Average Billable Hours for Law Firms: 2026 Trends and Benchmarks

Many lawyers are working in firms where billable hour targets sit between 1,800 and 2,200 each year. In others, higher annual billable targets keep raising the bar. Last year, King & Spalding's new 2,400-hour "productive time" expectation for lawyers sparked waves of controversy around average billable hours for law firms. The number sounded extreme, even for BigLaw.

Meanwhile, recent industry benchmarks show the average lawyer racks up just under 1,700 billable hours annually in 2026.1 But that figure only represents part of a much larger workload that approaches 2,800 hours a year on average.

That gap speaks volumes.

It doesn't say lawyers are working fewer hours than they should. It shows how much of their work either falls outside the billable column or never makes it there.

Despite real progress in AI and legal technology, workflows, and service models, a majority of the workday still goes to administrative tasks, professional development, and other work that never reaches an invoice.

That non-billable barrier is part of the reason small and mid-sized firms are finding it more difficult to set realistic billable hour targets.

Firms need to understand how many hours lawyers bill per day and year, how performance varies by firm size and practice area, and where productive time is being lost before it becomes billed time.

Below, we break down the law firm billable hours trends shaping 2026, the latest averages, and the steps firms can take to close the gap without asking attorneys to work longer days.

How Many Hours Do Lawyers Bill Per Day?

Lawyers bill roughly 31% of an eight-hour workday, or about 2.5 hours per day. The remaining 69% goes to administrative responsibilities, business development, professional development, internal firm work, and time that may be billable but never gets recorded or invoiced.

To put that figure into perspective, less than one-third of the day is recorded as billable work, even when attorneys are working well beyond standard business hours.

A low daily billable total does not always mean there was not enough client work to perform. It may point to delayed time entry, incomplete records, inefficient attorney billing processes, or time being absorbed by work that could be delegated or automated.

Average Billable Hours by Firm Size in 2026

There is no single billable-hour target that works for every law firm. Expectations generally rise with firm size because larger firms tend to have more associates, higher overhead, larger client matters, and more formal performance requirements.

Current benchmarks suggest the following billable hour target ranges in 2026[1]:

These ranges should be treated as reference points, not universal standards.

A realistic target also depends on the attorney's role, the firm's location, staffing model, and fee structures, and how much non-billable responsibility each lawyer is expected to carry.

A 1,900-hour target may be reasonable for an associate with dedicated administrative support. The same requirement could be unrealistic for a partner who is also responsible for hiring, client development, mentoring, and firm management.

The better benchmark is what your attorneys can reasonably achieve based on available workdays, expected non-billable responsibilities, historical performance, and the amount of eligible time your firm successfully captures.

Average Billable Hours by Practice Area

Practice area can push a firm's billable-hour target above or below the typical range for its size.

Firms focused on commercial litigation, insurance defense, and other contested matters set higher targets. Family law, estate planning, and other practices with more flat-fee services or frequent client communication may record fewer billable hours even when attorneys are carrying full workloads.

These planning ranges extend published mid-sized-firm benchmarks upward or downward based on typical firm-size target differences. They are directional estimates rather than independently reported averages.[2]

Commercial Litigation

Commercial litigation tends to support higher billable targets because discovery, depositions, motions, hearings, and trial preparation create longer stretches of billable work for attorneys.

- Small firms: 1,820–1,950 annual billable hours
- Mid-sized firms: 1,920–2,100 annual billable hours
- Large firms: 2,020–2,350+ annual billable hours

Corporate and Business Law

Contract drafting, negotiations, due diligence, transactions, and ongoing advisory work often place corporate and business law above the average for its firm size.

- Small firms: 1,760–1,890 annual billable hours
- Mid-sized firms: 1,860–2,040 annual billable hours
- Large firms: 1,960–2,290+ annual billable hours

General Legal Practice

General practice tends to remain close to the overall benchmark because attorneys handle a broad mix of billable matters and firm responsibilities.

- Small firms: 1,700–1,830 annual billable hours
- Mid-sized firms: 1,800–1,980 annual billable hours
- Large firms: 1,900–2,230+ annual billable hours

Family Law

Family law targets often sit below the overall benchmark to reflect frequent client communication, administrative coordination, court scheduling, and the use of flat or hybrid fee structures.

- Small firms: 1,580–1,710 annual billable hours
- Mid-sized firms: 1,680–1,860 annual billable hours
- Large firms: 1,780–2,110+ annual billable hours

Beyond practice area, actual billable hour targets should still account for attorney role, location, staffing support, fee structure, matter volume, and the amount of non-billable responsibility each lawyer carries.

Law Firm Billable Hours Trends: What's Changing in 2026?

Over the years, billable hour targets have moved gradually higher, while actual recorded, billed, and collected time continues to lag far behind the hours lawyers work.

In 2026, AI is beginning to change that equation as more firms consider how billable-hour targets and pricing models should evolve.

While Am Law 100 firms like Latham & Watkins and Ropes & Gray still maintain a 1,900-hour minimum for associates, Baker McKenzie Global Chair Sunny Mann recently called for the legal industry to rethink how alternative fee arrangements work as AI reduces the time needed to complete some legal tasks.

Small and mid-sized firms may not follow BigLaw's target structures, but they face the same underlying question: how should time inform pricing and performance when technology changes the amount of labor a matter requires?

Firms of all sizes are starting to separate pricing from time spent when technology can turn hours of work into minutes.

That shift makes timekeeping more valuable, not less. Accurate time data helps firms understand productivity, profitability, capacity, and the true cost of delivering legal work. It also gives firms the foundation they need to price work differently without losing control of margins.

The biggest law firm billable hours trends shaping 2026 include:

- **The 2,000-hour target is no longer an outlier:** Only 12% of reported firm minimums reached 2,000 hours in 2008.[3] Today, annual expectations commonly fall between 1,900 and 2,200 hours, particularly at larger firms.
- **Actual billed time is rising, but remains low:** In 2015, LawRank found lawyers billed an average of 1.8 hours per day. Today, they bill about 2.5 hours per day, an increase of approximately 39%.[4]

- **Demand for billable work remains strong:** Lawyers logged 3.5% more billable hours industrywide in 2025.[5]
- **Remote work raises the stakes for mobile capture:** Immediate, accessible time entry via mobile timekeeping apps is more important as attorneys move among offices, homes, courts, and client meetings.
- **Alternative fees are gaining momentum:** Automation and tools like AI-assisted billing make it easier for firms to work efficiently and price around scope, value, or outcomes.
- **Billable time is becoming a management metric:** As work becomes more efficient and pricing becomes less dependent on hours, firms use time data to measure capacity, costs, productivity, and profitability.

The overall trend is a slow, steady shift toward using time as one measure of performance and as the data firms need to price work, protect profitability, and make better decisions.

Why the Gap Between Worked and Billed Hours Matters

Most firms expect attorneys to bill between 1,800 and 2,200 hours a year, yet the average lawyer bills about 1,693.[1] Non-billable responsibilities, missed time, write-downs, or work that never reaches the invoice are a few reasons lawyers may fall short of annual targets.

As firms rely less on hours as the only measure of value, they need better visibility into what happens to time across the full workday. The gap between hours worked and hours billed becomes even more important to understand.

Utilization data helps firms see where the gap begins by showing how much available attorney time becomes billable work. Tracking it over time can reveal whether shortfalls come from limited demand, inefficient processes, incomplete time capture, or targets that do not reflect the way attorneys actually work.

That visibility depends on having time, target, and performance data connected in one place. With the right utilization and profitability reporting tools, firms can compare actual hours against goals, spot missing time earlier, and make informed decisions about workloads, processes, and targets before revenue is lost.

How to Increase Your Firm’s Billable Hours Without Working More

For firms that still rely on hourly billing, the fastest gains often come from capturing more of the work attorneys already perform. The same improvements also give firms better data for managing flat-fee, phased, and value-based matters.

Capture Time as Work Happens

Time entered later is more likely to be incomplete. TimeSolv gives attorneys several ways to record work in the moment, including timers, mobile entry, and passive time capture.

Make Mobile Work Visible

Calls, emails, document reviews, and client updates often happen away from a desk. Mobile tracking helps attorneys record that work wherever it happens and connect it to the right client and matter for accurate timekeeping outside of the office.

Catch Gaps Earlier

TimeSolv’s utilization and target-versus-actual reporting help firms compare available time, billable work, and performance goals. That visibility makes it easier to spot missing hours and address patterns before the billing cycle closes.

Reduce Write-Downs

Timely, detailed entries are easier to review and bill. Firms can also use time data to see whether write-downs stem from vague narratives, delayed entry, inconsistent billing practices, or work outside the agreed scope.

Use Time Data to Plan What Comes Next

The future of legal billing will include hourly work, flat fees, phased fees, subscriptions, and value-based arrangements. Each model still depends on knowing how much time and capacity the work requires.

Accurate time data helps firms understand delivery costs, price matters with greater confidence, allocate workloads, and evaluate profitability even when the client is not billed by the hour. It turns timekeeping from an administrative requirement into a source of business intelligence.

Turn Billable-Hour Benchmarks into Better Decisions

For small and mid-sized firms, the next step is not simply setting a higher annual target. Knowing how many hours lawyers bill per day is useful, but the stronger insight comes from understanding what happens to the rest of their available time.

As fee models evolve and firms take on more work without adding the same amount of overhead, they need a clearer view of how time, capacity, billing, and collections work together.

That visibility helps leaders see whether below-average billable hours point to missed time, inefficient processes, limited demand, pricing issues, or targets that no longer fit the way the firm operates.

TimeSolv brings those signals together while making it easier for attorneys to capture the time they already spend serving clients.

Ready to go beyond billable-hour benchmarks? Try TimeSolv free or request a demo to see how your firm can capture more billable work, understand what your time data is telling you, and make more confident decisions about billing, pricing, and growth.

Busy doesn't pay. **Billing does.**

Your day is full. Your invoices are not. Emails, calls, quick edits? TimeSolv tracks it all for you.

Sources

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