ALPS

2026

Solo Attorney Trends Report

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Executive Summary

Spend even a short amount of time talking with solo practitioners and a familiar theme emerges: This is meaningful work, but it is not easy work. In many ways, that duality defines the solo experience and frames the findings that follow.

The nationwide 2026 Solo Attorney Trends Survey results reflect a profession that continues to demonstrate both resilience and complexity. Solo practitioners report high levels of professional satisfaction, with 47.52% indicating they are satisfied and 24.26% very satisfied, for a combined 71.78% positive response rate. That level of consistency is notable, particularly given the pace of change in the broader legal landscape.

This strong level of satisfaction aligns with prior findings and reinforces the continuing value attorneys place on independence, flexibility, and control over their professional lives. At the same time, the data confirms that satisfaction exists alongside ongoing structural pressures that shape daily practice. It is not an either/or proposition; it is both, at the same time.

This is not a contradiction. It is a reality of solo practice.


71.78%
report high levels of professional satisfaction.

Across the survey, several consistent themes stand out:

- Solo attorneys remain highly satisfied with their practices despite ongoing challenges.
- Stress, burnout, and workload pressures remain significant concerns.
- Administrative responsibilities continue to compete with billable work.
- Practice systems and workflow structure are closely tied to sustainability and well-being.
- AI adoption is increasing, but implementation remains uneven.
- Strong risk-management fundamentals exist, but consistency remains a challenge.
- Most respondents intend to remain in solo practice long term.
- Attorneys are seeking practical tools that improve efficiency and support practice management.

It is clear from the survey results that solo attorneys value independence, flexibility, and control over their practices. But they are also managing the full weight of running a business, often without staff, without infrastructure, and without the support systems available in larger firms. They are, quite literally, wearing every hat in the organization.

Stress remains a consistent reality of solo practice. In fact, 46.04% report feeling stressed sometimes, however 26.24% report they often feel stressed and 9.90% report always feeling stressed. That indicates that more than one-third of respondents experience frequent work-related stress. Similarly, 43.56% report having experienced occupational burnout, underscoring the demands of managing a solo practice. These are not outliers; they are part of the operating environment.

What becomes clear throughout the survey is that these pressures are not isolated events. They are closely tied to workload, administrative responsibilities, and operational inefficiencies that form part of the solo practice model. In other words, the strain is structural, not incidental.

The survey results reveal that attorneys reporting heavier workloads are far more likely to report burnout, demonstrating that sustained workload intensity is a key driver of long-term well-being. Capacity is not just a scheduling issue; it is a sustainability issue.

Taken together, the findings suggest that solo practice remains rewarding and sustainable, but increasingly dependent on effective management of operations, systems, and workflows. Success, more than ever, is tied to how the practice runs, not just the quality of the legal work itself.

The survey findings are reinforced by ALPS claims experience for solo attorneys. Data reflects recurring issues involving claims arising from communication breakdowns, calendaring failures, missed deadlines, and procedural errors. Together, these findings reinforce a central theme throughout the survey; the systems and processes that support efficiency are often the same systems and processes that support sound risk management.

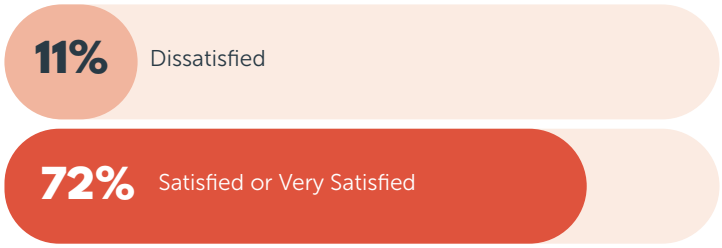
This year's survey expands beyond well-being to explore operations, technology, and risk management, offering a fuller view of what solo practice looks like today, and where opportunities for support and improvement may lie. It provides, in effect, a more complete picture of how solos are practicing law in 2026.


53.96%
rate their work-life balance as high.

Key Findings

Professional satisfaction remains one of the strongest and most consistent findings in the survey. Nearly 72% of respondents report being satisfied or very satisfied, while fewer than 11% report dissatisfaction, confirming the continued appeal of solo practice. Even in the face of mounting demands, the core value proposition holds.

Level of professional satisfaction



Work-life balance is also generally positive. Based upon a low to high scale of 1-5, 36.14% rate their balance as a 4 and 17.82% rate it a 5, meaning more than half report a high level of balance. However, the relatively smaller percentage reporting optimal balance suggests that this outcome requires effort and intention. It does not happen by accident.

Stress and burnout remain significant considerations. As noted, more than 36% report frequent stress, and 43.56% report burnout, indicating that strain is a persistent aspect of solo practice. The data makes clear that well-being is still very much in play.

Operational challenges continue to shape the solo experience in very practical ways, with 45.18% identifying administrative tasks as a primary issue, and nearly 29% citing billing, collections, and cash flow variability. This reveals a significant portion of a solo attorney's workload is tied to running the business rather than practicing law. This reduces billable time, contributes to financial uncertainty, and increases overall stress, making operational efficiency a key factor in both productivity and long-term sustainability. For many, the practice of law is only part of the job.

Payment timing varies across respondents. While 52.79% report receiving payment within 30 days, 27.92% report 31 to 60 days, with smaller percentages reporting longer time frames beyond that.

Taken together, the findings show that longer collection time frames are associated with higher reported stress levels. Cash flow, quite simply, is not just financial, it is emotional.

AI adoption presents a mixed but evolving picture, with 22.05% reporting regular AI use and 31.79% reporting occasional use, meaning just over half are engaging with AI in some capacity. At the same time, 28.72% report not using AI at all and not considering it, while 17.44% are still considering adoption.

These results indicate that adoption is growing but uneven, with some attorneys integrating AI into daily workflows while others remain hesitant or disengaged. The gap between early adopters and non-adopters remains meaningful. This is a space in motion, not yet settled.

Risk management practices are generally strong in some areas but inconsistent in others. For example, 66.67% report always using engagement agreements, and 62.43% report consistently performing conflict checks, while only 37.04% report always sending disengagement letters, indicating variability in across-the-board necessary risk management implementation. Consistency, not awareness, appears to be the challenge.

Finally, respondents clearly express a need for practical resources. The most requested resource is a solo-focused AI guide at 25.53%, followed by workflow templates at 19.15%, reinforcing the desire for tools that directly improve efficiency. Solutions that are usable, not theoretical, are clearly in demand.


66.67%
report always using engagement agreements.



53.88%

report having no staff, meaning that more than half of respondents manage their practices entirely on their own.

Respondent Profile & Practice Characteristics

The respondent base reflects an experienced group of attorneys. 71.36% report practicing law for more than 20 years, and 34.95% have operated as solo practitioners for more than 20 years, indicating a mature and established population. This is not a transitional cohort; it is deeply seasoned.

Age demographics support this, with 46.12% aged 65 or older and an additional 20.87% between 55 and 64. The survey therefore reflects the perspectives of attorneys who have accumulated substantial professional and practice management experience over the course of their careers.

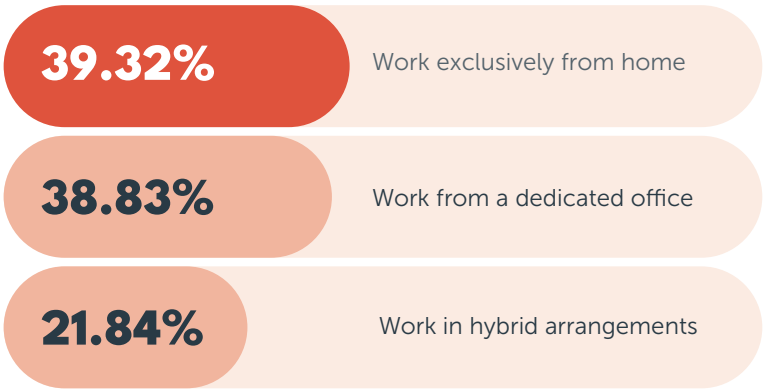
Practice structures vary significantly. 53.88% report having no staff, meaning that more than half of respondents manage their practices entirely on their own. Among those utilizing support, 23.79% employ full-time staff, 16.50%

Practice structures



employ part-time staff, 10.19% utilize contract virtual assistants or other non-employee support, 8.74% rely on outsourced service providers, and 3.88% report using interns. These varied staffing models illustrate the different ways solo attorneys expand capacity and manage operational demands. The presence or absence of support personnel can have a meaningful impact on workload, efficiency, and overall practice management, particularly given the wide range of administrative and business responsibilities many solo practitioners continue to handle themselves.

Level of professional satisfaction



Work settings are similarly varied, with 39.32% working exclusively from home, 38.83% from a dedicated office, and 21.84% in hybrid arrangements, illustrating the flexibility with which solo practitioners continue to structure their practices.

The respondent population is also diverse in terms of practice focus. While solos practice across a broad range of areas, several concentrations stand out and provide important context for understanding both the survey findings and the broader risks associated with solo practice.

Many respondents practice estate planning, family law, personal injury, and real estate. Notably, these are also practice areas that have historically generated a substantial share of legal malpractice claims. The overlap provides useful context for many of the issues found throughout the survey, including workload pressures, client communications, documentation practices, and risk-management concerns.

Viewed together, the survey and claims data provide important context for solo practitioners. While practicing in these areas does not mean that a claim is likely or inevitable, the overlap highlights the importance of understanding the unique risks associated with these practice areas. Effective client communication, well-documented processes, calendaring controls, workflow management, and consistent risk management practices remain essential safeguards for attorneys practicing in these higher-risk environments.

Satisfaction appears strongest among the most experienced attorneys, suggesting that over time, practitioners develop systems and expectations that support stability. Experience, in this context, appears to translate into operational clarity.



39.32%

work exclusively from home, 38.83% from a dedicated office, and 21.84% in hybrid arrangements.

Professional Satisfaction & Well-Being

Professional satisfaction remains high, yet it exists alongside measurable stress and burnout. As noted, nearly 72% report satisfaction, while more than 36% report frequent stress. The coexistence of these two findings is one of the defining themes of this report.

Work-life balance is generally favorable. More than 53% rate their balance as 4 or 5 (1-5), on a scale of low to high, poor to optimal, indicating that many attorneys are successfully managing competing demands. But further correlation reveals that balance appears to require ongoing adjustment.

Support systems play a key role. 61.88% report having adequate support systems, while 19.80% report lacking sufficient support, highlighting a meaningful gap. That gap represents both risk and opportunity.

Participation in professional communities is strong, with 63.86% reporting involvement in voluntary associations, including bar associations and professional networks.

Burnout is more commonly reported among those with heavier workloads, reinforcing that well-being is closely tied to operational demands rather than personal factors alone. How the work is structured matters as much as how much work there is.

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53+%

rate their work-life balance as a 4 or 5 out of 5 indicating that many attorneys are successfully managing competing demands.



90%

identify retirement as the primary reason, for those planning to leave solo practice, rather than transitioning to larger firms or other practice settings.

Career Outlook & Professional Direction

The outlook for solo practice remains strong. Most respondents indicate that they intend to continue practicing as solo attorneys, reflecting confidence in the sustainability of this model.

Specifically, 68.32% report that they expect to continue as solo practitioners, while an additional 21.78% indicate uncertainty but remain open to continuing, reflecting an overall high level of commitment to solo practice as a long-term professional path.

Among those planning to leave solo practice, 90% identify retirement as the primary reason, rather than transitioning to larger firms or other practice settings.

These findings suggest that while challenges persist, they are not driving attorneys away from solo practice. Instead, respondents appear to be adapting their practices to address their challenges rather than exiting the model altogether. Adaptation, not exit, appears to be the prevailing response.

This also indicates that solo practice is not widely viewed as a temporary stage in a legal career. For many respondents, it represents a long-term and intentional choice, a destination, and not a stop along the way.

Respondents with more structured processes tend to report better work-life balance, suggesting that systems play a key role in managing workload effectively.

The value of those systems extends beyond efficiency and attorney well-being.

The importance of process standardization is also reinforced by claims experience. ALPS data continues to reflect claims involving communication issues, calendaring mistakes, missed deadlines, and procedural errors. Many of these issues can be traced to breakdowns in routine processes or inconsistent workflow practices. Given that only 7.61% of respondents report fully standardized workflows, the findings highlight a significant opportunity to strengthen both operational efficiency and risk management through more consistent systems and procedures.

Workload, Operations & Business Realities

Operational realities represent one of the most significant influences on the solo experience. Many respondents report operating near or at capacity, with limited flexibility to absorb additional work.

Administrative burden is a recurring theme, with attorneys noting that non-billable tasks consume a sizable portion of their time.

Data analysis highlights a clear relationship between workload intensity and burnout, with attorneys reporting heavy workloads as far more likely to indicate burnout than those with moderate or lighter workloads.

Workload levels remain significant. 43.65% report a moderate workload and 31.47% a heavy workload, meaning nearly three-quarters operate at moderate to high capacity. Because the survey did not define workload using specific metrics such as hours worked, number of matters, or caseload size, responses reflect each attorney's personal assessment of workload and capacity. As a result, reported workload may encompass a variety of factors, including the complexity of legal matters, administrative responsibilities, staffing support, and other demands placed upon the practice.

Administrative burden remains the most consistent challenge, identified by 45.18% of respondents, followed by billing and collections and cash flow variability. The business side of practice continues to compete directly with the practice itself.

Payment cycles vary, with 52.79% reporting payment within 30 days, with a smaller, but still meaningful portion experiencing longer timelines.

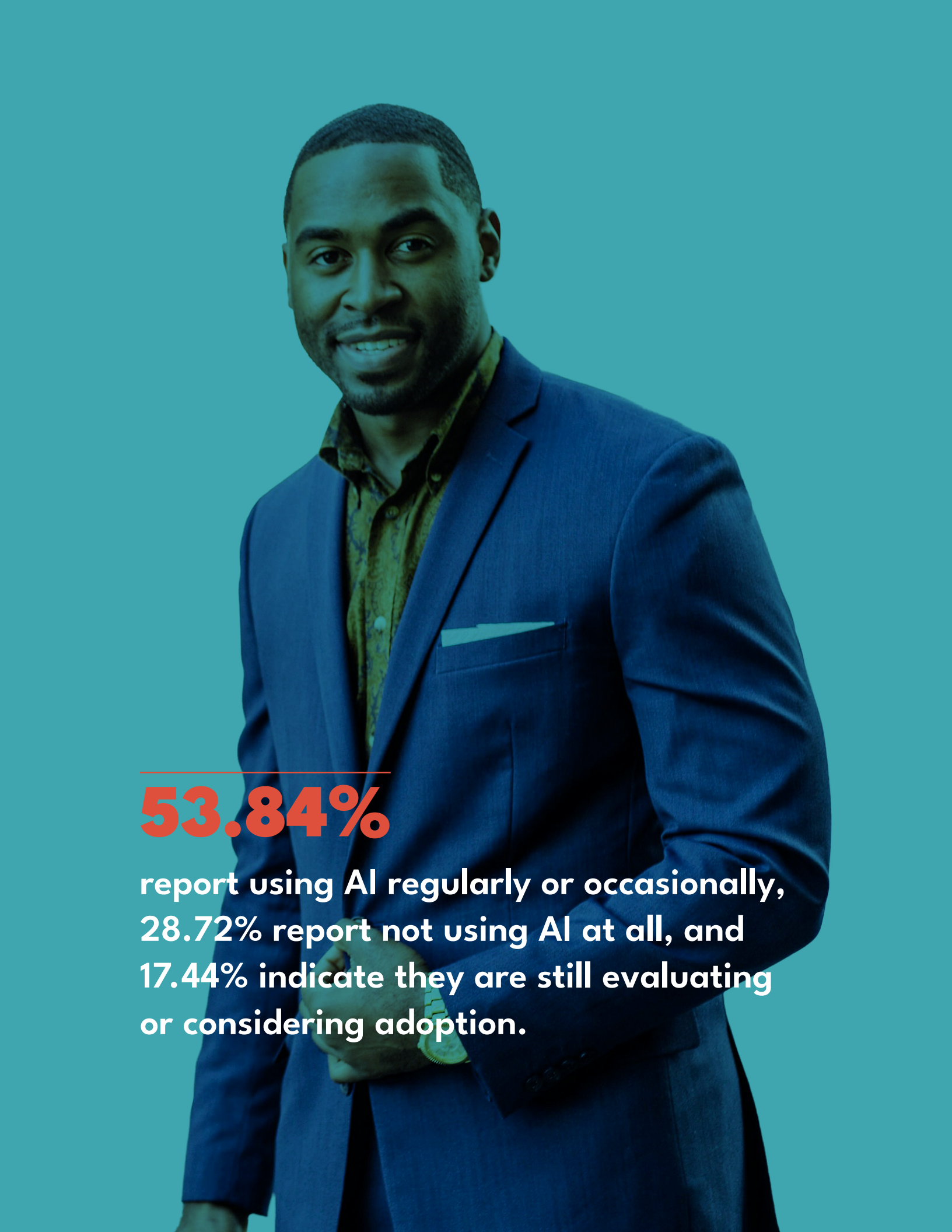
Attorneys experiencing longer collection cycles report higher stress levels, indicating that financial processes directly influence daily pressure and stability.

Process standardization remains limited. While 41.62% report having some structured processes, only 7.61% report fully standardized workflows, indicating significant opportunity for improvement. This is one of the clearest areas for potential gain.



45.18%

of respondents say that administrative burden remains the most consistent challenge.



53.84%

report using AI regularly or occasionally, 28.72% report not using AI at all, and 17.44% indicate they are still evaluating or considering adoption.

Technology, AI & Practice Infrastructure

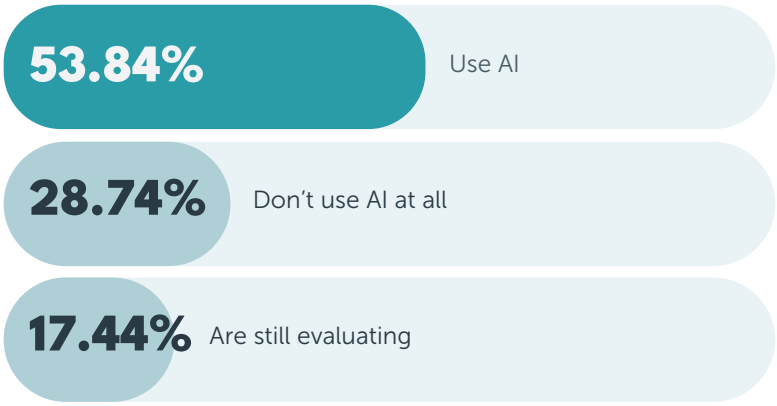
Technology adoption is an area of ongoing evolution within solo practice. While many attorneys report using some form of technology, adoption levels vary significantly. Adoption is not the issue; depth of adoption is.

Barriers such as cost, time, and lack of familiarity are frequently cited, preventing broader implementation of potentially beneficial tools.

AI adoption reflects a wide divide both in usage and the reason.

Technology adoption is widespread in some areas. 70.77% use PDF tools, and more than 52% use e-signature and accounting tools. However, only 39.49% use a practice management system, indicating partial adoption.

AI adoption levels



AI adoption reveals a significant divide among respondents. While 53.84% report using AI regularly or occasionally, 28.72% report not using AI at all, and 17.44% indicate they are still evaluating or considering adoption. These findings suggest that AI has moved beyond the experimental stage for many solo practitioners but remains far from universally embraced.

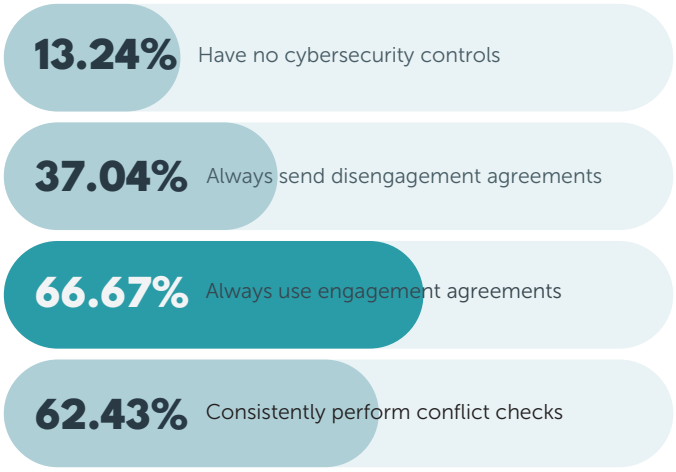
Analysis of survey responses by years in practice suggests that AI adoption varies by experience level. Attorneys with more than 20 years in practice appeared disproportionately represented among those reporting limited or no AI adoption, while attorneys with fewer years in practice were more likely to report occasional or regular use. This finding is particularly noteworthy given that more than 71% of survey respondents have practiced law for over 20 years. Although the survey did not specifically ask respondents why they chose to adopt or avoid AI, the open-ended responses provide useful insight. Some cited concerns regarding reliability, confidentiality, cybersecurity, ethics, cost, or the learning curve associated with implementation. Others suggested that existing workflows already met their needs and did not require significant modification. Conversely, many respondents described AI as valuable for legal research, drafting, proofreading, marketing, and administrative efficiency. These findings suggest that adoption may currently be influenced as much by comfort, experience, and workflow preferences as by the technology itself.

Claims data further reinforces the importance of technology infrastructure. Many recurring claim categories involve missed deadlines, communication breakdowns, and workflow failures. While technology alone does not prevent claims, reliable calendaring, document management, communication, and workflow systems can strengthen consistency and reduce operational risk.

Risk Management & Practice Controls

The survey findings closely mirror several longstanding themes reflected in ALPS claims data. Communication-related issues, calendaring errors, missed deadlines, and procedural mistakes continue to appear as recurring sources of claims among solo practitioners. These categories are particularly significant because they often arise not from complex legal analysis, but from breakdowns in routine practice-management processes.

Risk-management practices



Survey responses indicate that foundational risk-management practices are not uniformly implemented. While 66.67% always use engagement agreements and 62.43% consistently perform conflict checks, only 37.04% always send disengagement letters. Similarly, 13.23% report having no cybersecurity controls in place. Findings suggest that awareness of risk-management principles is relatively high, but consistency of execution remains uneven.

From a claims perspective, this distinction is important. Many malpractice claims arise not because attorneys are unaware of best practices, but because those practices are not applied consistently during the course of representation. The findings suggest that one of the greatest opportunities for risk reduction lies in improving consistency around the implementation of foundational controls.



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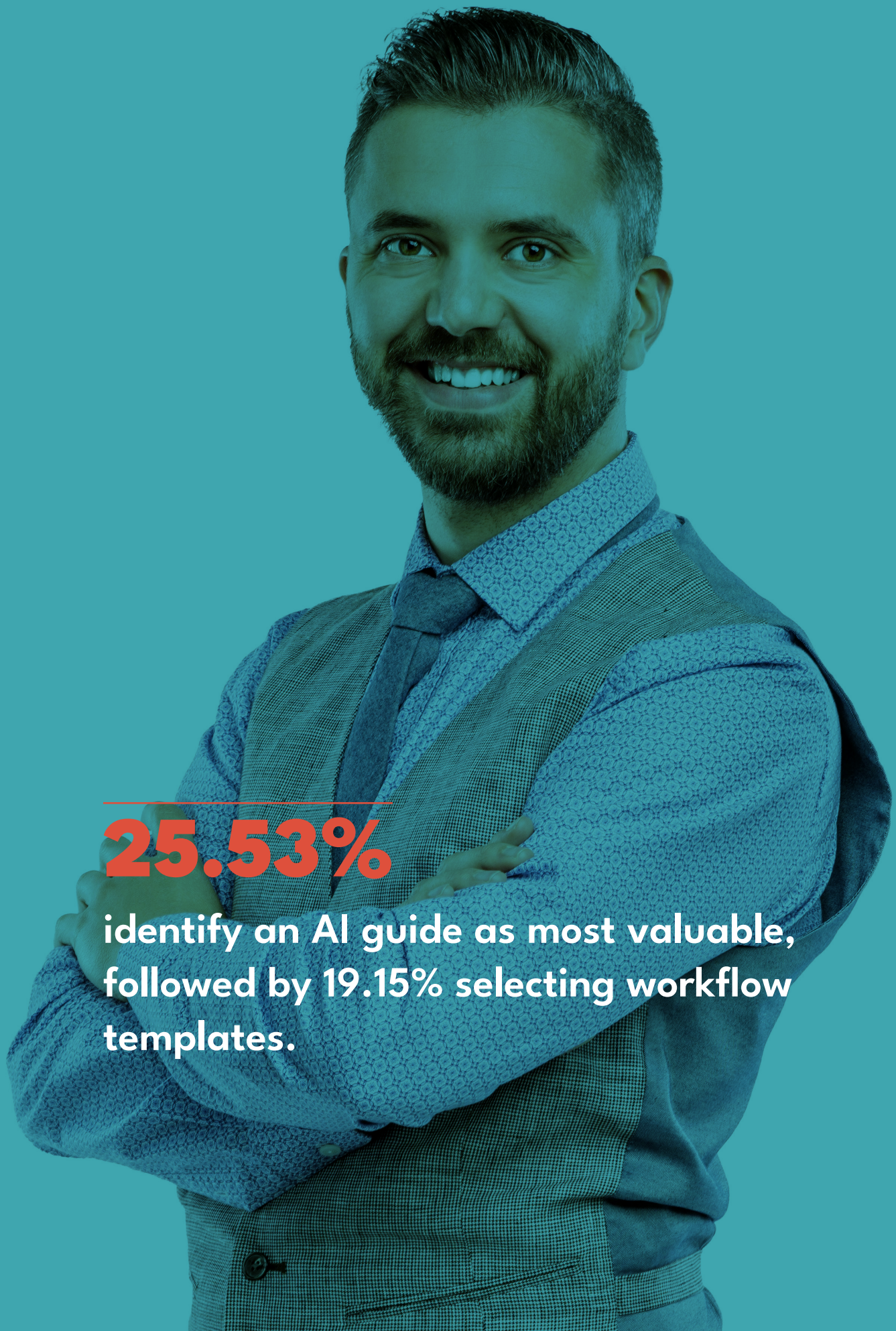
13.23%

report having no cybersecurity controls in place.

Practice Needs & Future Resources

Responses related to future needs highlight a clear demand for practical resources. Attorneys consistently express interest in tools and systems that improve efficiency and reduce administrative burden. 25.53% identify an AI guide as most valuable, followed by 19.15% selecting workflow templates.

The open-ended responses reinforce this theme. Respondents frequently cited workflow automation, staffing support, AI guidance, standardized procedures, billing improvements, and practice-management systems as changes that had recently improved their firms. The emphasis throughout the responses was on practical solutions that could be implemented quickly and produce immediate benefits.



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Beyond the Data: Turning Insights into Action

The survey findings reveal an important reality about solo practice: many of the most significant challenges attorneys face today are not legal challenges. They are operational ones.

Burnout, administrative burden, workflow inefficiencies, technology implementation, cash flow concerns, and risk management are all issues that affect the sustainability of a law practice, regardless of an attorney's substantive legal knowledge or skill.

Viewed collectively, the findings suggest that success in solo practice increasingly depends on more than being a good lawyer. It also depends on building a practice that can function efficiently, consistently, and sustainably.

The results are not particularly surprising. Most solo attorneys already know where their pain points are. They know administrative work consumes valuable time. They know client service, billing, collections, marketing, and technology compete for attention with the practice of law itself. They know that stress, workload, and burnout are real concerns. These survey results provide confirmation that these challenges are widespread and shared by many of their peers.

Perhaps the most important takeaway is that the challenge is not identifying the problems. The challenge is finding and implementing practical solutions to address them.

For some attorneys, that may mean evaluating existing workflows and processes. For others, it may involve improving intake and billing procedures, adopting technology more effectively, strengthening risk management practices, outsourcing administrative tasks, or reassessing workload expectations. The appropriate response will differ from practice to practice.

The survey does not point to a single solution, nor does it suggest that one exists. Instead, it highlights opportunities for attorneys to examine the operational side of their practices with the same care and attention they devote to serving clients.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that the long-term health of a solo practice depends not only on legal competence, but also on operational competence. Attorneys who invest in the systems, processes, and resources that support their practices may be better positioned to reduce stress, manage risk, improve efficiency, and build a practice that remains sustainable over time.

Solo Practice Sustainability Checkup

Every solo practice is different, and the survey findings do not suggest that there is a single solution to the challenges attorneys face. They do, however, identify several common areas of concern. The questions below are intended to help you reflect on your own practice and consider whether there may be opportunities to improve efficiency, reduce stress, strengthen risk management, and support long-term sustainability.

Operations & Workflow

- ○ Do you have documented procedures for routine administrative tasks?
- ○ Are there tasks that could be automated, delegated, or streamlined?
- ○ Do you have reliable systems for tracking deadlines, client communication, and matter progression?
- ○ Does your current workflow support efficiency, or does it frequently require workarounds and manual intervention?

Workload & Well-Being

- ○ Does your workload allow for adequate personal time and time away from the office?
- ○ Could your practice continue functioning if you were unexpectedly unavailable for a period of time?
- ○ Are you experiencing signs of chronic stress, fatigue, or burnout?
- ○ Have you taken steps to create a more sustainable balance between the demands of practicing law and running the business?

Financial Health

- ○ Are billing procedures timely, consistent, and routinely followed?
- ○ Do you regularly monitor accounts receivable and collections?

- Do you have a clear understanding of where your time is spent, and which activities contribute most to profitability?
- Are there financial pressures that could be reduced through process improvements or technology investments?

Technology

- Does your technology support efficiency and client service?
- Have you evaluated whether existing tools meet your needs?
- Are there repetitive tasks that could be improved through automation or better technology utilization?
- Have you reviewed your cybersecurity practices within the last year?

Risk Management

- Do you have systems designed to prevent missed deadlines and calendaring errors?
- Are client communications documented and managed consistently?
- Are file management, conflict checks, and engagement procedures routinely followed
- Have you reviewed your risk management practices and professional liability exposures within the last year?

Looking Ahead

- Can you identify one operational challenge that causes recurring frustration in your practice?
- Can you identify one improvement that would have the greatest positive impact on your practice over the next six to twelve months?
- Do you know where to find resources, education, or support to help implement that improvement?

Final Reflection

The challenge is not identifying the issues. The challenge is finding and implementing practical solutions.

If these survey findings serve as a catalyst for attorneys to evaluate the operational health of their practices and take even one meaningful step toward improvement, they will have accomplished something important. Stronger systems, more efficient workflows, sound risk management, and sustainable business practices not only benefit attorneys, but they also ultimately benefit clients as well.

Conclusion

ALPS gratefully acknowledges the over 200 solo attorneys who contributed their time and insight to this survey. The thoughtful participation of respondents made it possible to develop a meaningful and comprehensive view of the 2026 solo practice landscape. Their collective input is what gives this report its depth and relevance.

The findings in this report reflect not only the data collected, but the experiences, perspectives, and practical realities shared by attorneys across a wide range of practices and career stages. Their willingness to provide both structured responses and candid feedback has been essential to the value of this analysis.

This report is intended to support ongoing understanding of the evolving needs of solo practitioners and to help inform the development of resources, tools, and strategies that contribute to their continued success.

Founded by lawyers for lawyers in 1988, ALPS is the nation's leader in insurance for solo and small law firms. In fact, almost 75% of our policyholders are solo attorneys so we are committed to understanding the challenges of solo practitioners and how we can contribute to solo and small firm success.

If you would like to learn more about ALPS Insurance, please visit us at **alpsinsurance.com**.


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