



CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN LAW FIRMS

Crisis Management Practices in Law Firms

Lawyers have long understood their role in helping clients find their way out of the problems they're facing. Historically, this responsibility was captured under litigation practices or proactive corporate prevention.

Mission-critical business decisions have become a daily occurrence for most legal decision-makers. Facing a constant stream of new challenges that must be urgently addressed, clients are requesting more holistic support from their outside counsel and demand for crisis management services continues to increase. Now more than ever, clients are seeking guidance from their outside counsel on their reputational exposure in high-stakes litigation and legal decisions. But while crisis management has been recognized as a leading growth area for law firms, our research indicates many of the nation's top law firms are leaving valuable client services (and potential revenue) on the table.

We examined the websites of all Am Law 100 law firms. Our research team searched each website for references to crisis management as a practice area, as well as other practice area descriptions for evidence of crisis management services. We reviewed attorney and staff bios, where available, to better understand the capabilities and expertise offered.

- 86% of Am Law 100 firms reference "crisis" in practice area descriptions.
- 26% of firms have a top-line crisis management practice.
- 29% of firms offer crisis management as a sub-practice.
- 7% of firms are Chambers ranked for crisis management.*
- 5% of firms have public affairs / lobbyists on staff.**
- 2% of firms have crisis communications professionals on staff.**

*Just three of the seven Chambers-ranked Am Law 100 firms ranked for crisis management advertise a standalone practice

**This number does not include attorneys

Main Points:

- Most of the Am Law 100 do not advertise crisis management as a standalone practice.
- **26% of the Am Law 100 list crisis management as a top-line practice area.** Another 29% offer crisis management services as a sub-practice, making it the more common approach. However, nearly all the firms researched reference “crisis” in at least one practice area description on their website – one firm refers to “crisis” in over 50 separate practice areas despite not advertising crisis management as a dedicated service or practice area. Notably, just three of the seven Chambers-ranked Am Law 100 firms ranked for crisis management advertise a standalone practice.
- **Some broader practice areas leverage crisis management experience as an added benefit.** Our research found that crisis management is sometimes mentioned or described as a capability under broader practice areas like litigation, energy, government relations, white-collar defense and investigations – but was found in a wide range of services from arbitration to wildfire litigation. In such cases, crisis management is positioned as an added benefit or capability of the legal team.
- **Industry-specific focus on crisis management leads to higher practice concentration in New York, Texas and Washington, DC.** Aside from commercial litigation, energy practices dominate when it comes to advertising crisis management capabilities. Many of the law firm crisis management practices are led by Texas-based attorneys. New York and Washington, DC are also hotbeds for crisis management practices.
- **Services offered are primarily reactive and vague.** Across the board, firms tend to reference crisis management in response to litigation and/or government inquiries and investigations. Few detail their specific crisis management capabilities and/or services and almost none of the firms researched promote proactive crisis planning or ongoing advocacy. Many of the firms researched employ public affairs professionals and lobbyists to this end.
- **Communication is an afterthought.** Just four of the firms researched mention media relations and/or publicity as part of their crisis management services or capabilities. Only two firms have a crisis communications consultant on staff while less than five reference any partnerships with external agencies, networks or other access to experienced crisis communication resources. One firm boasts of its lack of communication professionals as a benefit and discourages clients from working with PR firms altogether.

Our research indicates “crisis” is a prevalent theme across a broad range of legal services. Nearly all Am Law 100 firms reference “crisis” in at least one practice area description, signaling some capabilities in crisis management. But, for most, these capabilities are not fully described – leaving much to interpretation. In a business environment where legal decision-makers are conducting more due diligence on their outside counsel and demanding more comprehensive support, law firms that more firmly position themselves as leaders in crisis management, along with the relevant communications, public affairs and other support services, will be primed to deliver increased value while increasing potential revenue streams.

Client RFPs are now frequently asking for law firms to share their crisis communications expertise or if they have any established relationships with public relations agencies. We go further and recommend that the law firm proactively add such information, if not asked, as a differentiating factor.

The best law firms work with clients as they innovate to predict legal issues or even strategize and create new markets and related laws via public affairs initiatives. (Think online gambling, automated vehicles and the space race.) Globalization and instant communication require the ability to manage client matters in ways never imagined before. These evolutions will make law firms truly become crisis counselors, helping their clients change for the better as one of many strategies for avoiding and managing risk.