AI technology to deliver trusted experiences - so nothing slips through the cracks and every customer feels heard first time. **Our solutions include:**

Telephone Answering

Your dedicated Money Penny Receptionist answers and fulfils caller needs whenever you can't, with the professionalism and warmth of someone who genuinely knows your business.



AI Receptionist

Built for routine calls that don't require a human every time. Our proprietary AI will schedule appointments, handle FAQs, route calls, and collect data accurately, with a clear route to a real person when it matters.



Outsourced Switchboard

For larger organisations managing high call volumes, we provide seamless switchboard outsourcing that flexes with demand and removes the burden of in-house overhead - without losing the human touch.



Lead Management

We qualify leads, book demos and appointments, take payments, and even drop everything neatly into your CRM system, so your people can stay focused on faster conversion.



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The research showed the gap. Now's the time to close it.

**Find out how Moneypenny will help your
business deliver on every conversation.**

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