2026 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ILTA Technology Survey

SPONSORED BY:

iManage netdocuments

Lights, Camera, AI!

WRITTEN BY:

Rich Raether
Chief Information Officer
Quarles & Brady LLP

Andrew P. Medeiros
Managing Director of Innovation
troutman pepper locke

Todd Corham
Legal Technology Advisor
Associate Member

AI steps into the spotlight – but is legal technology ready for the main stage?

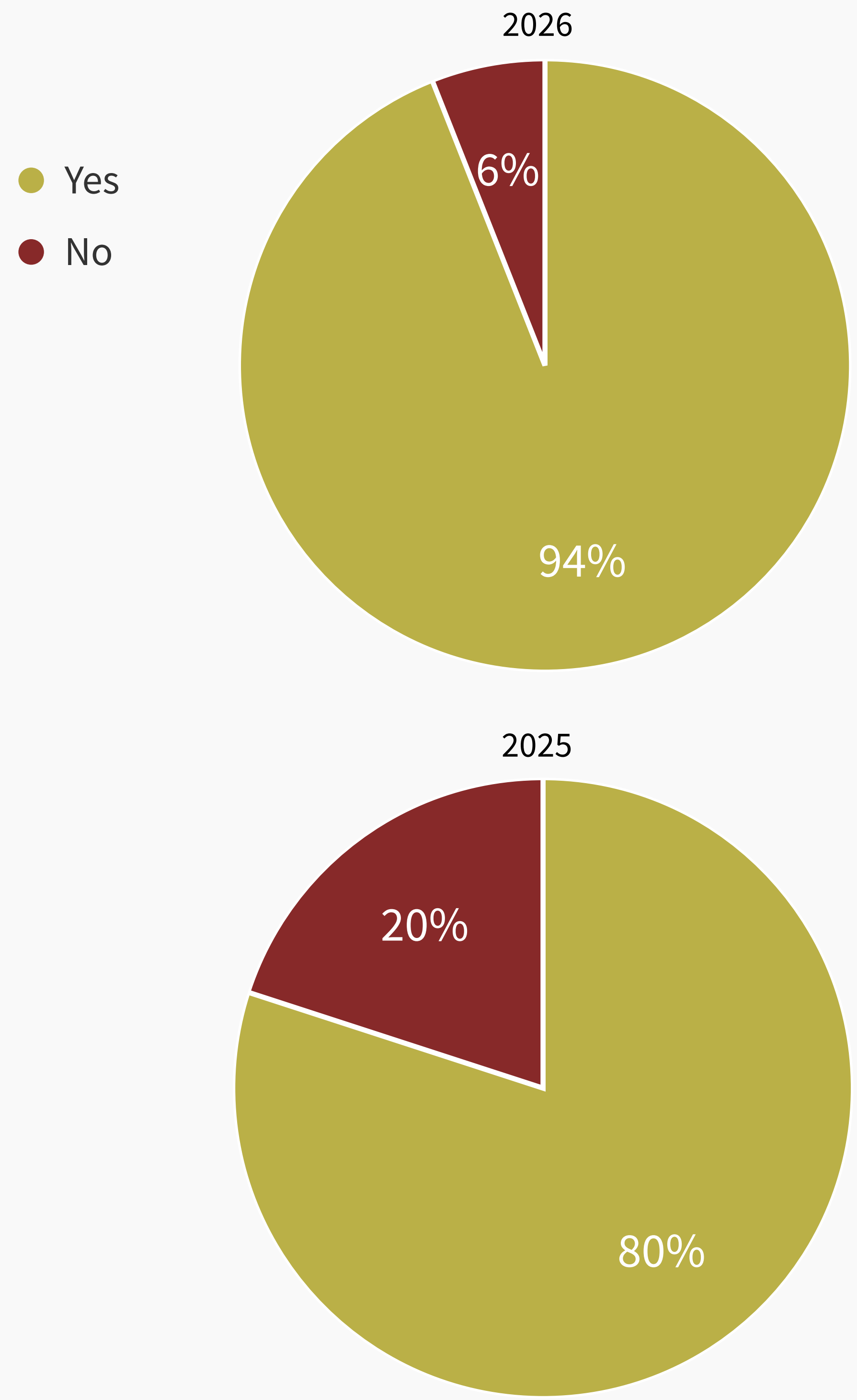
First, a note on presentation: Longtime respondents may notice some questions have shifted positions – a necessary migration to ensure related topics are grouped in ways that make sense. This year’s survey has been thoughtfully restructured to better align with how legal professionals work. The ten-section structure remains, but the content has been refined to align with functional workflows rather than discrete technology labels. Most notably, the former “Office Applications” framing has been redistributed: questions about document production, assembly, comparison, and management now live together under Document Processing, while communication and teamwork tools have found their home in Collaboration. Think of it as a well-organized prop closet – everything in its place!

Generative AI questions largely remain consolidated in their own dedicated section of Emerging Technologies, with smart routing that captures strategic perspectives from every participant. But GenAI is no longer content to wait in the wings – it’s stepping into the spotlight of everyday practice, and we’ve begun asking about GenAI-related issues wherever that substantive work occurs.

This year’s survey draws from over five hundred firms representing a diverse cross-section of the profession – from boutique practices to international powerhouses, capturing the full spectrum of legal technology experience. We use firm-size breakouts where available rather than relying on aggregate averages alone to provide more pertinent insights to readers.

What follows is our interpretation of the survey data – emphasis on interpretation. We’ve worked to spotlight the themes that emerged for us, though we may have missed (or hallucinated!) a few. We encourage you to explore the full results, draw your own conclusions, and let us know where we’ve gone astray. Please consume responsibly.

Q3.2 IS YOUR FIRM USING / EXPLORING GENERATIVE AI TOOLS (E.G., CHATGPT, COCOUNSEL, HARVEY, LEXIS CREATE+, LITO, ETC.)?



Setting the Stage for GenAI

Over the last few years, skepticism and caution were common themes among our respondents regarding GenAI, with a wary eyebrow raised at a promising but unproven newcomer. “Not ready for prime time,” some declared, wondering if this would be another short-lived trend like blockchain and the metaverse, relegated to smaller and experimental venues rather than top billing. But what a difference a couple of years makes. The question is no longer whether GenAI is here to stay; it’s whether the legal profession has the will, the administrative infrastructure, and the governance frameworks for the long run.

Where firms are placing their bets tells a story of platform consolidation and strategic repositioning. Nearly every responding firm (94%) is now engaged with GenAI, up 14 points from last year. Although the industry continues to experiment with consumer-facing GenAI tools (consumer tools are still 8 of the top 20 in our list), legal-specific tools, both new and established, are gaining ground on all fronts. However, there is some connection to firm size in terms of adoption - tools like Harvey, Legora, and Relativity aiR ramp up sharply among the mid-size to larger firms, while other tools like Laurel, ndMax and Westlaw CoCounsel are represented fairly evenly across all firm sizes. And as Microsoft’s dominance in the law firm stack solidifies (see data on that below), their Copilot suite has emerged as the season’s must-have enterprise productivity accessory.

Yet even those firms most engaged with GenAI continue to take a measured approach. Deployments remain deliberately gated, with more than half of respondents issuing Copilot licenses only on request. Some of our respondents captured the tension: “The firms that lean into GenAI will be here; whereas firms that don’t will struggle to prove their relevance.” Another respondent warned: “Until accuracy and quality improve, it is an expensive toy.”

Perhaps the most telling shift is in how legal leaders envision the future. A decisive majority now believe the profession will look significantly different – if not unrecognizable – within a decade. The industry is grappling with structural change that could reshape everything from talent development to the very nature of legal work. As one respondent put it: "GenAI will compress much of the document review, research, and drafting work that has historically powered the associate pyramid, putting pressure on the billable hour and forcing firms to rethink talent development." Yet seasoned observers remain philosophical. As one veteran noted with hard-won wisdom: "I've seen previous 'transformative innovations' result in minimal actual change. This hype, too, shall pass."

The Curtain Rises on Enterprise-Scale Adoption

GenAI has crossed from backstage experimentation to center stage production. For the first time in this survey's history, an emerging technology has become the primary focus of law firm technology investment. The question is no longer whether your firm will engage with GenAI, but how firms will adopt and manage what amounts to a new technology ecosystem.

The velocity of this transformation is breathtaking. Just twelve months ago, one in five firms reported no GenAI engagement at all. That holdout population has all but vanished, suggesting GenAI adoption is no longer a strategic choice but an operational baseline. Firms that remain on the sidelines may find themselves in an increasingly lonely minority, watching the competitive distance widen with each passing season.

GenAI is also arriving through the collaboration tools firms already use daily. Copilot and Teams Premium deployments have tripled in two years, and among those who have activated these features, Copilot Chat is the most common feature activated (81%). The implication for leadership is clear: GenAI governance cannot be treated as a standalone initiative when GenAI capabilities are being quietly activated across the collaboration layer without discrete deployment events.

Most significantly, GenAI has moved into the legal production layer – the work that defines law firm value. The majority of GenAI-engaged firms now use generative tools for drafting, legal research, document summarization, and contract review. Firms that integrate GenAI successfully into these workflows will operate at an entirely different tempo than those that don't. Those that fail to govern that integration will carry risks their competitors have already avoided. Speed without governance is a liability, not an advantage. The industry has responded with admirable discipline: most firms now maintain formal GenAI policies, restrict use to vetted or firm-approved tools, require human review of GenAI-assisted work products, and mandate independent verification with authoritative citations.

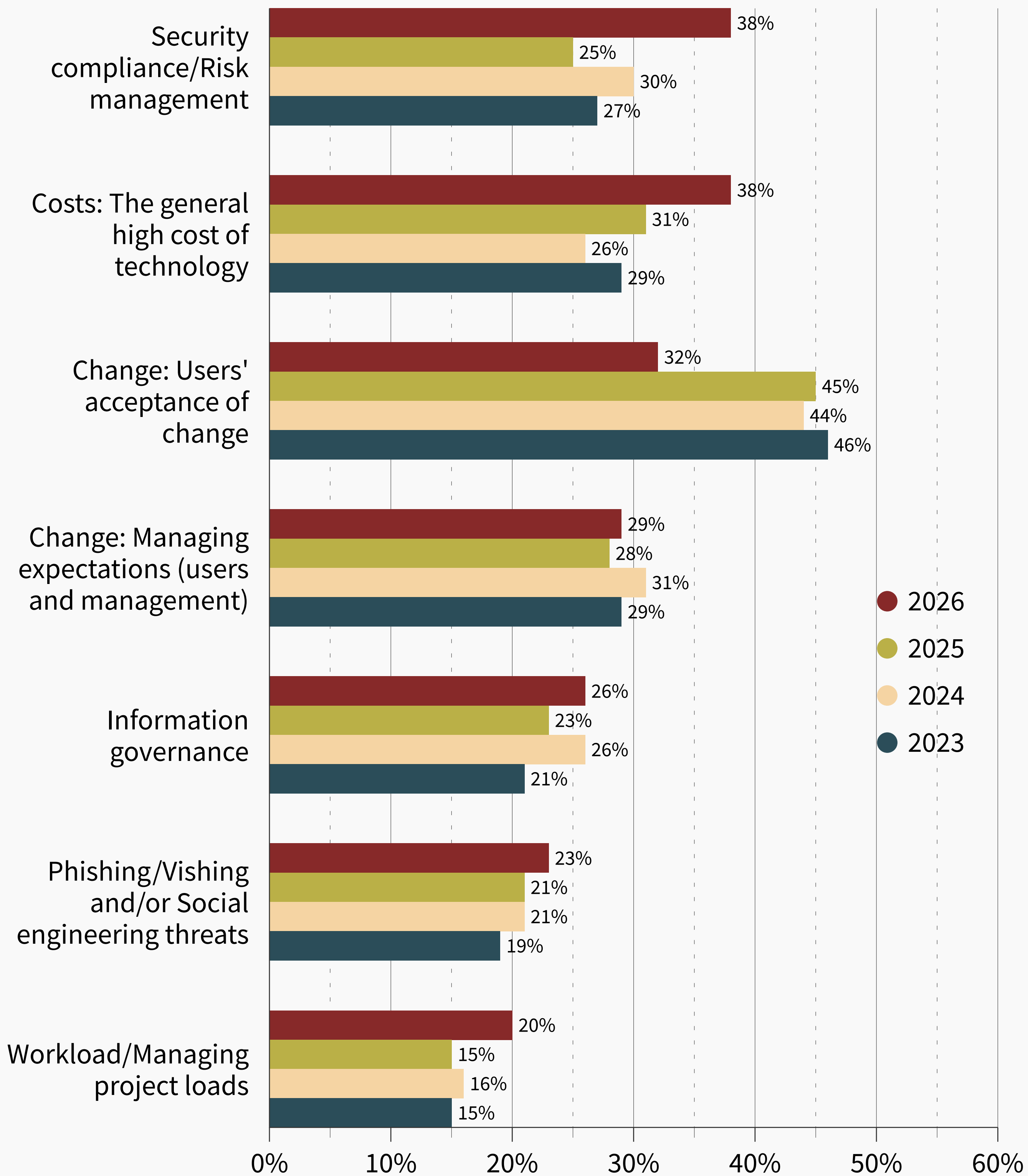
Once again, it should be noted that there are significant differences between firms when viewed by size. The most dramatic differences include whether a formal GenAI policy is in place at all (>30-point range), the external marketing of GenAI tools (50-point difference), and requiring training before users get access to these tools (a 60-point swing from small firms to large).

The infrastructure behind the curtain is expanding as well. Most firms have rolled out training on specific GenAI tools, many hold periodic learning sessions and town halls, and a substantial number run prompt-engineering workshops. The staffing implications are real: Many firms anticipate additional headcount needs across IT, innovation, security, training, knowledge management, and data science.

Q3.18 WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBE YOUR FIRM'S CURRENT OFFICIAL POLICIES OR GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI (GAI) TOOLS?

	Number of Lawyers				
	Under 50	50 to 149	150 to 349	350 to 699	Over 700
	%	%	%	%	%
A formal policy is in place	57%	80%	85%	98%	91%
Work product must be reviewed by a human	31%	59%	69%	83%	79%
Only vetted/firm-approved apps	39%	60%	67%	79%	74%
Specific training required before use	11%	30%	47%	63%	72%
Encourage experimentation within policy	24%	34%	43%	58%	57%
Outputs must be cited/independently verified	25%	42%	40%	60%	55%
No confidential/sensitive info	29%	43%	43%	46%	53%
Use of GAI tools actively marketed	2%	8%	19%	27%	52%
Must obtain client approval	8%	20%	24%	38%	34%
Must obtain supervisor/partner approval	4%	10%	13%	19%	19%
Formal policy still under development	21%	13%	3%	2%	5%
No formal policy, but guidance/warnings issued	16%	5%	7%	2%	2%
No formal written policy and guidance yet	10%	2%	2%	0%	0%
Prohibit use of GAI tools for client work	7%	2%	3%	2%	0%
Prohibit use of GAI tools on firm systems	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Other	1%	1%	2%	4%	2%
None/ Not applicable	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Q2.2 WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE TECHNOLOGY ISSUES OR ANNOYANCES WITHIN YOUR FIRM?



PARTIAL RESULTS SHOWN

When GenAI Ambition Meets Budget Reality

For years, the headline questions for law firm leaders included whether to embrace the cloud, launch a knowledge initiative, or rethink collaboration. In 2026, the questions have evolved: what does all this emerging tech cost, and who is ensuring it doesn't collapse under its own complexity? The data reveals a profession that has moved past adoption anxiety and into the harder work of governance, budgeting, and accountability.

The "high cost of technology" – a perennial also-ran in the annoyances category – has surged dramatically over five years, now sharing top billing among leadership concerns with security compliance and risk management. Information governance also remains a top five concern. These aren't complaints about specific tools; they're signals that law firm leadership is recalibrating its entire relationship with technology. Cost visibility, risk management, and demonstrable controls are growing imperatives.

Management burden, it turns out, is not distributed evenly: "managing expectations" emerges as a top concern at the largest firms, nearly double the rate reported by smaller firms. Scale can apparently bring its own complexity – coordinating stakeholder expectations, maintaining governance frameworks, and managing change across hundreds of users creates friction that smaller firms may encounter less often.

Meanwhile, the hybrid work experiment has quietly transitioned from active debate to settled infrastructure. Three days per week in the office has become the prevailing pattern, and hoteling has found its equilibrium. Leadership no longer needs to decide whether hybrid work is viable; they need to ensure that cost discipline, security assurance, and information governance extend across every location, device, and workflow that hybrid work has made permanent.

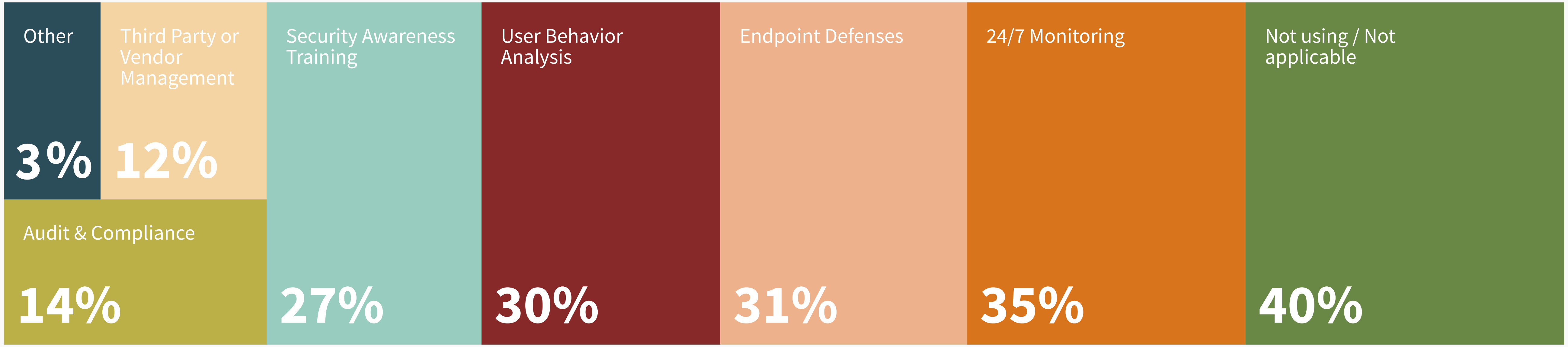
Two-Front War: GenAI Becomes Both Sword and Shield

If last year's survey introduced the "Battle-Ready" theme – demonstrating firms' investments in encryption, multi-factor authentication, and the perennial struggle against user behavior – then 2026 marks the opening of a second front. GenAI has arrived not merely as a productivity tool but as a structural force reshaping the entire security landscape. This year, GenAI appeared on the survey's tracked "security challenge" list for the first time – and immediately claimed second place, outranking malware, compliance, and every legacy threat except user behavior. The specificity of firms' GenAI security concerns reveals a profession that has evolved from "Should we worry?" to "What exactly do we govern?" GenAI-powered social engineering – deepfake calls, synthetic phishing, impersonation at scale – tops the list of concerns. But internal risks are also top concerns: detecting anomalous GenAI behavior, preventing GenAI agent abuse, managing third-party software GenAI security risks, and guarding against prompt injections and data-model poisoning. These aren't hypothetical scenarios; they're the governance requirements firms are actively wrestling with.

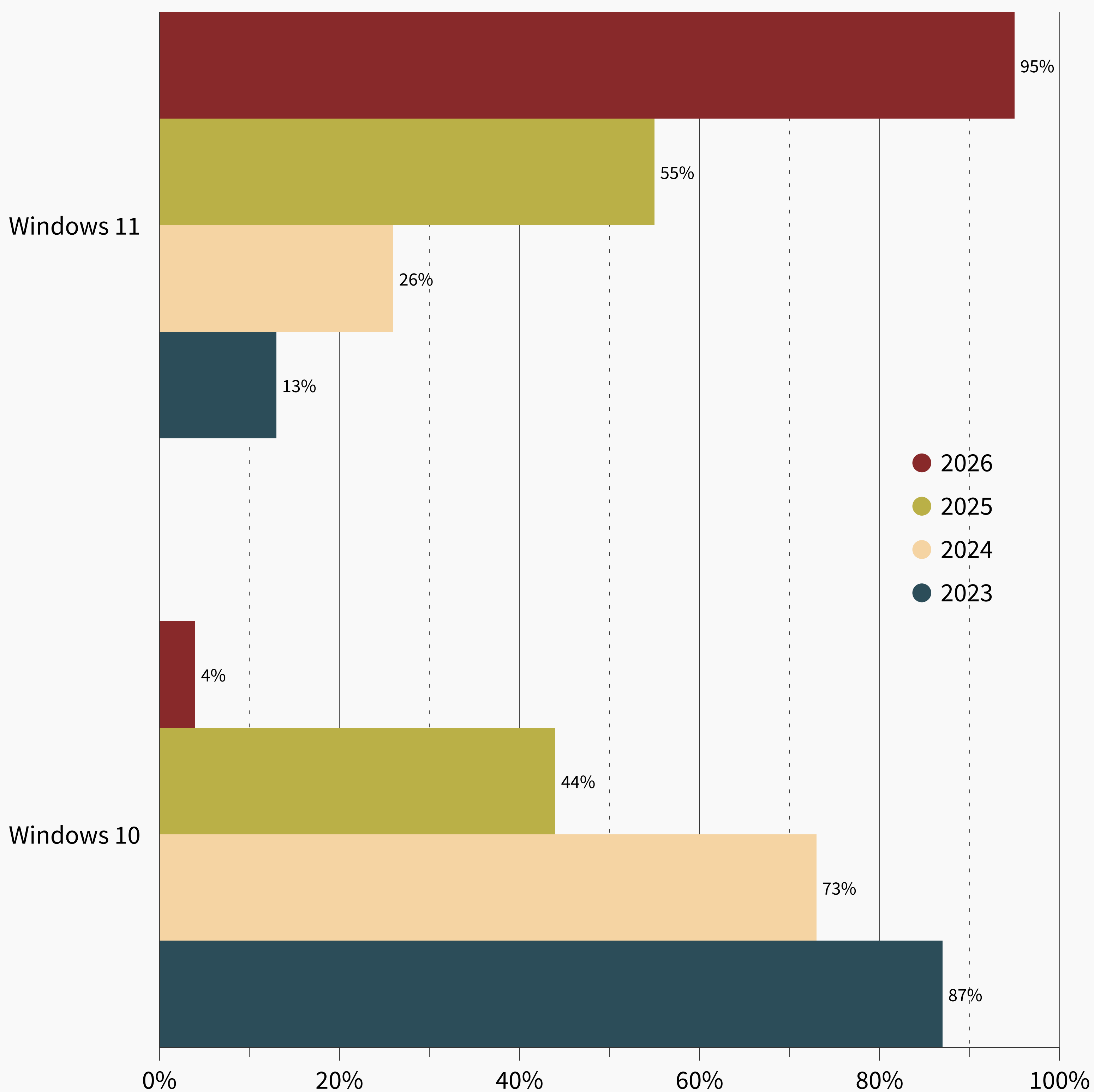
On prevention, the picture is mixed. Six in ten firms have deployed GenAI-powered tools for defending the organization, such as around-the-clock monitoring or endpoint defenses, with somewhat fewer using GenAI for user behavior analysis or security awareness training. Four in ten firms are not yet using GenAI to defend the firm at all, creating a readiness gap that may matter as GenAI-powered threats proliferate.

When firms look for outside assistance with security, Security Operations (SOC/MSSP) outsourcing remains a top practice in the industry. This reflects a structural shift from internal operations to a purchased-capability model. On the resilience side, cloud backup has become standard practice with 80% of firms moving to that model, layering immutable backups, time-based snapshots, and air-gapped copies into a maturing ransomware resilience program.

Q10.27 WHERE IS YOUR FIRM USING GENAI TO ASSIST IN DEFENDING THE FIRM?



Q9.2 WHICH PRIMARY WORKSTATION OPERATING SYSTEM DOES YOUR FIRM USE?



The House That Redmond Built

Across this year's survey, one structural pattern emerges with striking consistency: Microsoft is not just a vendor; it's becoming the operating system of legal technology itself. The convergence is visible everywhere – from device management to unified communications, cloud servers to operating systems. Windows 11 alone surged from 55% to 95% adoption as the primary operating system in a single survey cycle, one of the most dynamic platform transitions in the survey's history. Traditional alternatives have narrowed as the Microsoft ecosystem has become the default infrastructure across many categories.

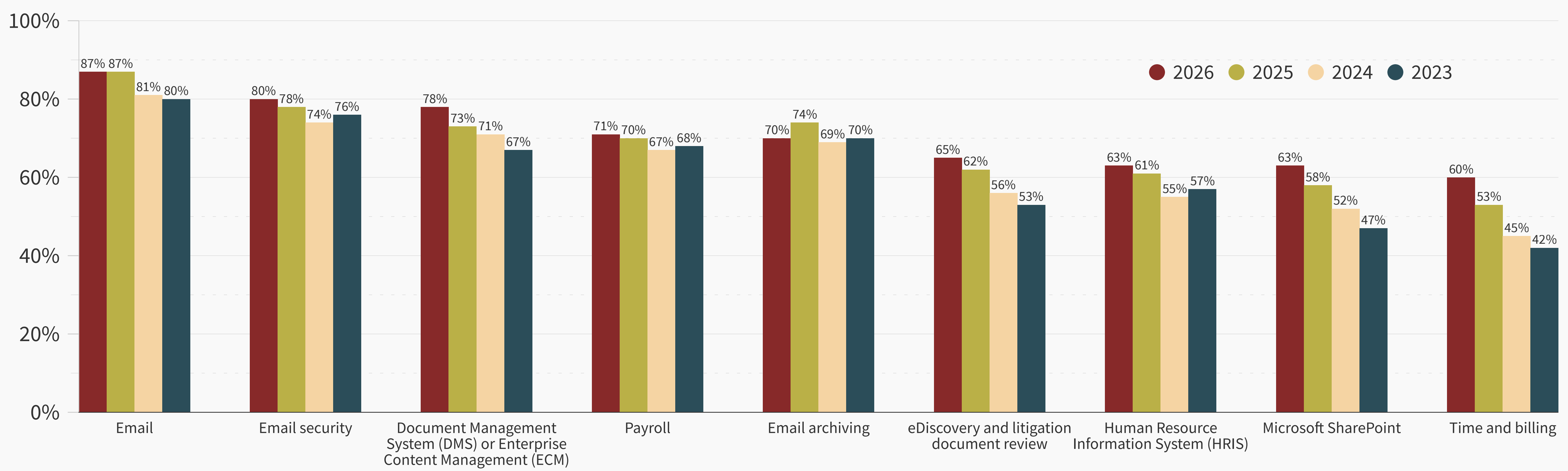
As readers may recall, the user hardware form factor underwent a dramatic shift in the early 2020s when hybrid work, mentioned above, began to solidify as a theme, driving firms to migrate toward mobility and portability. The desktop computer is slowly making an exit for lawyers, with laptop adoption becoming the norm. Use of laptops by professional staff continues to rise, now above 75% on average. The sudden expansion of the firm's "perimeter" as users worked from home created significant complexity, as these devices need to be provisioned, secured and maintained on-the-fly in unknown environments. In addition, these endpoints can have a great deal of variety, and with four leading vendors, as well as competing priorities on specifications (weight, battery life, price, docking features, etc.) there will always be a segment of unhappy constituents. As SaaS products continue to proliferate and historically local models move to the cloud, we can hope there will be less pressure on local hardware and software and, if we're lucky, less complexity. Of course, the contrary argument is that our laptops will increasingly require Copilot integration and GPU/NPU support. These challenges may be with us for a while!

Curtain Call for the Data Center

Speaking of the cloud and SaaS evolution, the multi-year cloud migration story for primary legal platforms continues its steady march. Almost every tool and platform tracked on the survey has moved steadily toward the cloud over the past four survey years. Cloud-based document management, email, and backup are all becoming standard practice at most firms. Cloud adoption for time and billing systems is up seven points this year, although still only at 60%. This is an area in which small and mid-sized firms are leading, while the largest firms have been slow to embrace cloud infrastructure for finance and billing. It should be noted that one in five firms plan to replace their time and billing system within the next 12 months, so we could see some significant change in cloud adoption on next year's survey.

The question has shifted from whether firms will move to the cloud to how they govern what now lives there. Two gaps remain that will define the next phase of legal technology investment. First, work-product governance still relies heavily on training and leadership pressure, while sophisticated tracking and compliance tools are in use by less than one-in-five firms. Second, knowledge infrastructure remains dramatically underdeveloped across enterprise search, expertise management, pricing, procurement, and competitive intelligence. The platform migration is largely complete, but the governance migration has yet to begin.

Q5.2 WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SOLUTIONS BEING UTILIZED BY YOUR FIRM ARE CURRENTLY LOCATED IN THE CLOUD OR ARE BEING MIGRATED TO THE CLOUD WITHIN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?



PARTIAL RESULTS SHOWN

A Note on How We Use GenAI

For over three decades, this survey has distilled the collective wisdom of the legal technology community into actionable insight. This year, GenAI served as our backstage assistant – analyzing responses, surfacing patterns across hundreds of questions, and helping us deliver clearer findings than manual analysis alone could achieve.

Using GenAI well means handling your data with care. The analysis used de-identified survey data and aggregated results. No respondent or firm-identifying information was provided to the GenAI tools used in preparing this summary. Your responses were never used to train public or third-party models, and our tools operate under strict enterprise controls that keep your information private and confined to this work.

In short: GenAI let us draw richer insight from your answers, without putting your data at risk.

Good Night, and Good Luck

As the house lights come up, we return to the question we posed at the start: Is GenAI ready for the bright lights? The data suggests a qualified yes – but the real story is no longer about GenAI itself. It's about everything GenAI requires to work well. The firms that deliver the best performance won't simply be the ones with the best tools; they'll be the ones with the governance frameworks, data discipline, training programs, security posture, and leadership buy-in to make those tools reliable, measurable, and defensible. As one prescient respondent observed: "The biggest factor won't be GenAI itself; it will be the business process discipline, data strategy, and systems integration required to use it well." The curtain has risen, and the firms that engage with GenAI strategically position themselves well to weather the changes afoot in the industry.

This Executive Summary reflects the collective effort of ILTA's Technology Survey team, whose members volunteer countless hours to ensure the survey remains a credible, actionable resource for legal technology leaders and for those tasked with executing on your firm's strategic technology vision. Our deepest gratitude to the 508 firms who shared their experiences, challenges, and predictions – your generosity is what makes this publication truly peer-powered. Special thanks to Laura Murphy, Senior Project Manager at ILTA, for guiding us through the process with patience, precision, and just the right amount of deadline pressure to keep us on task throughout the year. And to the broader ILTA community: thank you for continuing to show up, share openly, and challenge each other to do better.

ABOUT ILTA

The International Legal Technology Association (ILTA) serves the professional needs of more than 25,000 international legal technology professionals and their organizations. Since its founding in 1980, the association's focus has been to achieve results for our membership and the legal technology profession at large. Much of the value we provide as an association occurs through the coordinated efforts with our global volunteer membership teams.