

Legal directories and awards are a key pillar of any good strategic communications plan for your law firm. But with so many outlets running an ever-growing list of surveys and submissions, how do you make the best use of limited resources and pursue honors that actually have value?

There are three major categories of lists and recognitions: [surveys](#), [submissions](#) and [pay-to-play](#).

**Surveys:** The major legal industry and business information publishers (ALM, Law360, Firsthand/Vault and local outlets such as Chicago's Law Bulletin Media) all distribute surveys to law firms to collect demographic and other data. The survey responses drive lists such as The Glass Ceiling Report, Top 150 Under 150, and Chicago's Largest Law Firms (which also has a "fastest growing" category). Some outlets, such as Crain's, instead use publicly available data for their lists. Whether you have the opportunity to craft your firm's narrative or must rely on the outlet to seek information about your firm and its attorneys, it's important to respond to surveys ahead of the deadline and ensure information on your firm's website is accurate.

**Submissions:** The major directories (Chambers, Legal 500) and publications (Law360, American Lawyer, National Law Journal, Bloomberg Law, Crains, Law Bulletin, etc.) host a number of award and recognition programs that have their own nomination/application processes separate from their surveys. As the total number of these opportunities has grown, it has become more important than ever to target awards that make the most sense for your particular firm. Think carefully about your strategic goals – Which practice areas are you most focused on building? Who are your current superstars? Who are the future faces of your firm? – and focus on the awards that align with those objectives. (One other tip: Take note of each program's instructions on confidential clients and matters.)

**Pay-to-Play:** The "superlatives," i.e. Best Lawyers, Super Lawyers, etc., are largely commercial programs that firms can elect to be part of. Firms register with a brief survey form in order to get ranked (essentially a ballot-driven process that goes out to all the firms that register) and then can purchase various packages in order to be able to share/market that ranking with badges, online listings, etc. In general, these lists are far more valuable for firms who serve consumer clients, such as personal injury or family law practices. More sophisticated corporate buyers tend not to put much stock into these rankings, and so we tend to dissuade law firms who serve that client base from investing too much time and energy into them.

Once you have made sense of the many opportunities and chosen the recognitions you would like to pursue, the next step is to create a calendar of deadlines and begin the process of gathering information for the surveys and submissions. Still feeling a bit overwhelmed? Give us a call – we'd be glad to help you create an awards program that works for your firm.