



US LEGAL MARKET

QUARTERLY BRIEFING

**US LEGAL
MARKET:
Q2 2026**

APRIL - JUNE

Prepared by
EDEN ROSE USA

GROWTH RETURNS, BUT FIRMS REMAIN **HIGHLY SELECTIVE**



The 2nd quarter of 2026 demonstrated a legal recruitment market that is active, competitive, and increasingly strategic.

While hiring volumes strengthened across many major US markets, particularly New York, Washington DC, Chicago, Texas, California, and key growth centres in the Southeast, law firms continued to demonstrate significant discipline in their hiring decisions. Demand for talent remained strong, but firms showed little appetite for hiring simply to increase headcount.

Instead, Q2 was characterised by targeted growth, retention challenges, and an increasing focus on profitability.

The overarching theme of the quarter was clear:
Firms are willing to invest heavily in the right talent, but they expect a measurable return on that investment.

April: Strong Demand Meets Limited Supply
April saw firms return to the market with renewed confidence following a positive start to the year.

Demand was particularly strong for experienced associates in litigation, regulatory, investigations, privacy, cybersecurity, labour & employment, healthcare, and financial services. Corporate hiring also improved as deal activity stabilised and firms sought to strengthen teams ahead of anticipated transactional growth in the second half of the year.

However, talent shortages remained a significant challenge.

Many firms reported difficulty attracting lawyers with between 3 and 8 years of post-qualification experience, particularly those possessing specialist technical expertise and strong client management skills.

The result was a highly competitive market where quality candidates frequently received multiple approaches and competing offers.

May: Retention Moves to the Top of the Agenda

While hiring activity remained robust throughout May, retention became one of the dominant topics of discussion among law firm leadership teams.

After several years of elevated mobility across the legal profession, firms increasingly recognised that replacing experienced attorneys had become significantly more expensive than many internal models suggested. The challenge was no longer simply recruitment costs.

Vacancies often created substantial commercial disruption through the below:

6 Costs of Churn:

- Lost billable revenue
- Delayed client matters
- Increased pressure on existing teams
- Reduced productivity
- Knowledge and relationship loss
- Increased risk of secondary attrition

Many firms began placing greater emphasis on engagement, career development, succession planning, and compensation benchmarking as part of broader retention strategies.

The most successful firms were not necessarily paying the highest salaries. They were providing clear career pathways and maintaining regular dialogue with their highest-performing lawyers.

June: Strategic Hiring Gains Momentum

June reinforced an increasingly noticeable trend across the market: firms are becoming more strategic in how they deploy hiring budgets.

Rather than broad expansion, firms focused on highly targeted hires capable of generating immediate impact.

Partner recruitment remained active, particularly for lawyers with demonstrable portable business and expertise in growth sectors. However, firms continued to scrutinize business cases carefully, with increased emphasis on profitability, cross-selling opportunities, and cultural fit.

At the associate level, firms showed a growing preference for lawyers who could contribute immediately with minimal onboarding requirements.

The days of speculative hiring appear largely behind us. Today's legal recruitment market rewards specialization, commercial awareness, and proven performance.

Key Theme for Q2

1. Attorney Churn Remains Expensive

More firms are beginning to assess the true financial impact of turnover rather than focusing solely on recruitment fees.

Lost revenue during vacancies, reduced team productivity, and client service disruption frequently create costs that exceed the investment required to secure replacement talent.

2. High-Performing Lawyers Continue to Hold Significant Leverage

Although firms have become more selective, demand for exceptional legal talent remains strong.

Candidates with specialist expertise, strong client-facing capabilities, and proven commercial value continue to command significant attention from the market.

3. Speed Continues to Win Talent

One of the clearest trends of Q2 was the importance of decision-making speed.

Firms that moved efficiently through interview and offer processes consistently outperformed competitors attempting to achieve consensus through lengthy internal discussions.

Top candidates rarely remain available for long.

4. Quality Has Replaced Quantity

Many firms have shifted focus away from headcount growth towards productivity, profitability, and strategic capability.

This has resulted in fewer speculative hires and greater emphasis on long-term value creation.

Outlook for Q3 2026

As we move into the 2nd half of the year, market fundamentals remain positive.

Most indicators suggest demand for legal talent will continue, particularly in litigation, regulatory, compliance, privacy, cybersecurity, healthcare, financial services, and selected transactional practices.

However, firms are likely to maintain a disciplined approach to hiring. The organisations that perform best in Q3 will be those that successfully balance growth ambitions with retention strategies, recognising that recruitment and retention are increasingly two sides of the same commercial strategy.

MARKET INSIGHTS

The Talent Problem in BigLaw Is not Compensation, **It's** **Sustainability**

For years, the dominant narrative in top U.S. law firms has been straightforward: pay associates more, and retention will take care of itself.

That assumption is now breaking down.

The issue is no longer about attracting talent. It's about keeping it.



[Read more →](#)



[Read more →](#)

Is **Attorney Churn** Costing Your Firm **More Than Recruitment Fees?**

When a lawyer leaves a firm, the immediate focus is often on the recruitment fee required to replace them. But is that really the biggest cost? Most firms calculate the cost of hiring. Far fewer calculate the cost of losing someone.

The recruitment fee is often the most visible expense, but it is rarely the largest. The most successful firms recognize that strategic hiring isn't simply a cost of doing business, it's often a form of revenue protection.

Rising Demand for Patent Litigators as IPR Barriers Increase: **An IP Legal** **Recruiter's View**

Over the past decade, IPRs at the PTAB served as a powerful and cost-effective "safety value" for defendants in patent disputes. That era is shifting.

Recent changes in discretionary denial standards, evolving USPTO practices, and Federal Circuit case law have made IPR institution less predictable and more difficult.

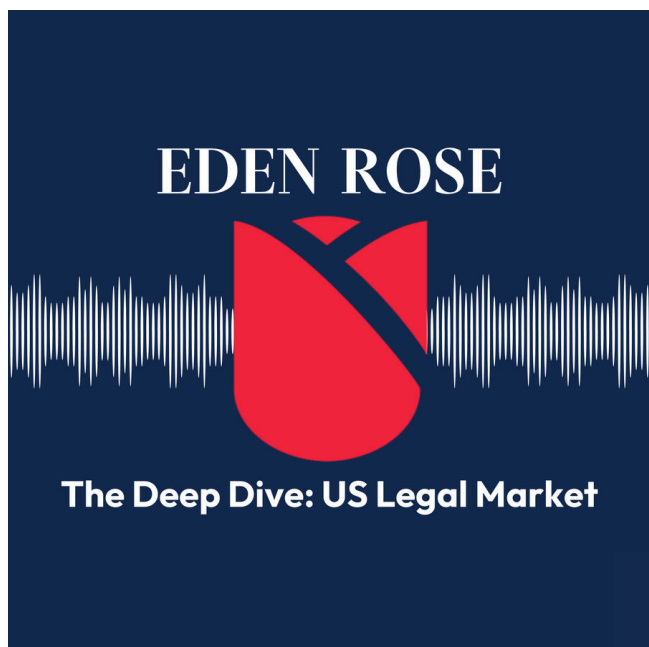


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For deeper insight into any of these trends, [connect with the Eden Rose USA team.](#)

PODCAST HIGHLIGHTS:

THE **DEEP** DIVE



The Deep Dive #03: The Reality of Legal Recruitment in 2026 — Agility, Pricing Pressure & the Race for Talent

A faster, more pressured market is emerging. We explore the “10-day hiring sprint,” pricing pressure from clients, and why career strategy now requires more agility than ever.

→ [Listen here](#)

The Deep Dive #04: BigLaw vs. Boutique — Burnout, Billable Hours & the New Career Priorities in Law

The episode breaks down the differences in workload, compensation, progression, and client exposure between BigLaw and boutique environments, while exploring why lateral movement between firms has become more accepted than ever before.

→ [Listen here](#)

The Deep Dive #05: Hiring Velocity — Why Top Legal Talent Is Gone in 10 Days

Drawing on internal market research and hiring insights, we break down the growing importance of “hiring velocity” in a highly competitive legal landscape. We share practical strategies firms can use to streamline hiring, reduce friction, and move faster—without sacrificing quality or due diligence.

→ [Listen here](#)

OUR FEATURED ROLES



Labor & Employment Partner (no book req)

LA
\$250k - \$300k



Mid-Level Funds Associate

NYC
\$225k - \$300k



Erisa Counsel (Partnership Track)

Remote, US
\$320k - \$350k



Labor And Employment Associate

Tampa, FL
\$200k - \$300k



Patent Prosecution Associate

NYC, CA, DC
\$215k - \$355k



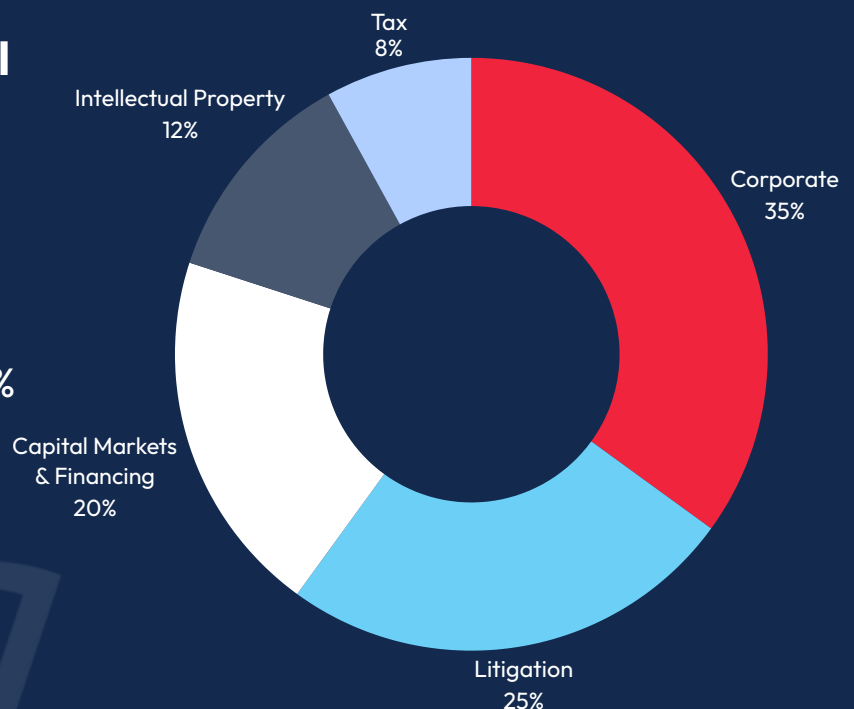
Patent Litigation Associate

CA, TX
\$275k - \$385k

OUR RECRUITMENT AREAS

Our 2026 Share of Legal Recruitment Activity by Practice Area:

- Corporate: 35%
- Litigation: 25%
- Capital Markets & Financing: 20%
- Intellectual Property: 12%
- Tax: 8%





CONTACT US



Eden Rose is a boutique legal recruitment firm based in New York City, built on a candidate-first approach. By working exclusively with high-caliber attorneys, we connect leading law firms with talent that is often not visible on the open market.

This briefing is intended as a perspective on market dynamics, not a definitive view. If you'd like to discuss any of the themes covered, we're always open to a conversation.

Phone/

+1 (646) 583 6002

Email/

emailus@edenroselegal.com

Website/

www.edenroselegal.com

Address/

1270 Avenue of the Americas
Manhattan, New York, 10020
United States of America