

November 2015

Living Ratings of Digital Intelligence

Digital Intelligence of the Top 40 law firms with the biggest NYC real estate practices*

A few years ago in the chaos that followed the 2008 financial crisis, when deals came to a near-standstill, New York City law firms were slashing their payrolls and refocusing their practices on bankruptcies and restructurings. Some succeeded, some filed for bankruptcy, then closed, sending lawyers scuttling to rival firms.

Today though, according to New York Real Estate News, “the landscape for real estate lawyers is decidedly better with the boom creating a boatload of legal work from financings to land use issues to development deals.”

Amid this change in fortunes, in this issue of Living Ratings we look at how New York’s leading real estate law firms’ digital communications are keeping pace with this turnaround.

Leading firms are failing their audiences with a sub-optimal digital experience

In Living Ratings’ leaderboard opposite you’ll note that the top five firms in Real Estate News’ top 40 – Rosenberg Estis, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, Proskauer Rose and Greenberg Traurig – are conspicuous either by their absence or by their poor performance. To put it bluntly, when it comes to modern, user-friendly, dynamic websites and social media communications NYC’s leading real estate law firms are way off the pace.

- Rosenberg Estis (Real Estate News No.1) **rated #31/43**
- Fried, Frank (Real Estate News No.2=) **rated #39/43**
- Skadden (Real Estate News No.2=) **rated #33/43**
- Proskauer Rose (Real Estate News No.4) **rated #16/43**
- Greenberg Traurig (Real Estate News No.5) **rated #28/43**

Of the five leading firms in New York Real Estate News’ top 40 only Proskauer Rose (Real Estate News No 4) makes our top 20 (#14=). What’s more Living Ratings’ top 20 league tables for web functionality, web brand content, social media content, social media presence, social media frequency, and social media influence are dominated by firms ranked 20 or lower by Real Estate News.

It’s revealing that only three firms (Bryan Cave, DLA Piper and Goodwin Procter) offer user experiences that we would describe as professional and user-centric or content that we would describe as substantive or engaging. 38 of the 43 firms we rated score less than 70% in our study. Across 43 firms the average score for Digital Intelligence is just 46%.

*Source: The Real Deal. New York Real Estate News. September 1st 2015

RE News rank	Living Ratings	Firm	Score
27=	1	Bryan Cave	85%
29=	2	DLA Piper	75%
20=	3	Goodwin & Procter	67%
17	4=	Dentons	65%
34=	4=	Hogan Lovells	65%
29=	6	Olshan Frome Wolosky	62%
15	7	Schulte Roth & Zabel	59%
23=	8=	Alston & Bird	58%
27=	8=	Katten, Muchin, Rosenman	58%
12=	8=	Kaye Scholer	58%
11	11	Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel	57%
12=	12	Sullivan & Cromwell	56%
18	13	Sidley Austin	55%
16	14=	Paul Hastings	53%
4	14=	Proskauer Rose	53%
40=	14=	Shearman & Sterling	53%
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36=	18=	Adam Leitman Bailey	49%
23=	18=	Hunton & Williams	49%
39	20	Holland & Knight	47%

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To talk with our team about any of the facts in this study or organise a meeting to discuss your digital brand content and social media communications strategy please contact David King in London, Melanie Osborne in Hong Kong or Robert Calvanico in New York.

Why Digital Intelligence matters

At Living Ratings our experience tells us that specific abilities are crucial for law firms' future success. These include:

- Attracting 'best of the best' talent
- Utilising fit-for-purpose technologies to support the business model
- Communicating effectively with both the market and clients.

In this respect websites and social media have a key role to play in helping firms gain and retain an edge. Law firms that fail to invest in fit-for-purpose digital communication face a long and potentially unwinnable game of catch-up.



Attracting 'best of the best' talent



Utilising fit-for-purpose technologies to support the business model



Communicating effectively with both the market and clients

Bryan Cave and DLA Piper win through against mediocre opposition

There's a massive gulf in Digital Intelligence between the two firms that lead Living Ratings' top 20 (Bryan Cave and DLA Piper) and those that rank #3 - #43. It's disappointing to report that our search for Digital Intelligence reveals a great deal of digital negligence. As a group, these 43 NYC real estate law firms may win plaudits for their legal expertise but when it comes to delivering modern, dynamic digital communications the evidence is damning. The majority of websites we rated are little more than online CVs; the bulk of social media activity we analysed is an exercise in self-promotion. Sadly, these firms are nowhere the leading edge of digital communication and are failing completely to differentiate themselves through:

- Client-centric user experience
- Relevant and engaging branded content
- Consistent visual branding
- Clear messaging.

In this respect websites and social media have a key role to play in helping firms gain and retain an edge. Law firms that fail to invest in fit-for-purpose digital communication face a long and potentially unwinnable game of catch-up.



Client-centric user experience



Relevant and engaging branded content



Consistent visual branding



Clear messaging

44% of NYC real estate law firms ignore growing mobile audience

The internet continues to change the way we go about our lives. In the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics¹, in 2015 over three quarters of adults used the internet every day, or almost every day (78%) and a similar proportion (74%) accessed the internet “on the go” (away from home or work).

And according to Informa², in the USA internet connectivity to websites via smartphone went from 18% in 2009 to 64% in 2014. Clearly this rise is set to continue in 2016 and beyond. However, many of NYC’s top real estate law firms are failing to respond to this trend.

- Just 26% of the law firms we rated feature responsive web design in their websites
- 44% of the websites we rated failed Google’s Mobile-Friendly test.

Firms who ignore their mobile audience risk alienating the growing number of people who use their smartphone or hand-held device to browse and research the internet.

¹ ONS: Internet access – households and individuals 2015.

² Source: US Census Bureau.

26%

Just 26% of the law firms we rated feature responsive web design in their websites

44%

Of the websites we rated failed Google’s Mobile-Friendly test.

Key performance indicators NYC’s top real estate law firms’ Digital Intelligence

26%	Offer a fully responsive website
56%	Offer a mobile-friendly website
30%	Take a client-centric approach to structure and content
94%	Have a Twitter or LinkedIn channel
7%	Offer intelligent predictive search functionality
32%	Feature no social media links on their website
74%	Feature dedicated Graduate content
21%	Use info-graphics to enhance technical content
49%	Link their social media to their website
28%	Offer a client app
0%	Responded to a Twitter enquiry about Graduate opportunities

Heroes & villains: Our analyst’s view



Goodwin Procter: Founders Workbench an A+ user experience.
Simpson Thacher: Lovely website...but no social media?
Paul Hastings: Stay connected icon is a shape of things to come.
Bryan Cave: Check out their “Life, Death and Taxes” blog.
Olshan Frome Wolosky: In words and pictures, their clients come first.

On pages 5–7 we’ve highlighted case studies on the three leading firms in our study. We hope they offer useful insight into how outstanding digital functionality, content and social media can enhance any law firm’s corporate communications.



Duval & Stachenfeld: “Our goal is always to “oversatisfy” our clients all of the time, and to “WOW” them every chance we get.” Interesting then that their website doesn’t work on mobile, nor do they offer a single social media channel.
Gibson Dunn: Website design is a triumph of novelty over user experience.
Paul Weiss: Forever defined by their pinstripes?
Goldfarb & Fleece: Web design rooted in ancient history.
Wachtel Missry: Lack of visual engagement is sheer misery.
Willkie, Farr & Gallagher: Cold and unapproachable.

Four digital challenges for real estate law firms

The significant growth of these firms' real estate practices reflects the real estate market boom in NYC. But can the market sustain the recent pace of development? And what happens when there is a downturn? What can these firms do to ensure they are properly equipped to survive and thrive?

Challenge #1: Deliver on the client-first promise and explain the value you offer



In common with many in the financial and professional services sectors, many of the real estate law firms we analysed talk passionately about how clients are their number one priority. "Clients come first" is a familiar mantra that's rarely evidenced in website structure and content. What dominates – in 70% of the firms we rated – is self-centred, 'About Us' promotion. Social media content and messaging is dominated by firms' own achievements, new hires or industry awards.

Real estate law firms need to urgently recognise that websites and social media channels offer new ways for them to explain the services – and the value – they provide. They can play a key role in encouraging clients to voice their aims, aspirations, expectations, and responding to them in a timely and transparent manner.

TIP: Don't just say you're client-centric; prove it.

Challenge #2: Content is a powerful asset; don't neglect it.



Real estate law firms are engaged in a hard fought battle for the brightest and the best talent, and the biggest and the best clients. If their websites, social media, microsites and blogs are the weapons in their armoury, content is the ammunition. Take away the snappy headline and a simple fact remains; for content to be effective it needs to connect with the task at hand and that's to engage, inform and inspire an intelligent and sophisticated audience.

TIP: Audience-centric, creative, engaging and substantive content is a powerful way to unite and enhance a suite of digital communication channels.

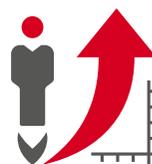
Challenge #3: If you want to attract the brightest and the best, talk to them in their language.



Firms will say they are looking to attract the brightest and the best graduates but on some of the evidence available we question if they really mean it. Dedicated graduate content is non-existent in 36% of the sites we rated. Even where it does exist it's underwhelming; lip-service at best. Remember; this is a digital savvy generation you are talking to.

TIP: An investment in dedicated graduate content is an investment in the future of your firm.

#4: Build for the growing mobile audience



In our new digital world where an image – or a web link – can go around the world in seconds, brand differentiation is key to success. While many of the larger law firms are encumbered by legacy brands, the small and mid-size firms have an opportunity to stand out by taking advantage of new technologies and presenting a nimbler more tech-savvy image to their audience. Few people know that Google actually penalizes non-responsive websites in their mobile search results. A website with responsive web design ability adjusts to fit the actual screen size of the device that people are using to view it. Think of screen content as liquid in a cup or a bottle – the content, the text, titles and the images actually move so that they fit within the size of that specific screen, whether it's a tablet or an iPhone or a Mac or a PC desktop. Responsive web design delivers some very important business benefits too:

- Multi-device adaptation
- Higher customer conversion
- Easy maintenance
- Increases mobile sales leads
- Improved SEO
- Seamless user experience.

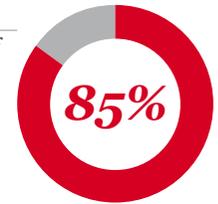
Clearly the arguments in favour of responsive web design go way beyond simple aesthetics. So why are only 26% of leading real estate law firms using it?

#1 Living Ratings Case Study

Bryan Cave

A slick and agile online experience with the mobile audience top of mind.

November 2015
A total score of



www.bryancave.com

As far as user-friendly websites go, Bryan Cave's innovative responsive site is a work of nimble efficiency. Everything from the stylish long scroll home page to its 'Life, Death and Taxes' blog, represents what's new in web design. Everything is beautifully organized, bringing a sense of clarity to the user journey. Content is curated, colour coded and categorised into logical groups; a pleasure in itself for the more OCD users among us. It's a de-cluttered delight.

Bryancave.com is streets ahead of every other one of the 42 firms we rated. It's free from the constraints that tie all its competitors to the past. Clear evidence of its totally client-centric approach are the search bar and menus that take centre stage; "What are you searching for?" is the priority. It caters to the one-click search habits of mobile users who demand a shorter, streamlined process to access content. It's an agile and sophisticated website site that's rich in functionality across desktop, tablet and mobile.

Social media highlights

Bryan Cave's social media presence lacks the style of its website but it's refreshing and heartwarming. It's free from the contrived, glossy 'law-firm-presented-as-dental-surgery' persona that dominates the sector and shows that the firm understands that different channels have different uses and audiences. They don't simply stream identical content across all their channels but treat each one as a discrete communications tool.

Facebook

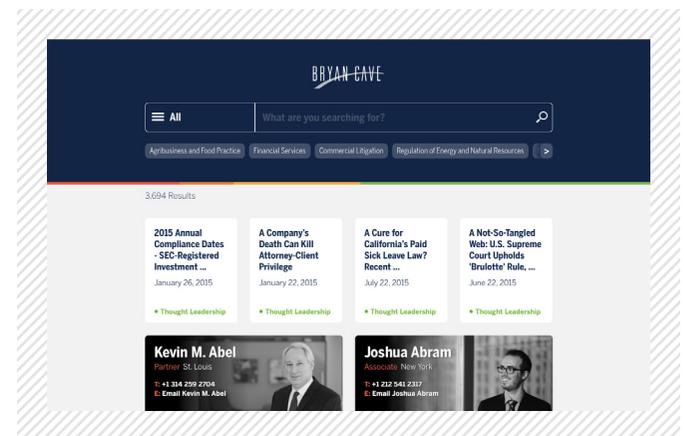
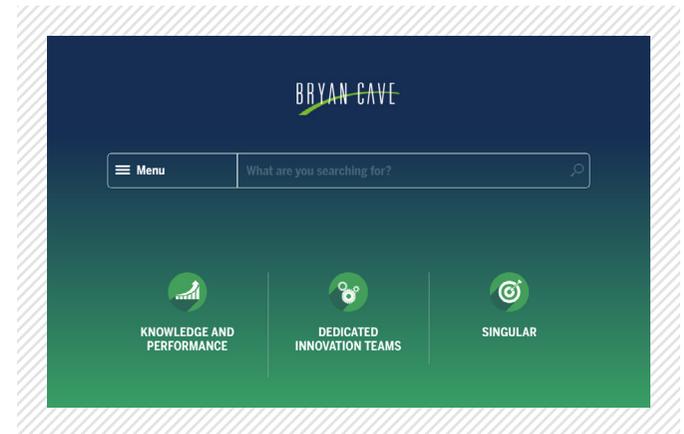
With its community focus, Bryan Cave's Facebook timeline combines the warmth of an old friend's profile with corporate interest and engagement. Rich in photos, videos and event entries – such as "Ace your health", and "Kids help Kids" – it follows the golden rule of communication: show don't tell. The result is a constant feed of honest communication that enables Cave's people-focused culture to shine through.

Twitter

Bryan Cave uses its Twitter channel to distribute bespoke branded content on a surprisingly diverse range of topics. They've created sub-accounts catering for different divisions of their business. Are you a start-up needing support? Their @bc_startup account is your go-to resource. Interested in Bryan Caves' diversity efforts? @DiversityBCLLP has the skinny on loads of initiatives.

LinkedIn

A glance at Bryan Cave's LinkedIn header graphic leaves the user in no doubt what the firm stand for. Colourful core values stand loud and proud, providing a useful context to a stream of useful updates; "Look who's watching what! Whistleblowing in the EU and Data Privacy", and "What the jobs are: New tech and client needs create a new field of legal operations" are just two of the topics covered here. Bryan Cave get social media.



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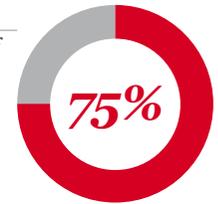
Website:
www.living-group.com

#2 Living Ratings Case Study

DLA Piper

Prioritising and promoting client-centric content.

November 2015
A total score of



www.dlapiper.com

While DLA Piper may not win awards for creativity and state of the art digital innovation, its success is down to three things; visual engagement, careful management of digital real estate and relevant content

Its home page combines stunning photography to accompany the announcement that “DLA Piper launches office in Casablanca” with highly graphic links to a range of client-centric content; “Manufacturing Outlook: Q3”, “How do businesses view human rights?”, “Looking to get up to speed with employment law?” Some impressive responsive functionality enhances the site’s performance too. Users can view long-form articles in a single page which makes for easy reading on a tablet or smartphone. A click on either of the ‘People’, ‘Sectors’ and ‘Services’ sections reveals a menu of one-click options rather than a long and detailed read. This site is all about instant access to relevant content.

However, it needs to be said that although DLA Piper takes second place in our study their Living Ratings score of 75% shows there are opportunities for improvement too. With the inclusion of better typography, more engaging info-graphics and relevant imagery to support some excellent content, it could go from good to great.

Social media highlights

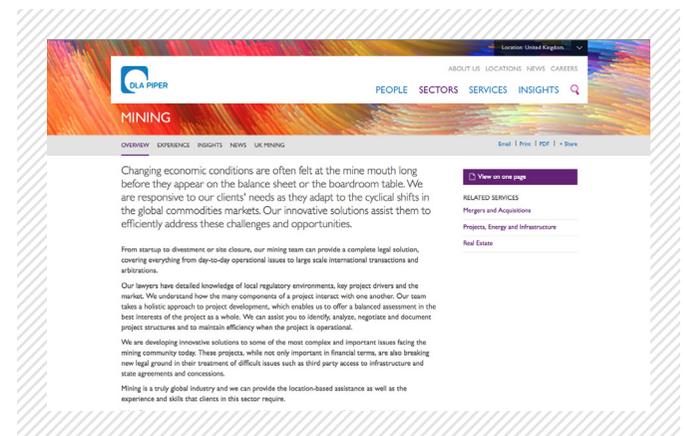
Social media is DLA Piper’s big strength. In fact, they offer the widest range of social media channels – seven in all – of all the law firms we rated; including Instagram, Slideshare and Wechat.

Instagram

DLA Piper is the only firm we rated that employs Instagram as part of its social media strategy. It features stunning photography of the DLA team in action across the globe. Whether it’s a trek through the Simien mountains in Ethiopia, their Aussie team preparing for their next global challenge or a down to earth real estate reception in Munich, they’ve recorded the event with a beautiful photograph. The result is a perception that DLA Piper is a great place to work as part of a truly global team.

Twitter

@DLA_Piper is a source of insight, inspiration and information on the latest topics from the law industry and beyond. Featuring a beautifully graphic header banner and an eclectic variety of stunningly presented content, this is a Twitter stream with eye candy and the must-scroll factor. Photos, videos, podcasts and GIFS keep the user’s eyeballs glued for longer than most.



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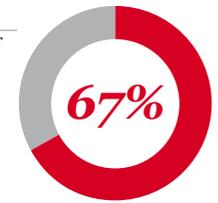
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www.living-group.com

#3 Living Ratings Case Study

Goodwin Procter

Curation, content and creativity.

November 2015
A total score of



www.goodwinprocter.com

Goodwin Procter is nothing if not consistent. In April 2014 in our study "Digital content & social media communication in the Am Law 100" they ranked #3.

At the time we remarked that "Goodwin Procter don't mess around. This website does the simple thing really well." Well it still does and in this respect little has changed in Goodwin Procter's digital space. Its visual branding and design, and approach to web content, are beautifully simple and highly effective. Eighteen months on and Goodwin Procter is still proving its client-first credentials by presenting "Our firm" content in fourth position in the main navigation. In contrast to many it prioritises user access with a directory-based approach where you're just one-click away from drop-down menus of Goodwin's People, Practices and Offices. Extensive alpha lists and a clear, concise homepage sitemap offer total access to detailed and relevant content.

Goodwin Procter's extensive use of video is a big winner; "A solid start for start ups" and "Delivering value from alternative fee arrangements" are escalated to the homepage and make a serious impression. Punchy layouts, bold typography and relevant messaging are big plus points.

Social media highlights

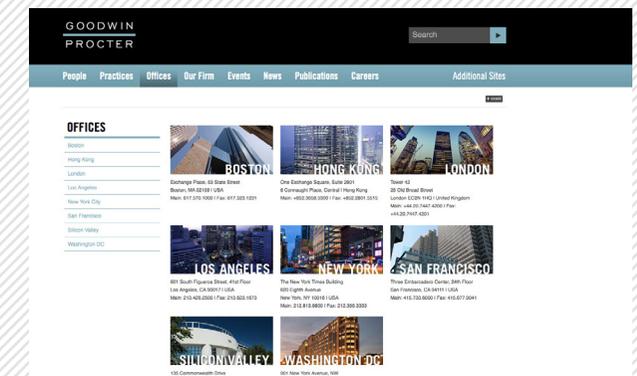
Goodwin Procter's social media is as simple and effective as its website. They combine the three c's of digital communication; curation, content and creativity with aplomb.

Twitter

In a refreshing departure from the highly graphic and conceptual banner images that dominate the sector @goodwinprocter features its people (unsuited, unpretentious) engaging directly with the audience. Although the days we rated featured too many retweets for our liking a scroll through Goodwin's twitter timeline reveals more than enough bespoke and engaging content to justify its leading position: "Could making daylight savings time permanent really reduce crime?"

Facebook

Goodwin Procter's timeline is well produced, easy on the eye and a useful case study on how to use Facebook to promote community, graduate, and corporate content to great effect. If you're a graduate "Discover how our New York Summers escaped the room"; if you're a working mother take note: "Goodwin Procter Named a "Best Law Firm For Women" by Working Mother for Sixth Year In a Row." If you're feeling peckish take a peek; "Celeb Chefs Judge law Firms Cook-Off", there's something for all tastes here.



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Company selection & Living Ratings criteria

Our company selection was defined by New York Real Estate News' top 43 law firms with the biggest NYC real estate practices, published September 1st 2015.

Our research and analysis was undertaken in October 2015. Living Ratings' analysts undertook detailed analysis and ranking of 43 firms using 45 rating criteria across the eight categories listed below.



Website functionality

The quality of search functionality and responsive design. In addition, we apply Google's Mobile-Friendly test to measure the capability of a website to deliver an effective mobile experience.



SSL Certification

Using Qualys™ SSL Labs to grade SSL certification.



Social media presence

The core social media channels a firm is using for connecting and sharing their insight and experience.



Social media brand content

The client-centricity, presentation and originality of social media content and its alignment with a firm's brand.



Web brand content

The client-centricity, presentation and originality of web content and its alignment with a firm's brand.



Twitter frequency

The frequency of a firm's tweets. Varying from daily, weekly to none.



Twitter response

The time taken to respond to a tweeted enquiry about Graduate trainee opportunities.



Social media PRISM

Measuring precision, reach and influence of social media output.



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Living Ratings of Digital Intelligence

Top 20: Digital Intelligence

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29=	2	DLA Piper	75%
20=	3	Goodwin & Procter	67%
17	4=	Dentons	65%
34=	4=	Hogan Lovells	65%
29=	6	Olshan Frome Wolosky	62%
15	7	Schulte Roth & Zabel	59%
23=	8=	Alston & Bird	58%
27=	8=	Katten, Muchin, Rosenman	58%
12=	8=	Kaye Scholer	58%
11	11	Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel	57%
12=	12	Sullivan & Cromwell	56%
18	13	Sidley Austin	55%
16	14=	Paul Hastings	53%
4	14=	Proskauer Rose	53%
40=	14=	Shearman & Sterling	53%
19	17	Dechert	50%
36=	18=	Adam Leitman Bailey	49%
23=	18=	Hunton & Williams	49%
39	20	Holland & Knight	47%

Top 20: Web functionality

RE News rank	Living Ratings	Firm	Score
36=	1=	Adam Leitman Bailey	100%
23=	1=	Alston & Bird	100%
27=	1=	Bryan Cave	100%
29=	1=	DLA Piper	100%
34=	1=	Hogan Lovells	100%
12=	1=	Kaye Scholer	100%
11	1=	Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel	100%
40=	1=	Loeb & Loeb	100%
15	1=	Schulte Roth & Zabel	100%
40=	1=	Shearman & Sterling	100%
18	1=	Sidley Austin	100%
5=	1=	Stroock & Stroock & Lavan	100%
8	13=	Herrick, Feinstein	83%
39	13=	Holland & Knight	83%
27=	13=	Katten, Muchin, Rosenman	83%
29=	13=	Olshan Frome Wolosky	83%
16	13=	Paul Hastings	83%
1	13=	Rosenberg & Estis	83%
12=	13=	Sullivan & Cromwell	83%
42=	13=	Wachtel Missry + 3 others	83%

Top 20: Web brand content

RE News rank	Living Ratings	Firm	Score
17	1	Dentons	100%
27=	2=	Bryan Cave	90%
20=	2=	Goodwin & Procter	90%
23=	2=	Hunton & Williams	90%
26	5	Simpson Thacher & Bartlett	80%
19	6=	Dechert	70%
29=	6=	Olshan Frome Wolosky	70%
29=	8=	DLA Piper	60%
27=	8=	Katten, Muchin, Rosenman	60%
12=	8=	Sullivan & Cromwell	60%
36=	11=	Clifford Chance	50%
12=	11=	Haynes & Boone	50%
34=	11=	Hogan Lovells	50%
12=	11=	Kaye Scholer	50%
11	11=	Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel	50%
4	11=	Proskauer Rose	50%
23=	11=	Seyfarth Shaw	50%
23=	18=	Alston & Bird	40%
16	18=	Paul Hastings	40%
29=	18=	Morrison & Foerster + 4 others	40%

Top 20: Social media presence

RE News rank	Living Ratings	Firm	Score
29=	1	DLA Piper	91%
23=	2=	Alston & Bird	82%
20=	2=	Goodwin & Procter	82%
16	2=	Paul Hastings	82%
29=	5=	Morrison & Foerster	73%
23=	5=	Seyfarth Shaw	73%
40=	5=	Shearman & Sterling	73%
36=	8=	Adam Leitman Bailey	64%
19	8=	Dechert	64%
5=	8=	Greenberg Traurig	64%
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23=	14=	Hunton & Williams	55%
27=	14=	Katten, Muchin, Rosenman	55%
11	14=	Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel	55%
15	14=	Schulte Roth & Zabel + 1 other	55%

Top 20: Social media PRISM

RE News rank	Living Ratings	Firm	Score / 20
29=	1	DLA Piper	19.51
20=	2	Goodwin & Procter	17.81
19	3	Dechert	16.98
36=	4	Clifford Chance	15.62
34=	5	Hogan Lovells	15.60
27=	6	Bryan Cave	14.92
12=	7	Haynes & Boone	14.91
5=	8	Greenberg Traurig	12.72
20=	9	Akerman	12.55
29=	10	Morrison & Foerster	12.08
39	11	Holland & Knight	11.85
23=	12	Seyfarth Shaw	11.74
16	13	Paul Hastings	11.22
15	14	Schulte Roth & Zabel	10.87
4	15	Proskauer Rose	10.85
27=	16	Katten, Muchin, Rosenman	10.44
23=	17	Alston & Bird	10.27
17	18	Dentons	9.89
11	19	Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel	9.65
18	20	Sidley Austin	9.40

Top 20: Twitter frequency

RE News rank	Living Ratings	Firm	Score
20=	1=	Akerman	100%
27=	1=	Bryan Cave	100%
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40=	1=	Shearman & Sterling	100%
18	1=	Sidley Austin	100%
2=	1=	Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom	100%
23=	20=	Alston & Bird + 11 others	40%

Top 20: Social brand content

RE News rank	Living Ratings	Firm	Score
27=	1	Bryan Cave	27%
17	2=	Dentons	24%
20=	2=	Goodwin & Procter	24%
29=	4	DLA Piper	21%
19	5=	Dechert	18%
34=	5=	Hogan Lovells	18%
15	5=	Schulte Roth & Zabel	18%
18	5=	Sidley Austin	18%
2=	5=	Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom	18%
36=	10=	Adam Leitman Bailey	15%
12=	10=	Kaye Scholer	15%
4	10=	Proskauer Rose	15%
23=	10=	Seyfarth Shaw	15%
23=	14=	Alston & Bird	12%
5=	14=	Greenberg Traurig	12%
29=	14=	Olshan Frome Wolosky	12%
40=	14=	Shearman & Sterling	12%
20=	18=	Akerman	9%
39	18=	Holland & Knight	9%
29=	18=	Morrison & Foerster	9%

About Living Ratings

Living Ratings delivers evidence-based insight that enhances our understanding of our specialist sectors.

Living Group specialises in integrated branding and communications

We help clients in the financial, professional services, property and technology sectors to enhance their corporate brands, communications and reputations. Our team integrates industry expertise and insight with award-winning creativity, cutting-edge technology and outstanding client service. The outcome is brand, design, digital and marketing communications that are engaging, relevant and achieve results.

What's your score? Connect with us about planning or enhancing your digital & social media communication.

If you'd like to know how you scored in our study or organise a meeting to discuss how you could benefit from a new website or developing a digital brand content and social media strategy, we'd love to hear from you.

Connect with us about planning or enhancing your digital communication

To talk with our team about your digital brand or content strategy, please contact us:



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