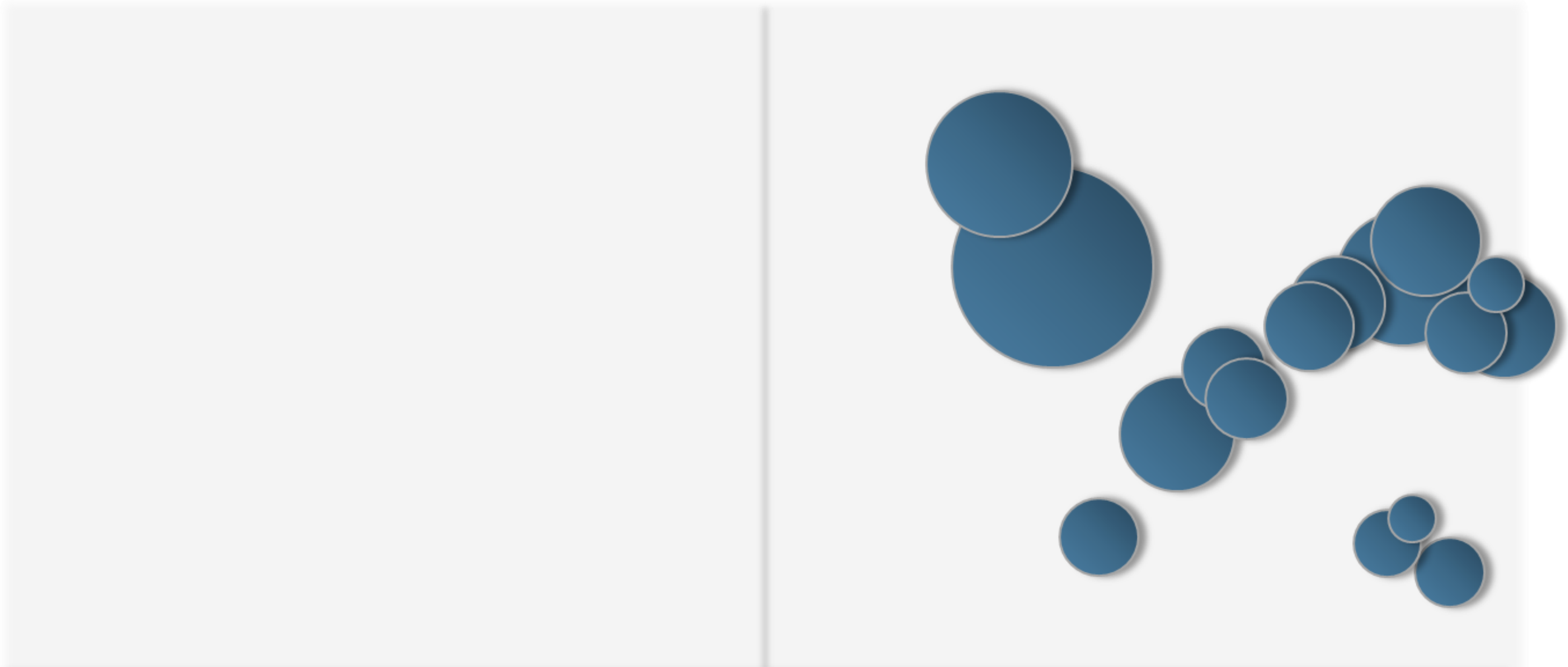
BTI Practice Outlook 2026:

The Opportunity-Rich Market

Changes, Trends, and Opportunities For Law Firms



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

bticonsulting.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AT A GLANCE

- 61% of clients are increasing spending on outside counsel to record levels
- **7 practices command the highest rate premiums in years**
- Business needs driving legal need – creating large scale opportunities for law firms

BTI Practice Outlook 2026: The Opportunity-Rich Market

We're witnessing a rare phenomenon.

Clients face an unprecedented collision of:

- Business urgency
- Legal strategies directly impacting and enabling client growth strategies
- Regulatory upheaval
- Investor pressure
- Complex litigation
- Uncharted M&A

(And yes – peak workloads, too.)

High-risk, high-impact matters are multiplying. "Bet-the-company" work now comes in more forms, from more places – and carries more consequences.

Clients are expanding their definition of risk.

And they're turning to outside counsel for the speed, foresight and strategic muscle they need to move fast and get it right.

Legal issues no longer live in silos. They bleed into growth strategies, boardroom decisions, investor scrutiny and brand reputation – raising the stakes across the board.

61% of clients are increasing their outside counsel spend to record highs. This isn't a trend – it's a signal.

2026 will be the most opportunity-rich and competitive legal market in more than a decade.

BTI Practice Outlook 2026: The Opportunity-Rich Market
Corporate counsel are charging into 2026 with record budgets and rising urgency. High-stakes litigation, regulatory whiplash, and board-level risks are multiplying fast.

This report zeroes in on the hottest practices, biggest spending surges, and the business development strategies winning the work.

Order today!

8 Trends In Corporate Legal Spending for 2026

Legal issues fuse with business issues impacting client revenue and growth

Clients see new sources of bet-the-company and high-risk issues – and spending big to defend

Board-level risk is widespread; consuming corporate counsel time and spending

Legal issues bring much higher risk when fused with business decisions – as they are now

Clients with increased budgets making very **BIG increases**

Clients preparing for more regulatory whiplash

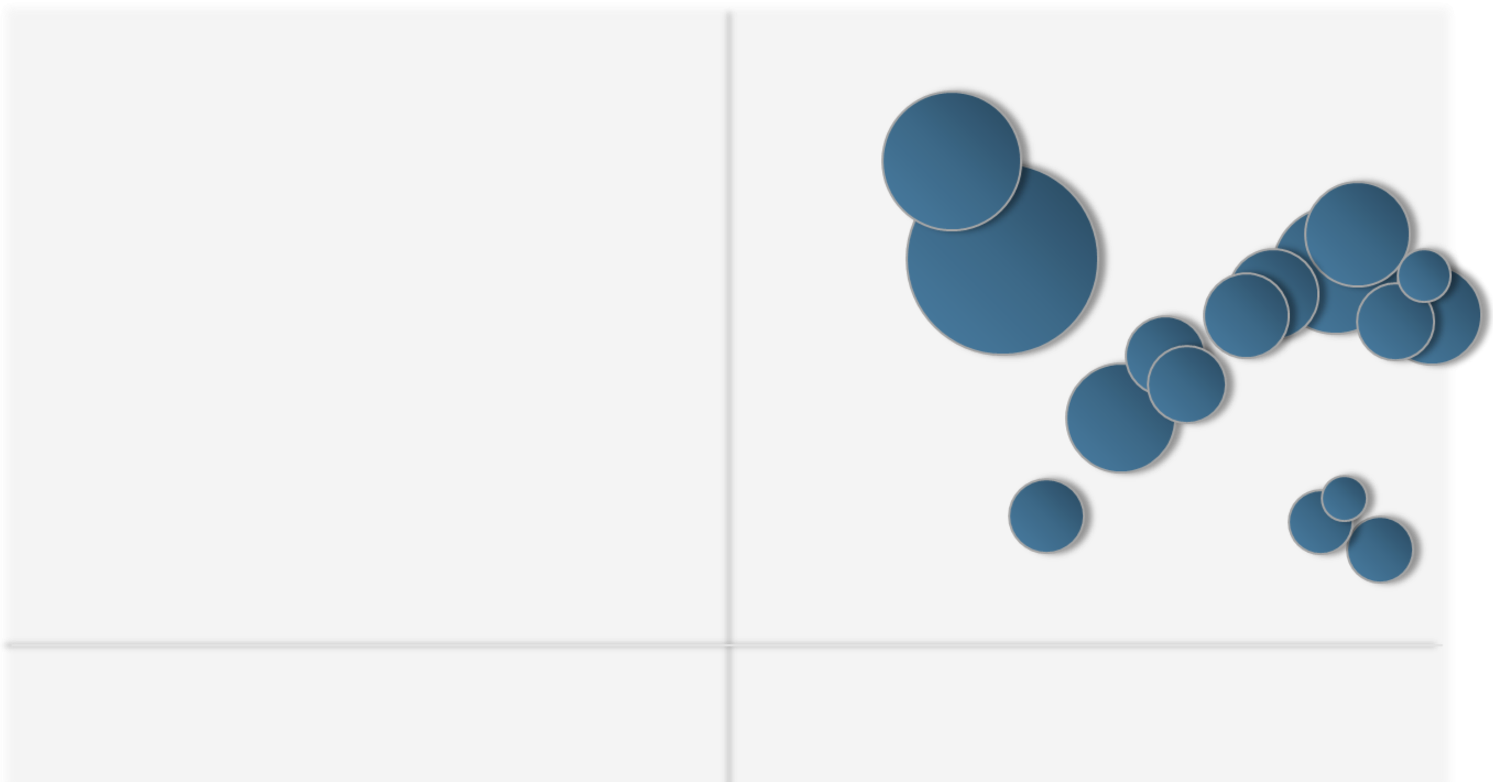
Clients have less time and patience as they face matters with bigger consequences

7 practice areas show the **most acute needs**

CONSULTING GROUP

BTI Practice Outlook

WHERE TO FIND GROWTH IN 2026



Opportunity Hot Spots in 2026:
Looking for Growth by Practice & Industry

As spending with outside counsel takes an unexpected turn up, growth for law firms is dependent on targeting the right clients with the right needs. BTI translates its unmatched research, based on in-depth telephone interviews with top legal decision makers into the best opportunities for growth – by practice and by industry.

Practice Trends

BTI's Practice Roadmap details how companies are changing the way they allocate their legal budgets in 2026 and what impact these changes will have on the opportunities available to law firms. Each practice has a distinct set of characteristics law firms can use to their advantage. Firms can use this to assemble their strategies and resources with tremendous precision to drive the highest returns.

(discussion starts on *page 14*)

Industry Needs

BTI takes this analysis one step further in our Industry Opportunity Matrix. This chart identifies industries with the largest and most compelling needs in 2026. This tool offers the deepest insight into exactly where the opportunities are. You can use it to target opportunities and your pitches.

(see full-size chart on *page 18*)

How to Read BTI's Practice Roadmap 2026

The practice opportunities for law firms in terms of growing market share and profitability in 2026 are organized around 3 core criteria in BTI's Practice Roadmap 2026.

Relative Rate Premiums

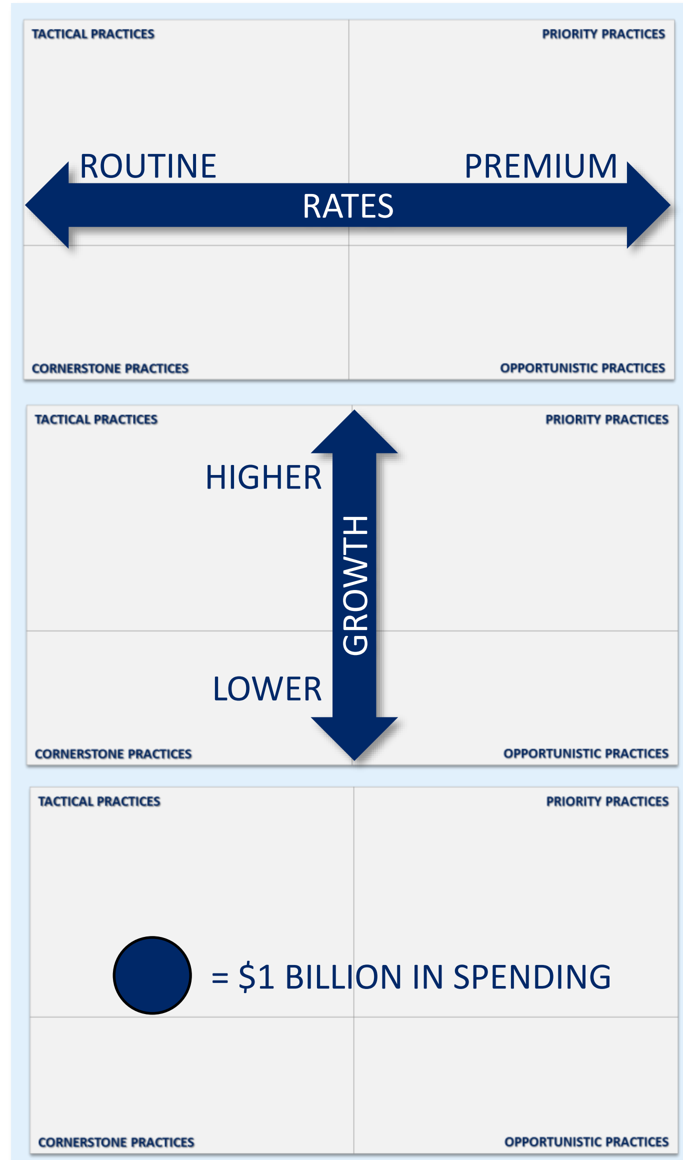
Legal decision makers have been putting more rate pressure on their law firms. We evaluate each practice, and the rates clients are paying – or plan to pay. Savvy law firms will have clear strategies to capture premium rates and have different strategies to work more efficiently in practices with higher rate pressure. Practice areas with the most potential for premium rates are on the right side of the roadmap.

Projected Spending Growth

In the current legal market, predicting and reacting to how companies are allocating their legal budget can be a major source of advantage. Most law firms are expecting a soft and unstable market. But you can use this report to guide you to the best opportunities by rates, need, and industry. The practices expected to see the most growth in 2026 are on the top of the roadmap.

Practice Revenue Potential

A critical factor for any law firm is understanding the total potential revenue a practice can deliver to your firm. This information helps inform several strategic decisions such as: practice offerings, resource allocation, lateral hiring, business development initiatives, and potential partnerships. The larger the bubble representing a practice, the more revenue potential.



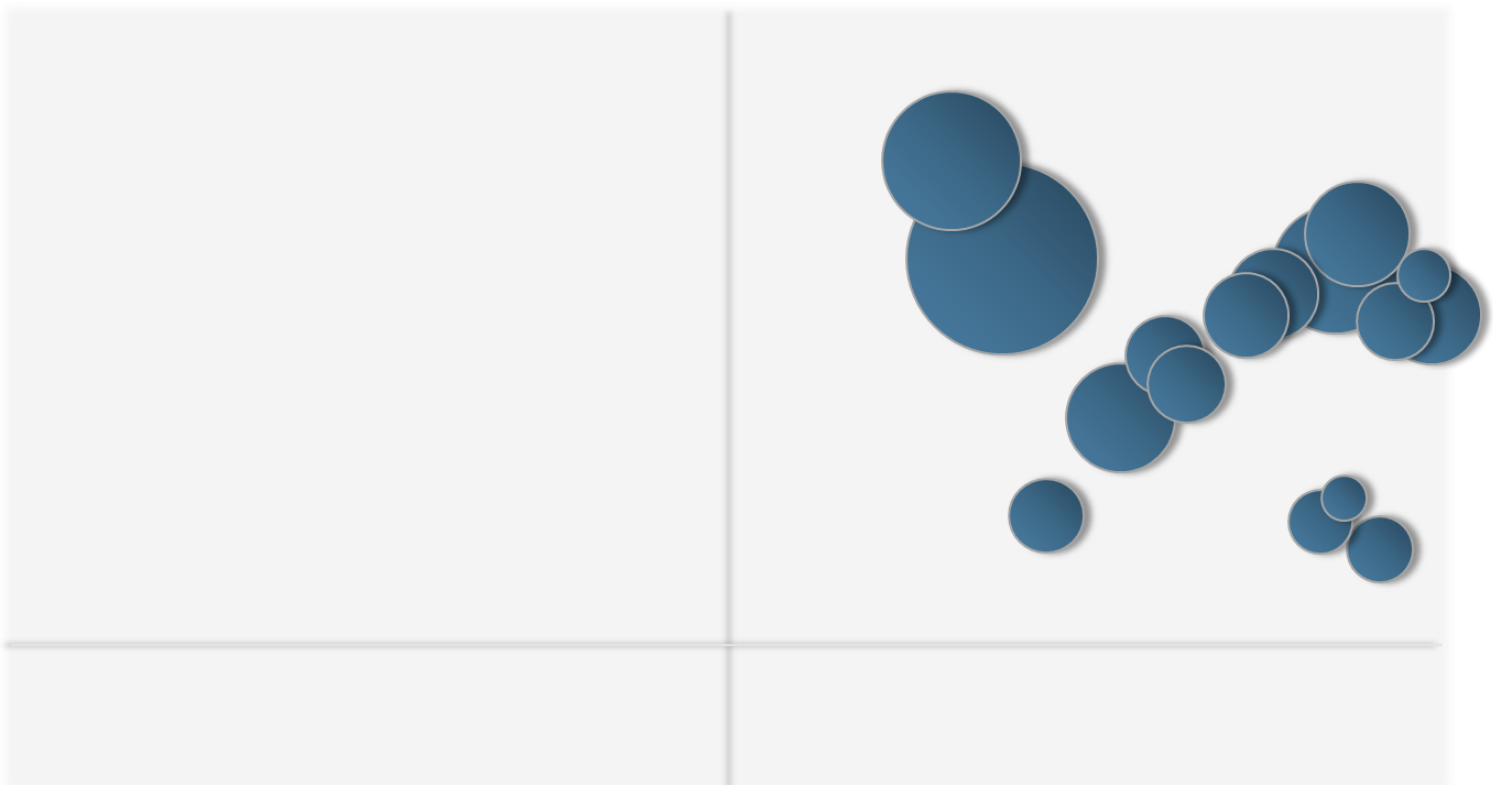
BTI's Practice Roadmap 2026

Analysis of legal practices by growth, relative rates, and market size

(%) = Projected Growth Rate

BTI Opportunity Zone

IDENTIFYING HOT SPOTS & PRESSURE POINTS IN 2026



How to Read BTI's Industry Opportunity Zone

For every major practice segment, BTI analyzes which client industries are expected to have increased needs and spending, and which are declining. BTI's Industry Opportunity Zone matrix zeroes in on the industries and practice areas promising strong growth opportunities in 2026. Actively target clients within these industries for access to increased spending and premium billing rates.

Top growth prospects

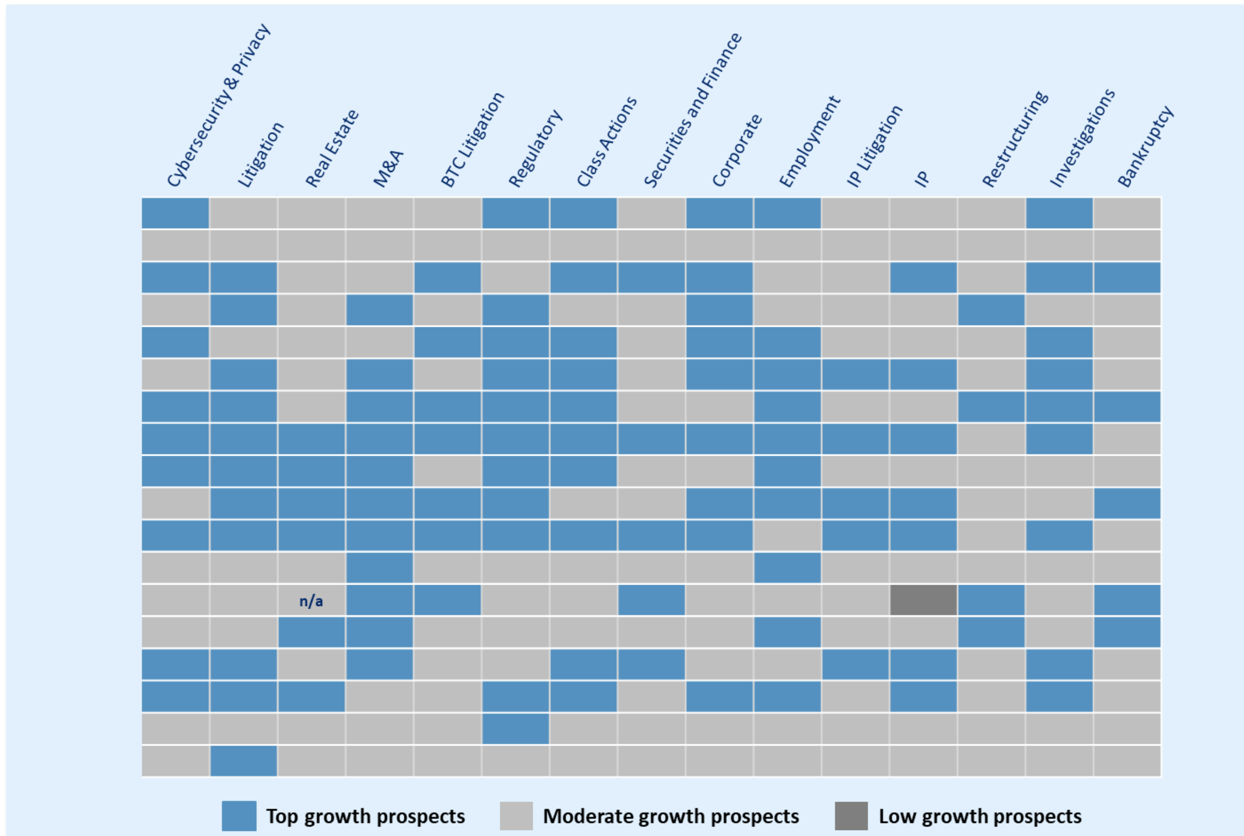
Even as the overall market for outside counsel services shows signs of growth, certain opportunities are more attractive than others. These areas are slated for prime growth and higher-than-market rates.

Moderate growth prospects

The legal market in 2026 will largely be neutral in terms of dollar growth. There will be little change in terms of spending and clients' needs in these practice segments.

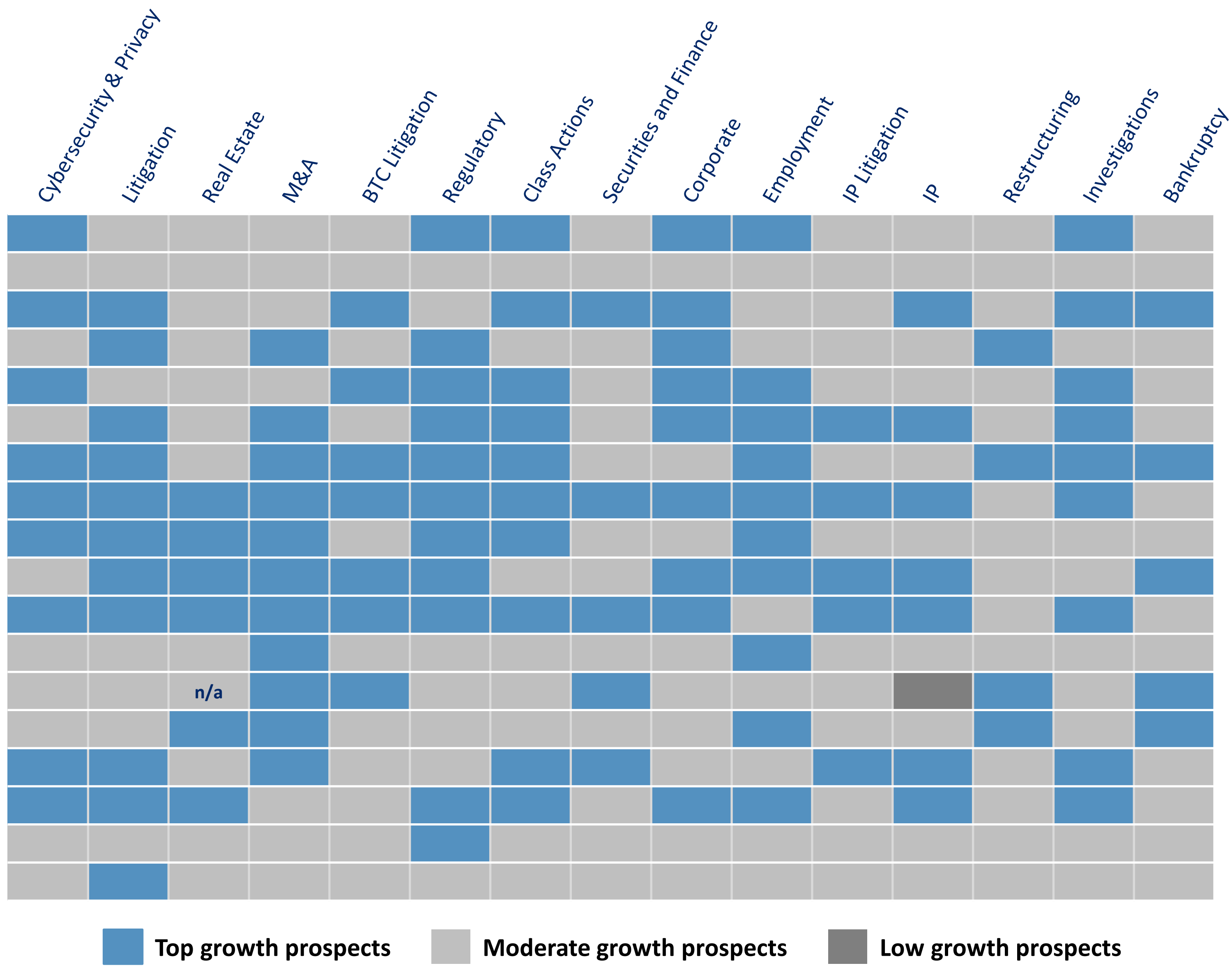
Low growth prospects

The most successful growth strategies are consistent with market realities – and in these low-growth-prospect sectors, rapid growth is not going to return in the near future.



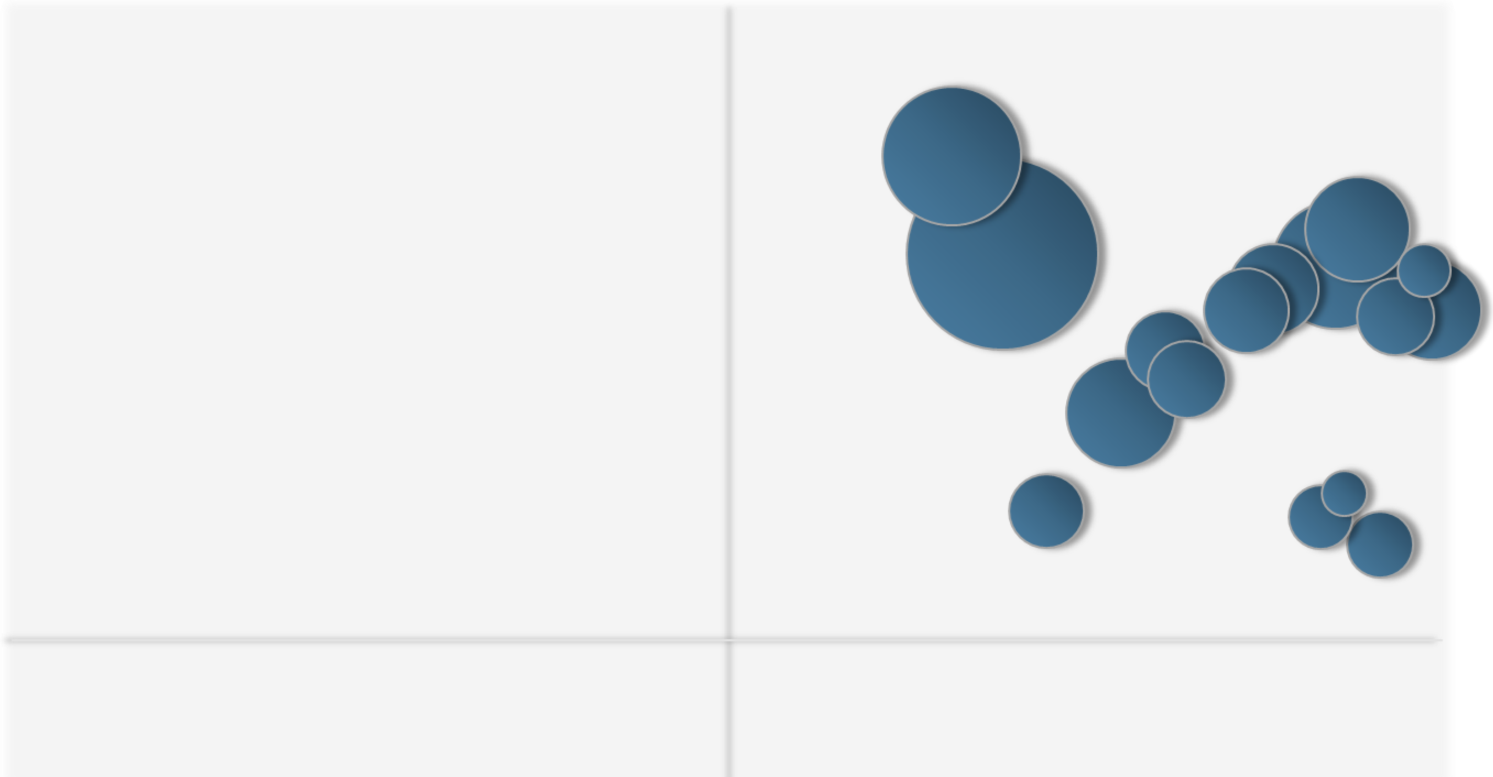
BTI's Industry Opportunity Zone:
Looking for Growth by Practice & Industry

Order BTI Practice Outlook 2026 For Industry Details



Practice Spotlights

MARKET DRIVERS & TRENDS BY PRACTICE



Reading BTI's Practice Spotlights

PRACTICE DRIVERS
Current trends and developments impacting the type of opportunities available.

INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITY ZONE
For every major practice segment, BTI analyzes which client industries are expected to have increased needs and spending – and which are declining.

Top growth prospects

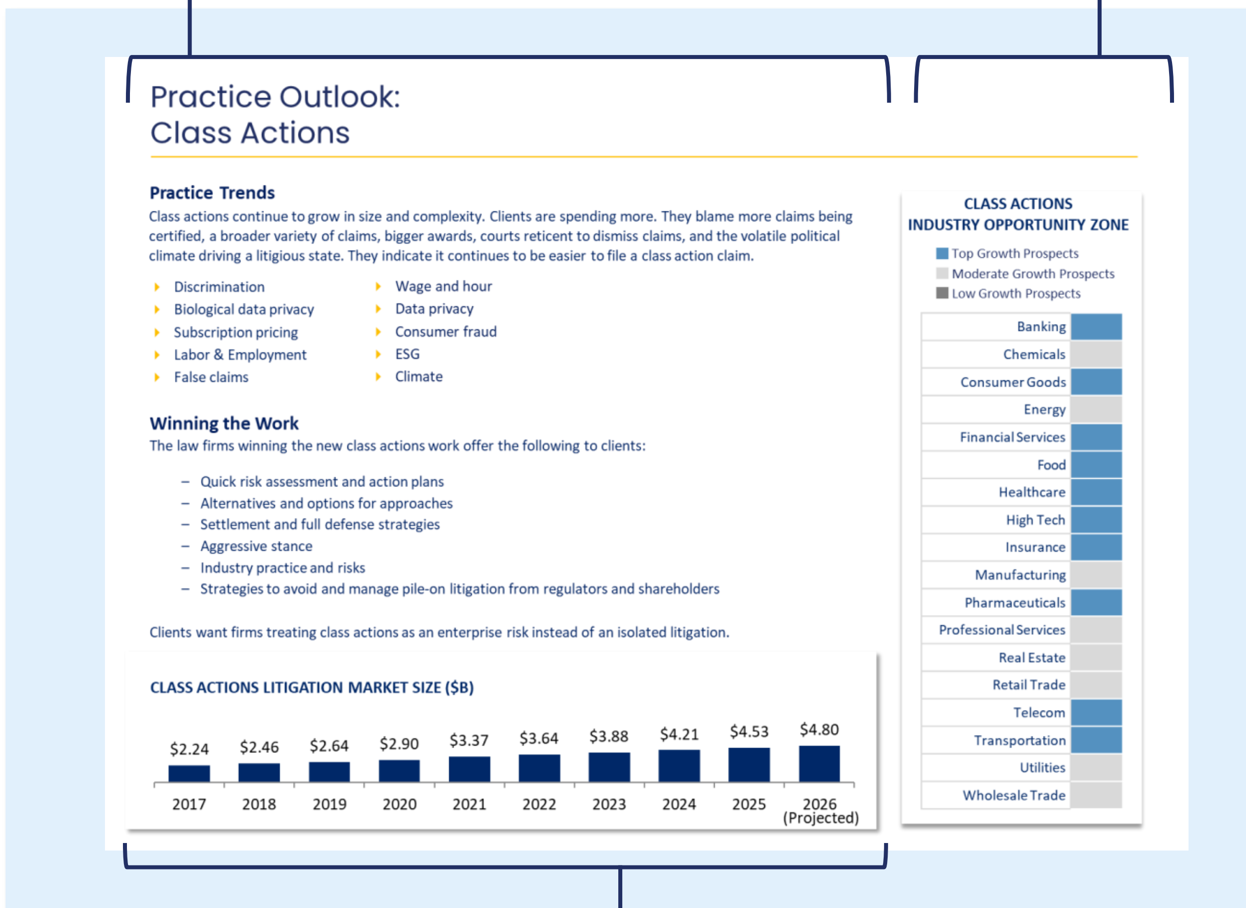
Even as the overall market for outside counsel services shows signs of growth, certain opportunities are more attractive than others. These areas are slated for prime growth and higher-than-market rates.

Moderate growth prospects

The legal market in 2026 will largely be neutral in terms of dollar growth. There will be little change in terms of spending and clients' needs in these practice segments.

Low growth prospects

The most successful growth strategies are consistent with market realities – and in these low-growth-prospect sectors rapid growth is not going to return soon.


Practice Outlook:
Class Actions

Practice Trends
Class actions continue to grow in size and complexity. Clients are spending more. They blame more claims being certified, a broader variety of claims, bigger awards, courts reticent to dismiss claims, and the volatile political climate driving a litigious state. They indicate it continues to be easier to file a class action claim.

- Discrimination
- Biological data privacy
- Subscription pricing
- Labor & Employment
- False claims
- Wage and hour
- Data privacy
- Consumer fraud
- ESG
- Climate

Winning the Work
The law firms winning the new class actions work offer the following to clients:

- Quick risk assessment and action plans
- Alternatives and options for approaches
- Settlement and full defense strategies
- Aggressive stance
- Industry practice and risks
- Strategies to avoid and manage pile-on litigation from regulators and shareholders

Clients want firms treating class actions as an enterprise risk instead of an isolated litigation.

CLASS ACTIONS LITIGATION MARKET SIZE ($B)

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 (Projected)
$2.24	$2.46	$2.64	$2.90	$3.37	$3.64	$3.88	$4.21	$4.53	$4.80

CLASS ACTIONS
INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITY ZONE

Top Growth Prospects
Moderate Growth Prospects
Low Growth Prospects

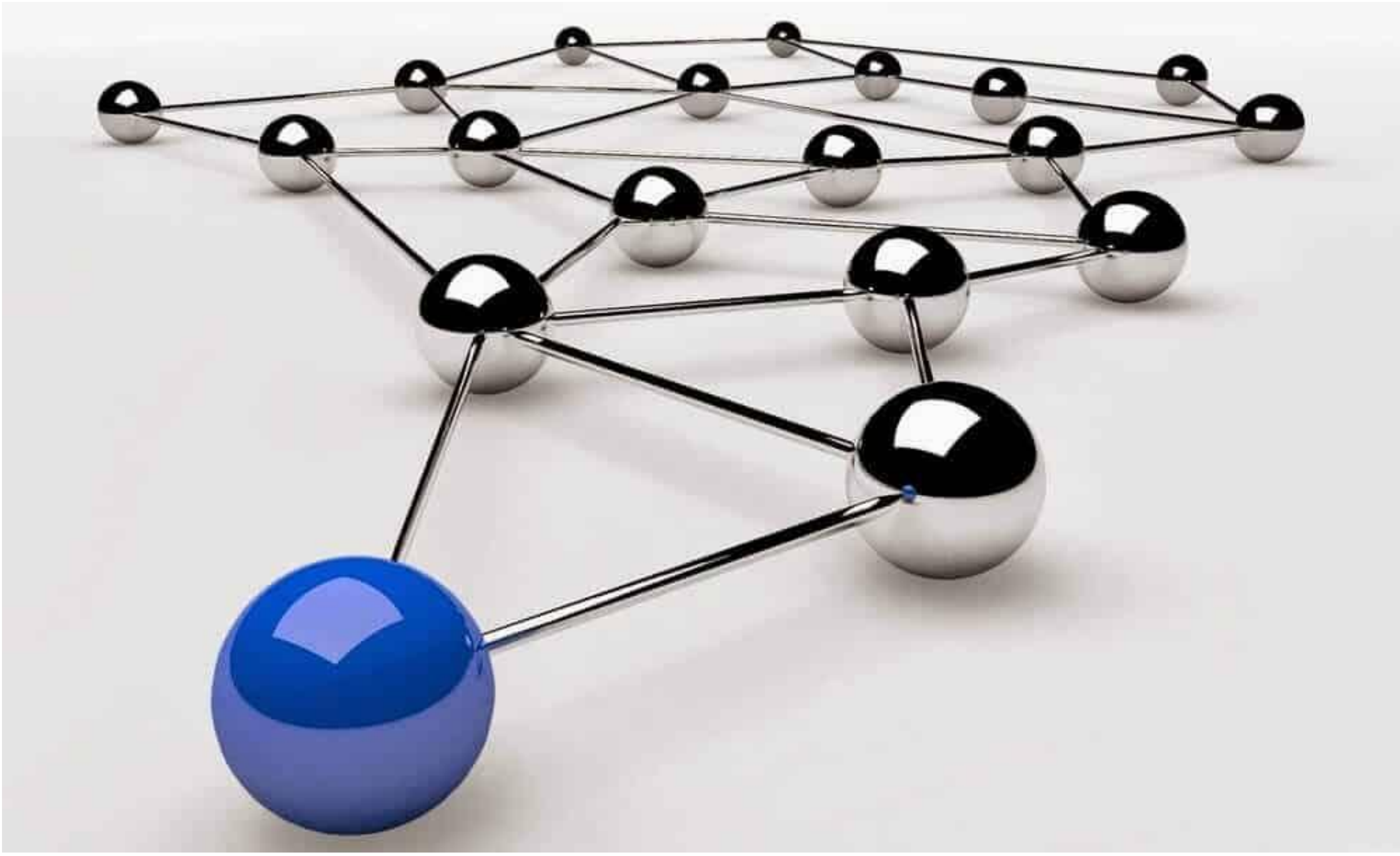
Banking
Chemicals
Consumer Goods
Energy
Financial Services
Food
Healthcare
High Tech
Insurance
Manufacturing
Pharmaceuticals
Professional Services
Real Estate
Retail Trade
Telecom
Transportation
Utilities
Wholesale Trade

MARKET SIZE TRENDS
BTI has tracked the legal market for the past 24 years. Use this data to understand the potential revenue opportunities available in each practice – and how major changes have impacted your firm's ability to be profitable.

BTI CONSULTING GROUP

BTI Practice Outlook 2026

METHODOLOGY



BTI Methodology and Approach

INDEPENDENT, UNBIASED RESEARCH, BASED SOLELY ON CLIENT FEEDBACK

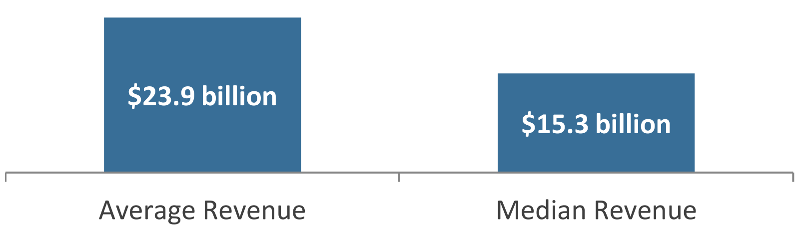
2026 Survey Participant Demographics

Research	More than **320 detailed surveys**
Time Frame	Conducted between **June 2025** and **September 2025**
Incentives	Contributors receive a complimentary report of benchmarks and metrics

Highest-Ranking Legal Decision Makers

- Chief Legal Officer
- General Counsel
- Deputy General Counsel
- Associate General Counsel
- Vice President – Legal
- Senior Counsel

Organizations with Highest Levels of Legal Spending



Representative of more than 15 Industry Segments

- Banking
- Chemicals
- Consumer Goods
- Energy
- Financial Services
- Food & Agricultural
- Healthcare
- High Tech
- Insurance
- Manufacturing
- Pharmaceuticals
- Professional Services
- Retail Trade
- Real Estate
- Telecom
- Transportation
- Utilities
- Wholesale Trade

__BTI Practice Outlook 2026__ is based solely on in-depth telephone interviews with leading legal decision makers. This comprehensive analysis trends data from more than 30,000 corporate counsel client interviews conducted over the span of 25 years.

This research is independent and unbiased – no law firm or organization other than BTI sponsors this study.

Each year, BTI reaches out to a strategically designed group of top legal decision makers at large organizations with $1 billion or more in revenue. We target the decision makers in the industries who spend the most on legal affairs as well as thought leaders and innovative Chief Legal Officers. Our survey also includes Chief Legal Operating Officers and business executives who hire and influence the selection and hiring of law firms.

We grant interviewees confidentiality at the individual and organizational level.

BTI Consulting Group

ABOUT US

What We Do

For over 30 years, we've successfully helped our clients strategically drive revenue, boost performance, attract and retain clients, develop more business in new and existing markets, and create enduring relationships with our data-driven customized programs and solutions tailored to meet each client's specific and unique needs. We examine the market from your client's perspective with a measurable, innovative, and high-impact approach.

From in-depth independent research to one-on-one interviews with C-suite executives, top legal decision makers and market leaders, our expertise and insight will help you understand – as well as benchmark – how clients acquire, manage, and evaluate their professional services providers.

Client Feedback Programs

We help you reveal powerful, defining client insights you simply can't get anywhere else through innovative, world-class feedback.

Business Development Training

We help you and your firm catapult your business development skills, culture, and mindset, fast.

Client Service Excellence

We help you redefine how clients think about you and your firm for the short- and long-term.

Market Research & Insightful Client-Centric Reports

Authoritative, innovative & practical advice from our research. BTI's client service rankings, brand health assessments, market forecasts, and more are the industry gold standard.

Market Research, Expertise & Insights

Authoritative, innovative, and practical advice from our research

Law firms who would otherwise have little insight into corporate counsel hiring decisions, goals, law firm preferences, market positions, and detailed recommendations can now gain access to the same research used by the largest and best-performing firms in the world. The data and insight found in BTI's reports are used to train attorneys, guide business development, inform strategy, and calibrate market trends against firm tactics. In short, you get many of the benefits of a custom study commissioned for your firm, at a fraction of the cost. These insights are proven to drive growth and client retention and protect fees.

Our reports come with a 100% satisfaction guarantee and complete telephone support to help you maximize the value from our publications.

Order today at **bticonsulting.com**

BTI Litigation Outlook 2026

Our 16th BTI Litigation Outlook reveals the turbocharged litigation market is accelerating faster, hitting harder and offering more opportunity for law firms than ever. The *BTI Litigation Outlook 2026* is available now to help you decipher the new market dynamics and seize the opportunity.

Order Now

BTI Client Service A-Team 2025

Long considered the gold standard in measuring client service performance by clients and law firms alike, the *BTI Client Service A-Team 2025* is the only source for measuring client service solely from the client perspective. Now in its 24th year – this is the most important edition ever with more than 350 new, in-depth interviews.

Order Now

BTI Benchmarking Law Firm LinkedIn Performance 2025

LinkedIn is all grown up – is your LinkedIn strategy? *BTI Benchmarking Law Firm LinkedIn Performance 2025* delineates how law firms are performing along 9 key metrics – including rankings of law firms' performance by name – and includes detailed recommendations on improving your position.

Order Now

Questions? Comments?

Michael B. Rynowecer, President

For questions, research inquiries, and information on BTI's client feedback programs, market insight research, seminars, training, or workshops, please contact us via email or by calling **+1 617 439 0333**.

mrynowecer@bticonsulting.com

Visit Us

bticonsulting.com

Subscribe to BTI's Blog

The Mad Clientist

Follow BTI Consulting

Terms of Use

The BTI Consulting Group, Inc.
396 Washington Street, Suite 314
Wellesley, MA 02481
+1 617 439 0333

bticonsulting.com