

The Benefits Of Choosing A Niche Practice In The AI Age

By **Daniel Borneman** (March 16, 2026)

Anthropic PBC, the company that developed the Claude family of large language models, recently released a new tool that offers increased functionality, including the ability to review legal documents. The news rattled the legal tech market and contributed to a significant dip in shares of several established providers.[1]



Daniel Borneman

As high-quality generative artificial intelligence becomes increasingly accessible, lawyers with a niche practice may have an opportunity to stand out among generalists, as clients seek specialized judgment that automation cannot replicate. This dynamic has important implications for early-career attorneys weighing a foundational career question: whether to develop a narrowly defined practice or maintain a broad, generalist approach.

Practitioners know that while generative tools like Harvey, ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot excel at automating routine tasks, lawyers still cannot trust them with complex legal questions. Specialists with legal AI experience will tell you that they are not worried about being replaced anytime soon; their niche is too nuanced for AI to truly grapple with. In short, the more deeply one probes into an issue, the less useful large language models become.

This dynamic provides an opportunity for young lawyers who are considering whether to pursue a specialized or generalist practice. The decision between these options is rarely binary, especially at the outset of one's career. Many attorneys begin with broad exposure before gravitating toward an area of focus. Still, making a deliberate choice to pursue a niche can significantly shape long-term opportunities.

Understanding Niche Practices and Their Benefits

Niche practitioners have a concentrated focus, whether in a specific industry, subject matter, client type or procedural posture. Examples are wide-ranging, and include practices like privacy compliance in a single regulated sector, fiduciary breach litigation related to the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, cannabis regulatory compliance and licensing, executive compensation, and representing only policyholders in insurance coverage litigation.

What unites these practices is depth rather than breadth: Niche lawyers aim to master a defined body of law and the business realities surrounding it.

Specialists differentiate themselves by becoming the first call for a well-defined problem. A narrow practice also lends itself to repeat clients: Each successful matter within your niche reinforces your credibility and compounds your reputation.

Specialists are also in demand for internal clients within firms: A niche will touch on many areas of the law and intersect with other practice groups at your firm or organization, keeping your practice in demand.

You can also participate in thought leadership early in your career, because specialists can

develop a depth of knowledge in their field that would take many years for a generalist to achieve.

These advantages are magnified in the current legal market because clients are distinguishing between work that AI tools can expedite, and work that demands sector-specific experience and judgment, which is where specialists excel.

By contrast, generalists may handle a wide variety of commercial disputes, corporate transactions or regulatory matters without concentrating heavily in one subfield. This approach can offer universally applicable experience, as well as a flexibility that may suit lawyers who enjoy constant variety.

However, as legal tech continues to improve, generalists may find themselves under pressure from clients to outsource more lawyering tasks to AI to cut costs, because generalists are more likely to be working on cases that aren't all that unique, and legal AI is getting very good at generating common legal documents while incorporating a matter's unique facts.

This is not the case for many of the issues that clients bring to niche practitioners, who often deal with problems that are novel or otherwise not well suited for a templated approach.

One way to ensure your continued demand in a market flooded with AI is to embrace a niche.

Key Market Considerations Before You Specialize

The first step, of course, is to choose a niche. Young attorneys should consider market realities as much as personal interests when choosing whether to specialize, and in what.

Start with demand durability: Assess whether the niche is likely to remain active through regulatory changes, litigation trends and economic cycles. Ask yourself, for example: How long has this practice group been at this law firm? You can also ask lawyers practicing in that area if their work is dependent on market cycles.

Next, consider your geography: Some specialties cluster in particular regions where clients, courts, regulators or industry ecosystems are concentrated, like Washington, D.C., for many regulatory practices, or Texas for certain energy practices. You should also evaluate the competitive landscape: Are there already many established players? How does your current firm compare in reputation and resources? Local Chambers and Partners rankings are an invaluable source for this information.

Finally, understand your firm's economics: Learn how seriously the firm supports the niche, encourages entrepreneurial development, and invests in infrastructure like the staffing, marketing and knowledge management support that is needed to build a credible practice. If the practice's outlook at your current firm is uncertain, or if the group is not well supported by firm leadership, consider whether a lateral move to another firm or organization would be feasible and worthwhile.

Portability matters too. Ask whether the skills and client relationships you build will travel with you across firms or translate into an in-house transition if your long-term goals evolve. One way to gain insight into portability is to search for job postings within the specialty to determine demand for those skills. But the best way is to reach out and talk to practitioners

on the ground.

Finding a Professional and Personal Fit

In addition to market factors, a sustainable niche needs to be a professional and personal fit. Professionally, the practice should align with your skills, temperament and interests. Inventory the work you enjoy and the tasks at which you excel. If you want to write briefs, make sure your niche litigates cases regularly.

If you dislike complicated legal research, find a niche that falls under a consistent regulatory scheme that you can master and eventually recite from memory. Again, the best way to determine whether a practice area aligns with your interests and strengths is to talk to lawyers within that specialty. Specialists are often happy to discuss their field of expertise with curious young lawyers.

Even more importantly, you should assess the people — the colleagues and mentors with whom you will spend your days — to ensure a personal fit within the group. These individuals will shape your growth as much as, or even more than, the subject matter itself. Strong relationships with colleagues, and a supportive culture from leadership and mentors, often outweigh marginal differences between practice areas because they drive your development and professional satisfaction.

In addition to a personality fit, you should scrutinize a practice group's mentorship and training, as early exposure to high-quality feedback and learning opportunities accelerates mastery and builds confidence.

Finally, every field has different standard workflows and time demands. After talking to lawyers who practice in the field, you should ask yourself whether the practice group's expectations align with your long-term goals, including work-life balance, travel requirements, compensation trajectory and partnership prospects, and whether your goals are realistic at your firm from within your niche.

How to Deliberately Pursue Your Niche

Start by mapping your firm's practice groups and reaching out to lawyers in specialist practices. Does your firm have specialist groups that interest you, or do you need to make a move? If your firm has lawyers doing such work, reach out and ask practitioners questions about their work and for exposure to live matters.

Approach these opportunities by taking ownership — ask thoughtful questions, anticipate needs and follow through beyond the black-and-white assignment. For example, if a partner asks you to research a narrow point of law, you should ask how your research will fit into the larger case — and be on the lookout for, and proactively flag, potential parallel issues when researching.

You can also subscribe to industry newsletters and legal news updates to stay current on developments in the field, while making sure that those alerts are interesting to you. If you enjoy the subject matter, build your brand by contributing to marketing and business development efforts for the group. You can propose client alerts, offer to assist with a pitch to a potential client, or volunteer for speaking engagements where you can share your experiences and practical takeaways.

Practicing within a narrow subject matter makes it easier to publish consistently, deliver

targeted client alerts and speak with authority — even as a young lawyer — to an audience that understands your value.

Real Risks and How to Mitigate Them

Of course, specialization carries trade-offs. Industry or regulatory downturns can suppress demand within a niche, so stress-test your target area. If the practice is cyclical, consider whether there are adjacent niches that could provide countercyclical stability.

For example, a lawyer concentrating on cannabis licensing could also cultivate experience in general regulatory compliance work with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or at the state level to hedge against shifting enforcement priorities. In addition, specializing too early can make changing course harder if your interests shift.

A related issue is the risk that a lack of variety will lead to boredom or the atrophy of lawyering skills that are less utilized in your field. You can mitigate these risks by maintaining a modest percentage of your workload in complementary areas, or with a robust pro bono practice in an unrelated field.

Making a Deliberate Choice

In a market that AI is actively reshaping, narrowing your focus can be a career accelerant if the niche is durable, the practice group exists at your firm and is made up of people that inspire and support you, and the work is genuinely engaging over the long run.

Daniel W. Borneman is an associate at Lowenstein Sandler LLP.

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[1] See Evan Ochsner, Anthropic Sends Legal Tech Market Warning With New AI Tool, Bloomberg Law (Feb. 4, 2026), available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/anthropic-cowork-legal-plugin-publishing-stocks-legalzoom-thomson-reuters-relx-2026-2>.