

What's Changing in Your Panel Reviews

Legal & Compliance

You have seen this in your panel reviews

“Your biggest client’s GC has not stopped calling. They have just stopped calling as often. The revenue decline will be masked by the retainer for 18 months. By the time it shows in the billing data, the repositioning window has closed.”

01

What happens when our clients do more internally?

02

Why are we losing panels we should be winning?

03

What happens when our rainmakers retire?

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You have seen this in your panel reviews

Every head of business development at a mid-sized Nordic law firm has had the same Monday morning. A panel review lost on Friday to a competitor the managing partner does not rate. An 8:15 email from your biggest banking client, warm and polite, mentioning in passing that their new Legal Operations lead is running sharper triage on what goes out. A quiet coffee with the partner who holds a quarter of the originations, and the phrase "the thought has crossed my mind" about retirement.

You have done this job for fifteen years. The pattern used to be simple. Get your best partners into the right rooms. Prepare the pitch. Coach the relationship partner on the panel. Track the mandate. The work was understandable.

Something changed. Your panel reviews are going to firms whose pitch lead arrived with a sharper view of the client's live regulatory exposure than your partner volunteered. Your longest-standing clients have not stopped calling. They have just stopped calling as often. Your marketing leads are thinner. And when you ask the Head of KM for a succession plan on the top five partner books, there is no answer that calms the executive committee.

This is not a you problem. It is an industry problem and a function problem, happening at the same time. Most heads of BD are treating them as two. The ones who see them as one are going to own the next decade of mid-market legal and compliance work.

This briefing covers what is happening in your sector, what it means for your pitch team and your client development function, and the three questions your partnership should answer before the next executive committee meeting.

Your clients are becoming the competitor for the work you used to get

Every technology wave that hit legal in the last forty years made lawyers more productive. Word processors. Precedent databases. Electronic filing. E-discovery platforms. Contract lifecycle systems. Each wave let the partners do more with less associate time and the hourly rate survived every one. The pricing model never broke because clients still needed the firm to hold the knowledge.

AI does not behave the same way. Your general counsels are adopting the same contract review, research, and advisory tools your associates use. 94% of in-house teams now work with AI on matters they used to instruct out. 64% say they expect to bring more work in-house this year. This is not your associates getting faster. This is your clients getting capable. Every hour the GC's AI handles is an hour they do not buy from you. The firm gets faster and the client buys less. Both blades cut toward the firm.

Your biggest client's GC has not stopped calling. They have just stopped calling as often. The revenue decline will be masked by the retainer for 18 months. By the time it shows in the billing data, the repositioning window has closed.

The competitors in your segment are not waiting. The AI-adopting firms in Nordic mid-market legal are already running panel-review preparation on tools your partners have not seen yet. Their pitch leads arrive with a sharper view of the client's live CSRD, AI Act, and data-protection exposure than the client's GC had before the meeting. Your partner is still the better lawyer. Their partner is running the better conversation. Procurement teams at your largest clients have noticed. In 2026 they build it into the panel-review scorecard. In 2027 it becomes how panels are decided. Your partner was right on the law. Their partner was right on the conversation the CEO was having that week.

Your pitches, your marketing, and your KM are feeling it every day

Your pitches. The partner walks into the panel review with a one-pager and the firm's credentials deck. The competing firm walks in with a specific point of view on the client's live regulatory exposure, the CEO's board-meeting agenda that quarter, and a comparable matter from six months ago that lands the differentiation. Your partner is the better lawyer. Their pitch lead is running the better meeting. The decision goes to preparation, not law. This is happening more often than a year ago.

Your marketing and client development. The lead-generation playbook changed in a single year. Buyers research in answer engines, industry publications, and peer forums. Your firm's thought leadership is produced once a quarter, it mentions CSRD in general terms, and it does not get cited. The firms pulling ahead are shifting marketing from volume outreach to specification-stage authority. Original research. Named partners with clear points of view on emerging regulatory areas. Presence in the forums where GCs compare firms privately. The firm is the preferred pick before the panel is scoped.

Your knowledge management. Your KM function runs three platforms the partners never open. It costs real money every year. Every quarter the Head of KM asks partners to file what they know, and nothing happens. The shift happening at the leading firms is structural: stop asking partners to file knowledge. Extract it silently from the artefacts they already produce. Matter files, pitch debriefs, panel-review briefs, advice memos, client correspondence. The KM function moves from filing to infrastructure. Most firms have not made this move. The ones that do build an asset that compounds with every new matter.

Your associates' week. Research, precedent retrieval, first-draft advice memos, due-diligence review, tender compliance. Ten to fifteen hours a week of work that used to be the price of being an associate. That work can now be done in an hour when your team is set up for it. Your best associates are using the freed time to build deeper views on specific regulatory questions. Your middle associates are doing the same things they did before, which is now not enough.

Your best partners. Your top three or four rainmakers carry between forty and sixty percent of the originations. They built it on fifteen to twenty years of client knowledge, never written down. When the rainmaker leaves, the book leaves with them. At Nordic market averages, forty percent of the book transfers inside the firm and sixty percent walks. Two of your top three are over sixty. The retirement conversations are already happening. You know which ones.

The winners are already running one commercial system

Your sector is compressing because your clients are doing more internally. Your function is compressing because your pitch teams and your marketing team have free time they did not have before, and your clients arrive at panel reviews better prepared. Same force, two altitudes. But there is a third thing happening that most heads of BD have not named yet, and it is the one that matters most.

Look at the firms pulling ahead. Pitch, marketing, and knowledge management are running as one commercial system, not three separate teams. Marketing sits in the panel-review prep every week. KM feeds the pitch team a pack on the client's matter history, the partner's prior positions, and the competitor firm's likely angle. The pitch team feeds back what the client actually asked so marketing's next piece of original research targets the real question. The data moves between the three functions. The firm walks into panel reviews better prepared than the competitor for no additional partner effort.

Most heads of BD are still running three teams with three plans. A new pitch template. A marketing refresh. Another KM platform. Twelve months later nothing compounds, because the three plans never met.

A mid-market Nordic firm at €200M with forty-five equity partners. Top five client relationships generate a quarter of the originations. Two are held by partners over sixty. If those books transfer at the Nordic average, the firm loses €10M in the three years after retirement. Infrastructure built starting now halves the attrition. The head of BD who raises this next month is the architect of the firm's next decade.

You have twelve to eighteen months. The AI adoption debate is over. Your question now is whether you lead the conversation with the managing partner, or the executive committee hires someone who will.

What most firms are doing. What the winners are doing instead.

Every head of BD has had the AI conversation by now. Most firms are making the same four decisions. A smaller group is making different ones.

THE DEFAULT PATH

Run pitch, marketing, and KM as three teams

Three plans that never meet. A new template for pitches, a campaign refresh for marketing, another platform for KM.

Buy a legal AI platform and call it the strategy

Every competitor firm will have the same platform in six months. The tool is the commodity.

Push marketing for more content volume

More pieces, more campaigns, more impressions. The panels go to firms with sharper points of view anyway.

Wait for your rainmakers to retire, hope the book transfers

Sixty percent walks. The client relationships decay in the eighteen months that follow.

THE WINNERS' PATH

Run one commercial system across all three

Marketing in the panel-review prep. KM feeding the pitch pack. Shared data and shared outputs.

Build the tools your partners actually use

Tuned to your matter history, your clients, your practice areas. Yours to keep, compounding with every matter.

Build authority where GCs actually research

Original work that answer engines cite. Named partners with clear views on CSRD and AI Act. Preferred pick before the panel.

Capture what they know now, while they are still there

Matter files, pitch history, client correspondence. The book becomes portable. Retirement is a planned handover.

Same technology. Same twelve months. Opposite outcomes. The difference is the operator, not the AI.

Instructions. Mandates. Books.

Three questions every head of BD is tracking. None of them used to be the same question. They are now.

01 · INSTRUCTIONS

What happens when our clients do more internally?

Your GC contacts are deploying the same AI tools your associates use. They are not telling you. Your instructions are shifting in shape before they shift in volume. The shape change is the early signal: more discrete matters, fewer advisory conversations, more "I need X by Friday." The billing data lags eighteen months. By then, repositioning is reactive.

02 · MANDATES

Why are we losing panels we should be winning?

The mandate went to a firm your partners do not rate. They did not price you out. They showed up with a sharper view of the client's live regulatory exposure than your partner volunteered. They had been in the CSRD or AI Act conversation earlier. Your partner is the better lawyer. Their partner is running the better meeting.

03 · BOOKS

What happens when our rainmakers retire?

Your top three or four partners hold half the originations between them. You have never found a way to pass what they know to the rest of the partnership. Two of them are over sixty. At Nordic averages, sixty percent of the book walks when they leave. The retirement conversations are already on your calendar.

What the firms winning this play are actually doing

Four concrete moves any head of BD can start this quarter. Each touches one function. Together they fuse your team into one commercial system.

1

Pitch: prepare partners for panel reviews the way competitors already do

Your partner walks into the panel review with a one-pager and charm. The competing firm walks in with a sharper view of the client's live regulatory exposure, the CEO's board-meeting agenda that quarter, and a comparable matter from six months ago. Forty hours of pitch preparation compresses to three hours of partner review on an AI-produced pack. Win rate on contested panels rises. Partner effort falls.

2

Marketing: shift from volume to specification-stage authority

Your thought leadership is produced once a quarter, mentions CSRD in general terms, and does not get cited. Buyers research in answer engines and peer forums your team does not track. The move is to build authority where the GC is researching. Original work on emerging regulatory areas. Named partners with clear points of view on AI Act and digital compliance. Your firm becomes the preferred pick before the panel is scoped.

3

KM: move from filing to infrastructure

Your partners never filed what they know. They never will. Stop asking. Extract the knowledge silently from the artefacts partners already produce. Matter files. Pitch debriefs. Panel-review briefs. Advice memos. Client correspondence. The KM function moves from filing to infrastructure. Every pitch and every panel review runs on it. This is the quietest move on the list, and it moves more numbers than any of the other three.

4

Succession: encode the rainmaker's book before they retire

Every top partner carries fifteen to twenty years of client knowledge in their head. Political dynamics, competitive near-misses, pricing history, the advice structures the GC prefers. An AI trained on the partner's own matter history produces a structured map of the relationship. The next partner inherits it. Book transfer moves from forty percent to seventy or eighty. Start now. This has the longest lead time.

The firm that joins the partnership conversation to working tools

The head of BD in 2026 has four places to go for help. None can do what we do, each for a specific reason.

Legal AI vendors sell software with seats. Their model needs your firm dependent on the platform. They cannot have the managing-partner conversation about what AI means for partner economics or client portfolio strategy.

The Big Four legal-ops practices will write you a sharp strategy deck. They cannot put a working pitch-preparation tool in a partner's hands in three weeks because their cost structure requires billing associate hours.

The management consultancies have written about the legal sector. They rarely staff a team that has run partner distributions or defended a panel review. Their partners do not know your Monday.

Your own head of knowledge management is capable and under-resourced. They already run three platforms the partners do not use. Adding a fourth is politically impossible.

The market offers four things you have already said no to, or are saying no to now. GRAIL is the fifth option.

WHAT YOU GET

Senior advisory in partnership-economics language

Working tools your partners use the same week

Custom AI built on your matter history

Infrastructure your knowledge function owns

No platform dependency at any stage

WHY IT MATTERS

Operators who have run partnership economics

Business first, technology second

Three weeks to working tools, not eighteen months

You own the intellectual property, not us

Every next step earned, never assumed

Three sessions with your partnership's commercial leadership. Working tools from week one.

We start with the managing partner, the head of BD, and two practice heads because the change cannot outrun the group's personal understanding of what is possible. Three workshops. Each delivers standalone value. Each earns the right to the next.

WORKSHOP 01

How to think

Walk through what is happening in your sector and on your pitch team. Build the first working tool in the room. A panel-review prep agent for one real mandate, trained on one real partner's style, for one real client. The leadership group leaves with a shared view and the first working tool already in hand.

WORKSHOP 02

Your firm's tools

A half-day activation. Each partner and BD lead leaves with five to ten working tools tuned to their practice areas, their clients, their pitches. Panel-review preparation. Matter-history synthesis. Scope-expansion benchmarking. CSRD and AI Act practice-area intelligence. Tools your partners are using the same week.

WORKSHOP 03

Ready to roll

Refined tools based on real use. The rollout plan to wider pitch and KM teams. The knowledge-capture plan for your rainmakers. The pricing-discipline playbook for emerging practice areas. And the managing-partner conversation with numbers the executive committee can check, not a deck they cannot argue with.

Three weeks. No platform project. No executive committee approval needed to start. The tools your partners are already using when we finish.

For your next executive committee meeting

The questions where your partnership cannot agree on an answer are the ones worth an hour on the agenda. Ask these honestly.

Of the last ten panel reviews you lost, how many went to firms whose pitch lead arrived with a sharper view of the client's live regulatory exposure than your partner did? If you do not know, how would you find out?

What percentage of instructions from your top five clients are shifting in shape (more discrete matters, fewer advisory conversations)? How does that compare to two years ago, and when did you last look at the pattern?

If your top three partners retired next year, what percentage of the attached book would transfer inside the firm? What have you actually built in the last twelve months to improve that percentage?

Where is your average associate spending their week today, and where would they need to spend it to give partners a sharper view going into panel reviews?

Which of your partners is already doing what the rest of the partnership will need to do by 2027 to keep winning panel reviews? What would it take for that preparation to be the firm default?

If any of these produces a disagreement in your executive committee, that is the conversation worth having before the next panel review lands.

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