PRACTICE NOTE / CASE STUDY

The Legibility Deficit

Five and a half years inside one law firm's climb to national standing - the commercial mechanics of it, the assumptions its partners had to abandon first, and what the work actually consisted of, and why becoming findable was only half the work

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The Argument

Two locks hold a good small firm where it is. It has no record, so on the rare occasion its name is raised in a room where work is allocated, somebody checks and finds nothing. And it has no route, because the people who allocate that work do not know the firm exists and the firm does not know who they are. Publishing, search and directory submissions open the first lock. They do nothing whatsoever to the second. This is an account of working on both, and of how differently the two halves are bought.

The firm is not named, at its preference, and its clients are described rather than identified. Every ranking, award and placement referred to is a matter of public record and verifiable by anyone who works out which firm this is. Nothing here asks you to take my word for the outcome - only for the account of how it was reached, including the parts that failed.

Being findable is what allows a firm to survive the check.

It does nothing at all to cause the check to happen.

01 THE RECORD

Can the market verify the firm when somebody checks?

→

02 THE ROUTE

What causes the firm's name to be raised in the first place?

What the Boutique Trap is, described properly

In March 2021 the firm had **two partners**, **fewer than ten lawyers**, and a**nnual revenue under two crore Indian Rupees**. One partner had spent years as a senior associate at one of India's three largest corporate firms. The other had been senior in-house counsel at one of the country's biggest industrial groups. Their pedigree was not in question. Their position was.

The significance of the revenue figure we disclose above is in how it impacted everything else. A corpus of under INR two crore, across a partnership and a small bench, means the firm cannot refuse work. It takes the routine corporate-commercial mandates that arrive, at rates set by whoever else was quoting, because the alternative is an empty month. It cannot hire the senior lateral who would open a new practice, because it cannot guarantee that person eighteen months of drawings.
It cannot invest in anything whose return arrives in year three, because it is solving for year one. And both partners spend their evenings doing the work that a business development function would otherwise do, badly and intermittently, after a full day of billing.

That is the **boutique trap**, and it is circular.
No public standing means no pricing power. No pricing power means thin margin. Thin margin means nothing to invest in building standing. The firm works harder each year and arrives at roughly the same place, and the partners - demonstrably good lawyers with elite training, begin to suspect that the market has made a settled judgement about them.

What made this firm unusual was only that the underlying practice was genuinely strong. The matters were technically demanding and they were won. In another firm's hands the same record would have been the basis of a reputation. Here it produced almost nothing outside the immediate referral circle, because nothing about it had ever been written down in a form which the market could read.

The evidence of that was everywhere on the firm's own infrastructure. No international directory carried its name. Neither partner had been quoted in a national newspaper. The website's practice pages redirected to addresses like ?p=127. The homepage had no meta title, so search engines were inventing one from whatever they found. The blog was not a section of the site at all - it was an anchor link on the homepage. Several years of genuinely good writing existed as fragments of a single page, with no individual addresses. To a search engine, none of that writing had ever happened. The social channels had been opened and abandoned.

In our first conversations both partners used a version of the same phrase, unprompted: they felt like outsiders to the inner circle. I have heard that sentence since from very good lawyers at very good small firms in several countries. It is almost never a statement about the quality of their work. It is a statement about the absence of a record and about the specific, grinding exhaustion of being better than your .position and having no mechanism to demonstrate it

The boutique trap is circular: no standing → no pricing power → thin margin → nothing to invest in standing.

The record and the route

A firm is not judged on what it has done. It is judged on what can be established about what it has done.

Two different problems, only one of which can be solved by working harder.

Being findable is what allows a firm to survive the check. It does nothing at all to cause the check to happen.

There are two locks on that door, and most firms (along with almost every supplier they buy from) work on only one of them.

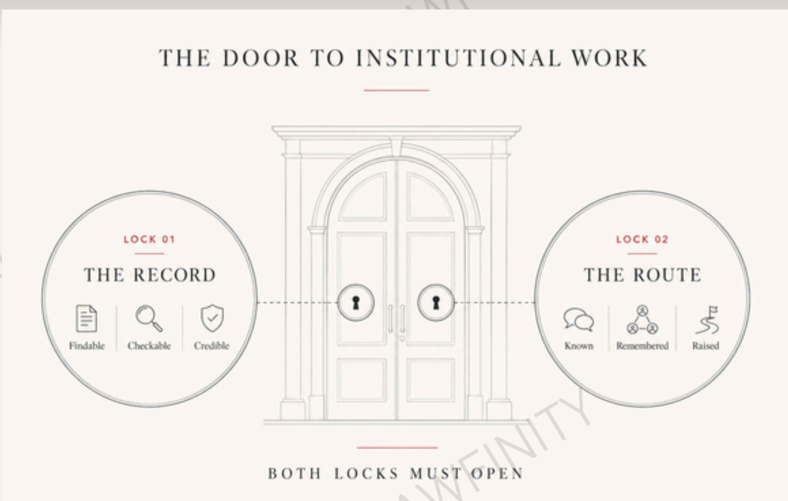
The first is the **record**. When a firm's name is finally called out between people who have something to do with work being allocated, somebody checks. They look for the directory entry, the reported matter, the published analysis, a practice page that reads like it was written by someone who does the work. A firm with no record fails that check silently and never finds out it happened.

The second is the **route.** Somebody has to raise the name in the first place.

The mandates that moved this firm from where it was to where it is did not arrive from people conducting searches. They arrived because a panel process was identified and entered on time, because a capital markets intermediary had a specific reason to remember one firm out of four, because a partner was in a particular room on a particular afternoon holding a conversation that had been prepared for. Being findable does nothing about the second lock. It is a necessary condition that produces no result by itself.

The work in this document divides roughly evenly between the two.

One half is an **execution machine** that builds the record including submissions, evidence, publishing, search, press. The other half is a **targeting discipline** that decides whose desk the firm needs to be on, establishes what that person is dealing with right now, and engineers the approach. Firms that buy only the first are buying the more visible half, and it is the half any competent agency can sell them.



Seven things partners believe that keep the trap shut

Before any of the work below could begin, a set of convictions had to be dismantled.The convictions were there not because the partners were unsophisticated, but because each conviction is locally rational and most senior lawyers hold several. These are the assumptions I have since encountered in almost every conversation with a boutique partner, in India and outside it. Each is stated here as they state it.

B E L I E F O N E

"Good work speaks for itself. Our growth will come from referrals, as it always has."

W H A T F A L S I F I E D I T

Referrals do work. Referrals also only compound inside the circle that already knows you, and that circle grows arithmetically while the firm needs geometric growth. More to the point, referral is the mechanism by which a firm receives the kind of work it already does. It is structurally incapable of introducing a firm to a buyer category it has never served. Every genuinely new client type this firm acquired - the regulator, the listed industrial group companies, the institutional financiers, the capital markets intermediaries, came from a market that had to first be able to find and check it. Referral could not have produced them because the people who would have had to make the referral did not know the firm existed.

B E L I E F T W O

"We'll invest in this properly once we can afford to."

W H A T F A L S I F I E D I T

This is the single most expensive belief in the set, because the return curve on standing is slow at the front and steep at the back. This firm began in year one, saw very little until year three and a great deal by year five. A similar firm in its place that would have waited until it "can afford it" would have not started three years later at year three - it would have started three years later at year one, having spent the interval funding the trap it was trying to escape. The compounding cannot be bought forward with a larger budget. In this engagement, the recognitions that transformed the firm's standing arrived in years five and six, off submissions and relationships built in years one and two, when there was nothing whatsoever to show.

Beliefs Three and Four

BELIEF THREE

"A marketing person cannot possibly understand what we actually do."

WHAT FALSIFIED IT

Usually true, and it is why boutiques end up with one of two bad outcomes: a junior hire who becomes an administrator of deadlines, or an agency producing content indistinguishable from every other firm's. Neither can write up why an insolvency petition failed on maintainability rather than merits, or why a disclosure-adequacy defence in a public offering challenge was the difficult part, or why one arbitration mandate carries more weight in a submission than three larger ones. A directory researcher can tell instantly whether the person who wrote a submission understood the matter. So can a journalist. So can a general counsel reading a practice page. The technical comprehension is not a nice-to-have layered on top of the marketing function; it is the load-bearing element, and its absence is why most of what firms buy in this category does not work.

BELIEF FOUR

"Client confidentiality means our best work can never be marketed."

WHAT FALSIFIED IT

The most consequential matters are always the most sensitive, so this belief silences a firm precisely where it is strongest. The resolution is a discipline rather than a workaround: for every significant matter, a named and verifiable version for directories that accept submissions in confidence, and an abstracted version for anything public-facing; then a deliberate, matter-by-matter judgement about which is which, and a consent conversation wherever consent might reasonably be given. Run consistently, this converts a supposed prohibition into a usable evidence base. This document is written under exactly that discipline.

Beliefs Five Through Seven

BELIEF FIVE

"If we become visible we'll be buried in enquiries we don't want."

WHAT FALSIFIED IT

A real risk, and it is what happens to firms that pursue visibility through volume. In this firm's own competitive set there are practices publishing sixty to seventy articles a month aimed at generic search terms; they attract exactly the endtail, price-sensitive enquiry flow the partners feared, and they rank in no international directory and hold no institutional mandates. Visibility is not one thing. Volume visibility recruits volume clients. Standing that comes from directory tables, technical bylines, the business press, named institutional matters recruits institutional buyers, and simultaneously deters the enquiries a firm does not want, because a firm that visibly defends a market regulator does not read as the cheapest option in the market.

BELIEF SIX

"This is all soft. We want leads, and we want to see them monthly."

WHAT FALSIFIED IT

Had this engagement been governed by monthly lead counts it would have been terminated in year two, shortly before it began to work. But the answer to a bad instrument is a better instrument, not the absence of one. Four measures report honestly from the first quarter: the tier and quality of placements secured, movement in directory standing, the calibre of inbound approaches, and the origin of new instructions. Monthly lead counts not only fail to measure this work but actively corrupt it, because the fastest way to produce a lead number is the volume activity that demonstrably destroys standing.

BELIEF SEVEN

"We tried an agency once. It didn't work."

WHAT FALSIFIED IT

Almost every boutique has this scar, and the diagnosis is usually wrong. What failed was not the category but the structure: a vendor executing defined tasks, with no authority over what the firm should claim, no technical grasp of the practice, no relationships of its own to deploy, and an account handler who rotated out after a year taking the accumulated context with them. There is a distinction between a supplier of activities and a function that holds strategy, judgement, technical comprehension, relationships and operational grind in one continuous place. Firms conclude the category is worthless when what they have actually established as worthless is the fragmented version of the category.

The dilemmas that are real

Not everything a hesitant partner raises is a false belief. Four of the objections are genuine, and pretending otherwise gets no one anywhere.

01 PARTNER TIME

Partner time is the binding constraint, not money. Every hour a partner spends assembling a matter description is an unbilled hour, and the work described in this document consumes partner time whether or not the function is outsourced. What can be changed is the ratio. The correct design extracts the irreducible minimum from the partner, i.e., the substance only they hold, and absorbs everything else. In practice this meant that partners were asked for material in short, structured conversations tied to submission and press cycles, not open-ended requests to “send me something for the website.”

02 SPECIALISATION

Specialisation makes a firm legible and also narrows it. Directories and journalists reward clarity; a full-service boutique is hard to rank and hard to quote. But a small firm that abandons its general corporate base to become a securities boutique may destroy the revenue paying its rent. This firm resolved it by staying broad in practice and becoming legible in layers. It led with the practices where its evidence was strongest, and it let the rest sit behind those layers.

03 POACHING

Visibility exposes a team to poaching. A ranked, publicly credited associate is a more attractive lateral target. This is real and there is no clever answer to it beyond the obvious one: firms that keep their people invisible to protect them tend to lose them anyway, to firms that offer visibility.

04 PRICING

Raising rates risks the volume clients who fund the practice today. The sequencing question is genuine. What the engagement demonstrated is that standing must be established before pricing moves, not after. Also, the repricing can be selective rather than wholesale, applied first to new institutional mandates while existing relationships are left alone.

What was actually built, in what order

THE PLUMBING, BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE.

- Query-parameter URLs replaced with readable slugs.
- A meta title written for the homepage.
- The blog was rebuilt as an indexed section where each piece has its own address and can accumulate authority.

None of this is interesting, all of it is prerequisite, and the honest note is that we did it later than we should have - a point I return to.

THE EVIDENCE BASE

A matter-capture discipline: for each significant mandate, what the issue was, why it was difficult, what turned it, what it was worth, who could be approached as a referee, and what could be said publicly. This is the asset everything else draws on. Without it, every submission cycle and every press opportunity begins from zero and misses the deadline.

THE BUYER MAP

Running in parallel with the evidence base, and drawn from the same mandate data: a stratification of who actually instructs firms of this kind, and how each category makes that decision. Regulators and public bodies empanel through formal processes with published criteria. Institutional financiers empanel too, but weight peer reference heavily. Listed corporates' in-house teams work from internally assembled shortlists. Capital markets intermediaries, merchant bankers in particular function as gatekeepers who route a whole category of listing work to whoever handled the last one without incident. Promoter families and family offices instruct almost purely on trust and personal introduction. Five categories, five entirely different routes in, and a content calendar addresses precisely none of them directly.

What was actually built, in what order

The plumbing was prerequisite. The targeting judgement was the work.

THE DESCRIPTOR TEST

One rule governed every claim written about the firm: could a competitor say this truthfully? If yes, it was generic and it came out. “Commercially minded”, “partner-led”, “solution-oriented” are things every firm in the country can say, so they carry no information whatsoever. What survived was specific and attached to proof: not that the firm is trusted by institutions, but that it defends a market regulator’s own enforcement actions rather than appearing against them. Not that it is technically strong, but that it defeated an insolvency petition by establishing that employee stock appreciation rights are not operational debt.

THE SUBMISSION CALENDAR

International directories, domestic legal journals, practice-area awards, firm-level and individual, each with its own deadline, evidence format and referee requirement, run as a rolling annual cycle rather than a scramble. Most firms fail here for entirely unromantic reasons: the matters were never written up, the referees were never asked, the confidentiality question was never resolved, and the date passed.

THE PRESS FUNCTION

Built from nothing over roughly two years. What a journalist filing before an evening deadline needs is a specific, technically correct, quotable sentence within the hour. Firm size is a proxy they reach for when they have nothing better. Precision and availability beat letterhead more often than the market assumes. But like every compounding effort, this asset too starts delivering only after months of being right, being fast, and being useful on stories where there is no quote in it for you. The early approaches produce very little. Then the acceptances start arriving.

The articles were the instrument. The decisions that made them work all preceded the writing: that the firm’s existing private-client files contained an unbuilt practice that noone in the management was naming; that the buyers for it do not read legal journals, legal newsletters or law firm websites; that the conversion path ran through an existing client forwarding something to a relative rather than through search; and that the correct venue was therefore general-interest national press rather than anywhere a lawyer would instinctively publish. Place the identical article in a legal journal and it produces nothing at all. Place it in national press in the stylisation of a journal article and the correct buyer skims right past it. Say too much and it is solicitation, or a helpful reckoner for the competition rather than a communication to the potential client. Say too little, and it confuses everybody if at all it gets accepted by the paper (which it likely would not be). Every one of those calls is a targeting judgement that happens to be executed as content.

Three ways a firm acquires work it has never done

Referral cannot introduce a firm to a category of work it has never handled, because the person who would have to make the referral has no reason to think of it. Every genuinely new practice line this firm opened came by one of three routes. Content appears in all three and is decisive in none of them.

Route one: the latent vertical

Estate planning: a practice that did not exist

Two partner-bylined pieces on inheritance and on executing a will correctly, placed in a national daily and a national news magazine. Existing clients read them and forwarded them to family members. Within months the firm was structuring intergenerational wills for a senior professional family, clarifying ancestral versus self-acquired property rights for a business family, and unlocking a stalled high-value property sale frozen by succession complications. Six-plus matters in the last year. It began as two articles.

Route two: the credential ladder

Capital markets: mandate, then authority, then inbound

Analysis of SME listings, confidentialfiling routes,regulatorboard decisions and disclosure practice, placed across national financial press. Pre IPO companies, merchant bankers and capital markets intermediaries began approaching directly. The vertical became the firm's flagship with eight plus significant engagements last year, and a High Court mandate defending the regulator in a closely watched challenge to a major event, where the petitions were dismissed with costs.

The sequence is the point, and it cannot be run in reverse. Authority in a technical practice area is not assertable; it has to be evidenced by mandates before commentary carries weight, and the commentary then compounds into further mandates. What the function decides is which credential to build the ladder on, and when the firm has enough of one to start climbing. Publish too early and the market reads it as marketing; publish too late and a competitor owns the position.

Route three: signal-led origination

The third route is the one that does not resemble marketing at all, and it is the one this firm's competitors have no equivalent of.

Some practice areas have a property most do not: the need becomes publicly observable before it becomes an instruction. Certain practice areas have this property more strongly than others, and we select for it. In those areas, a situation produces observable traces some time before anyone inside it decides which firm to call. The interval between the trace and the instruction is the only window in which an unranked boutique competes on equal terms with a firm ten times its size, because in that window nobody has been chosen yet.

We built a standing capability for this firm to work that window: continuous identification of situations at a defined stage of formation, a qualification layer that filters the observable universe down to the matters genuinely worth pursuing, and an approach method designed around a constraint that governs everything in this jurisdiction. Indian professional conduct rules prohibit advocates from soliciting work. Anything that reads as a solicitation is both impermissible and, separately, ineffective. The approach therefore leads with something of independent use to the recipient and never with an offer.

Three ways a firm acquires work it has never done

The article is the instrument. The decision about which buyer, at which moment, through which venue, made before a word is written, is the work.

TD The identification criteria, the qualification filters and the approach mechanism are not set out in this note. They took a long time to build, they work, and they remain a product we license to firms in other practice areas and other jurisdictions. What is relevant to this account is the class of capability rather than its contents: a firm can be supplied with a continuously refreshed, qualified, correctly timed set of situations in which its specific expertise is about to be required - instead of waiting to be found by whoever happens to already be looking.

This is the clearest line between a positioning function and a content or search agency. An agency's output is addressed to an audience. This is addressed to a named situation, at a moment chosen because the need has formed and the decision has not.

Finding the room, and the person in it

This is the half of the discipline that no content or search agency performs, and it is where the judgement actually sits.

RECONSTRUCTING WHO INSTRUCTS WHOM

Public records carry far more intelligence about a legal market than firms use. If one knows where to search, the public domain allows a reasonably complete reconstruction of who is instructing whom and in which sectors. The useful information we can further derive from this: where nobody is instructing anyone. A company with a live regulatory exposure and no external counsel on record is not a prospect in the ordinary sense. It is an opening with a name attached and a clock running on it.

Applied to this firm, the same method produced something more immediately useful than a target list: an understanding of which categories of buyer were structurally reachable from where the firm already stood, which were reachable only after a particular credential existed, and which were not worth pursuing at all in the current cycle. Sequencing beats ambition. Approaching a category before you hold the credential it screens on wastes the approach and burns the contact.

CHOOSING ROOMS BY WHO IS IN THEM

Conferences, panels, industry gatherings and delegations are sold on prestige and audience volume. Neither is the relevant variable. The relevant variable is whether three specific people the firm needs to meet will be present, and whether the format allows an actual conversation rather than a lecture to two hundred strangers. A modest sectoral roundtable attended by the general counsel of two target institutions is worth more than a keynote slot at a marquee event whose attendees are other lawyers competing for the same work.

The firm made ten-plus speaking and panel appearances in the most recent year. Every one was assessed against that test before it was accepted, and several higher-profile invitations were turned down on it. Selection is the work; attendance is the easy part.

DESIGNING THE ENCOUNTER

A partner walking into a room having been told only “there will be good people there” will have pleasant conversations and generate nothing. What changes the outcome is a short briefing prepared beforehand: who is expected, what each of them is currently dealing with, which of the firm’s matters speaks directly to that, and what should not be raised. Fifteen minutes of preparation converts a networking event into three targeted conversations. This requires preparation that requires reading the same public record referred to above with a specific human being in mind.

The same design principle governs written approaches. An approach that opens with what the sender offers is a solicitation. An approach that opens with something specific and true about the recipient’s own position is an intelligence exchange, and it is answered at a materially different rate. The difference is entirely in the research done before writing.

The encounter, the corridor, the chain

HOLDING THE CONVERSATION

Firms usually solve the live component by deploying whichever partner is comfortable in public. That is expensive, scales unpredictably, and it excludes the introverted technician who may be the firm's strongest lawyer. A practice management professional who can discuss a market opportunity in front of practitioners - understanding the technical substance well enough to be credible, on short notice, in the register of a practitioner rather than a marketer, is rare enough that most firms have never encountered one and therefore do not think to look for one. It is the single capability that most distinguishes this function from an agency relationship, because it cannot be delivered by deliverable.

BUILDING CORRIDORS BEFORE THEY ARE NEEDED

The same targeting logic applied at the level of geography. Rather than waiting for cross-border work to arrive, the corridors the client base was actually heading toward were identified in advance and built toward: a
Gulf corridor, a West African one, a China-into-India inbound route, a United States link. In the most recent period the firm ran an acquisition
into a UAE free zone, advised on a bid for a listed West African consumer-care business, and handled a Chinese manufacturer's India entry. Those did not arrive by chance. The relationships, the referral counterparties and the supporting visibility were assembled ahead of the demand, on a judgement about where this particular client base would need to go neat. An agency optimises to be found. This function decides who needs to know, works out what they are dealing with, and arranges the encounter. The first is a service. The second is judgement, and it is the reason the two cost differently.

The encounter, the corridor, the chain

PIPELINES ARE STRUCTURES, NOT FUNNELS

A second discipline runs alongside visibility: mapping where an entry mandate leads, and building the firm's positioning around the entry points that open the longest downstream chains. Four were identified from the firm's own mandate data.

DOWNSTREAMCHAINS

01 **SME listing readiness** → eligibility diligence → offer document drafting → exchange queries → **recurring listed-company compliance retainer**

One entry mandate, a multi-year revenue tail.

02 **Pre-contractual term sheet** → definitive agreements → cross-border structuring → **post-closing warranty and indemnity work**

03 **Pre-litigation supply-chain triage** → invoking the arbitration clause → statement of claim → High Court arbitrator appointment → **award enforcement**

04 **Insolvency filing** → debt restructuring → asset tracing → security enforcement → **corporate rescue transaction**

The practical consequence is that search and content architecture were reverse-engineered from the mandate base rather than from keyword tools. When it comes to SEO, it is not that a firm following substance over volume does not need it. The approach rather is more about a balance and about targeting the specific, low-volume, high-intent terms that sit at the top of those work chains, rather than the high-volume generic terms the volume publishers compete over and win nothing from.

Where a boutique has to land

Benchmarked against roughly a hundred competitors, the domestic market divides into four tiers, and only one position is available to a firm of this size.

At the top, the legacy giants generate business through boardroom networks and need no search visibility at all. Below them, premium full service challengers run high-frequency content engines and country desks. Below those, specialised boutiques run targeted, platform native intellectual property - regulatory trackers, sector newsletters. At the bottom, local volumisers publish twenty-five to seventy articles a month, rank in no directory, and compete purely on keyword density.

The trap for a strong boutique is that the cheapest available strategy is the bottom-tier one, and adopting it makes the firm illegible to the buyers it actually wants. The position that had to be built instead was the combination that almost nobody occupies: institutional-grade work and client roster, made as digitally legible and evidentially dense as the volume tier, with the restraint of the top tier. Elite standing without elite name recognition has to be earned through visible proof, because a sparse, confident presence without proof does not read as premium, it reads as an empty placeholder.

LEGACY GIANTS

Boardroom networks · sparse digital presence

POSITION TO BUILD

PREMIUM CHALLENGERS

High-frequency content engines · country desks

SPECIALISED BOUTIQUES

Targeted, platform-native intellectual property

LOCAL VOLUMISERS

25–70 articles/month · keyword competition

VIII / THE CURVE, AND WHAT IT PRODUCED

The curve, and what it produced

2021	2022	2023–24	2025–26
FOUNDATIONS	RECORD	COMPOUNDING	STANDING

17+ recognitions across two years

29 national business pressfeatures

11 lawyers hired intwelve months

8+ newretainer relationships

YEARS ONE AND TWO — 2021 TO 2022

Almost nothing visible. Site architecture, evidence base, first directory cycles, first press approaches, content pipeline from a standing start. One firm level recognition and the beginnings of individual listings. On a monthly leads report, this period reads as failure.

YEARS THREE AND FOUR — 2023 TO 2024

The record starts to hold. Both partners placed on a leading legal journal's A-List of India's top practitioners, then placed again the following year, consecutive listing being materially harder and more persuasive than a single appearance. Press relationships begin producing a large number of acceptances and a few unprompted calls.

> **That is a Substantial, Precise Claim.**
>
> This work does not win clients. It puts a good firm in the room where clients are won or lost - a room it was previously not in at all.

YEARS FIVE AND FIVE-AND-A-HALF — 2025 TO 2026

Seventeen-plus recognitions across two years. Firm-level rankings from IFLR1000, Asialaw, Legal 500 Asia Pacific and IBLJ, including firm awards in capital markets and in arbitration and ADR, and a place on RSG's Resight 100 list of India's top law firms. Both partners in Blue Ribbon rankings, one in disputes and one in M&A, alongside individual awards for dispute resolution and regulatory advisory. Twenty-nine features in national business press in a single year, several bylined. Eleven lawyers hired in twelve months, including a senior corporate lateral with thirteen years' transactional experience - the hire the firm could not have made in 2021.

By the firm's own year-end reporting, the most recent year ran to four practice verticals, thirteen major recognitions, fifty-plus published pieces, twenty-nine media features, ten-plus conference appearances, eight-plus new retainer relationships, twenty-five-plus active dispute matters and eight-plus capital markets engagements.

The client base moved with it. The firm now acts for a national regulator, three listed companies within India's largest industrial group, the country's largest private-sector bank, a national flag carrier, a global ports and logistics operator, one of the world's major spirits businesses, and the housing finance arm of a leading conglomerate. It advises consumer ventures promoted by two of India's most recognised public figures. It has acted as co-counsel alongside two of India's largest firms on a renewable energy acquisition, and it has run outbound mandates into a UAE free zone and a bid for a listed West African consumer-care business.

The attribution discipline that must attach to all of it: the partners won those mandates. They did the work, earned the regulator's confidence, argued the cases. No positioning function delivers a client of that order and anyone claiming otherwise is selling something they cannot supply. What may be claimed is that:

every submission, ranking entry, nomination, byline, media relationship, published article and search asset behind the firm's present standing ran through this function; and a firm invisible to the market it belonged in became findable, checkable and credible enough to be shortlisted by buyers who had never heard of it. What happened after the shortlist was the partners'.

LAWFINITY
Between The Market And The Firm

What the firm never had to carry

NEVER I NCURRED

1. A senior marketing or business development hire, with the search, package, on-costs and management attention that accompany one.
2. A vendor stack - separate suppliers for press, content, directories, awards and digital - assembled, briefed and coordinated by partners with no time to do it.
3. The recurring cost of explaining the practice from scratch: what a maintainability objection is, why a disclosure-adequacy defence mattered, why one arbitration mandate carries more weight than three larger ones.
4. A missed submission deadline because the person who understood the process had resigned.
5. Recruitment, ramp-up or replacement cost when the function's own capacity changed.

The last of these inverts the standard objection to an external function. Across five and a half years the firm's junior bench turned over several times, as junior benches do everywhere; eleven lawyers joined in the most recent year alone. Through all of it the function's institutional memory including every submission previously filed and what it claimed, which referees were approached and how they responded, which journalists cover which beats and what they need, the editorial standards, the accumulated record of what has been said about this firm where and when, never reset once. It survived every departure inside the firm precisely because it had never been inside the firm.
An in-house hire takes the directory knowledge with them when they leave in eighteen months. An agency rotates account handlers annually. Continuity here is not a soft benefit; it is the compounding mechanism itself, and losing it returns the curve to year one.

Why this is difficult to buy

A firm that accepts everything above still faces a procurement problem.The reason, put plainly:

The work requires, simultaneously: enough legal training to read a matter and know which part is difficult; enough journalistic instinct to find the angle that a national editor will run and a general counsel will forward; enough commercial judgement to identify which entry mandates open the longest downstream chains; enough discretion to know what to disclose on which platform and what to withhold; the relationships to place work in both practitioner journals and mainstream business press; the operational discipline to run submission calendars, awards, brochures, requests for proposal, search and social without any of it slipping; and enough live fluency to hold a technically credible conversation about market opportunity at a professional gathering, in the register of a practitioner rather than a marketer.

Firms currently solve the last of these by deploying whichever partner is comfortable speaking in public. That is an expensive choice that may or may not scale, and is unavailable to the introverted excellent lawyer who may be the firm's strongest technician. A practice management professional who can do it is rare enough that most firms have never met one and therefore do not know to look.

My own route to this combination was not designed: **law, then seven years as a legal journalist, then seven and a half years building positioning and lead-generation systems for Indian boutiques -** the least forgiving client base available, since they combine an absence of institutional credentials with a constant hunger for clients and conservative budgets. Published work in arbitration and investment treaty journals, international legal business press and mainstream Indian financial media sits alongside that, and the difficulty of placing it is itself the evidence: practitioner journals want practising lawyers, trade publications frequently want sponsorship rather than editorial merit, international journals want jurisdictional consequence that does not lean too heavily on one country, and several of the most-read legal platforms are wary of any analysis carrying market intelligence even where the piece is substantially doctrinal. Every placement that landed sits on a larger pile that did not, each requiring a rewrite pitched at a different readership.

Behind the individual sits the part that makes it operable: a team carrying the historical context, the standard operating procedures and the cost structure to run award submissions, the content and newsletter pipeline, practice brochures and proposals, sponsored speaking and physical presence, and search and algorithm tracking to the standards applied at premium practices globally - plus direct working relationships with marquee Indian media.

What we got wrong

We wrote ahead of placement more than once. Early on, strong pieces were produced and then sent looking for a home. That is the wrong order. The platform, its readership and its editorial appetite should shape a piece before the first paragraph exists. The same rule goes for approaching business decision makers.

The site architecture was diagnosed too late. The query-parameter URLs, the missing homepage title, the unindexed blog - identified and fixed far later than they should have been. The cost is quantifiable and irritating: several years of good published writing did not compound in search, because each piece had no address of its own against which to accumulate authority. Editorial quality was never the problem; the plumbing was, and plumbing is not interesting enough to prioritise unless someone deliberately goes looking for it. It is now audited in the first sixty days of any new engagement.

XII

What transfers

The mechanics described here are not specific to India. A disputes boutique in London, a commercial firm in Singapore, an independent in Latin America or Madrid faces the same structural problem in different clothing: strong practitioners, real matters, a market that cannot see them, and a set of instruments (directories, business press, search, referral memory) that only read documentation.

What differs is difficulty, and in the direction that favours the buyer. India runs on severe fee compression, more contested directory access, and deeper more settled is, to us, an easier version of this problem.

What does not transfer is division of attention. The intelligence that makes this work is an accumulated understanding of one firm's position, one competitive set, one group of buyers. The moment the same understanding is being assembled for a competitor, its value to both collapses. Lawfinity works with one firm in a deep fractional CMO mandate, and holds that constraint absolutely.

Five and a half years, one firm, and a record anyone can check. Offered not as a claim about what is possible, but as an account of what happened - including the parts that took too long.

Figures describing the firm's recent activity are drawn from its own year-end reporting. Rankings, awards, published articles and media features are independently verifiable. Client descriptions are abstracted under the confidentiality discipline described in Section II.

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