



**KIDD AITKEN**

LEGAL MARKETING

# **Your Best Practice Guide to Chambers and Partners Submissions**

## **HOW TO:**

- // Develop a submissions strategy**
- // Optimise and refine your submissions**
- // Maximise the client feedback process**
- // Achieve your desired and deserved rankings**



## Introduction

At Kidd Aitken we believe that legal directory rankings are the best form of legal marketing that any law firm can have. It elevates your firm. Highlights your specialisms. And catapults the reputations of your Partners.

Rankings act as an important reference point for both your firm and your Partners. How you're perceived externally. How well you're doing. And what you're doing well. They are also usually the first port of call for potential clients looking for representation as well as an important recruitment tool for attracting and retaining new legal talent to your firm.

In a recent survey of GCs conducted by The Legal 500, it was discovered that 69% of the survey sample referred to a legal directory recommendation before instructing a law firm. 77% visited law firm profiles and 74% research individual lawyer profiles.<sup>1</sup>

**No one can argue the importance of legal directory rankings when it comes to attracting new instructions as a law firm.**

In this guide, we will share:

1

**How to create a strategy for your Chambers rankings**

2

**How to write an effective submission**

3

**How to make the most of the client referee process**

By integrating these tips into your own processes, you will begin your journey to reach the rankings that both your firm and your Partners deserve.



## Different directory criteria

Because every directory has different criteria, in this guide we will focus on Chambers and Partners. Some of the steps and practices you will find here are applicable across other directories. We will publish further directory-specific guides in the future.

Chambers and Partners is one of the most prestigious legal directories in the world. Chambers ranks law firms in over 200 jurisdictions. It is clear that achieving a ranking in Chambers – whether as a firm or individual Partner – is a profound achievement. It is a recognition of your expertise and authority in a highly competitive field.

## About Kidd Aitken

We are experts in legal directories. Our Co-Founders, Daniel Kidd and Jacob Aitken, are both former Chambers editors who founded and launched the first editions of the Asia-Pacific and Latin America guides respectively in 2008.

Daniel and Jacob are supported by a 30-strong team, 19 of whom are legal directory specialists who are all either former Chambers, Legal 500 or other major legal directory editors and researchers. A further seven team members are coordinators, managing the crucial client referee process – an important and often tricky part of the submission process.

Together, the team has reviewed tens of thousands of submissions, and know how to craft the perfect legal directory submission. In this guide, we combine our experience and insight to share our best practice as to how you can improve and optimise your Chambers and Partners submissions.



Daniel Kidd



Jacob Aitken

# 1

## Strategise your legal directory submissions

With a defined medium and long-term strategy for your legal directory submissions, you are more likely to rank highly and maintain that ranking in a competitive landscape.

At the same time, an effective short-term strategy helps to understand the limitations of what can be achieved within a research cycle. In doing so, you are aware of the maximum numbers of deals and referees you can include per submissions. Aiding in managing both time and human resource deployed as well as the effectiveness of your submissions. This is particularly relevant for Chambers directories, which have one of the most complex and time-consuming submissions processes.

### How do legal directories make their ranking decisions?

In order to effectively evaluate your strategy and streamline your processes, it's helpful to understand how Chambers makes its ranking decisions.

There is a strong correlation between the number of lawyers ranked in Chambers guides and overall firm rankings. The overall cumulative ranking of your Partners, and the supporting evidence that is submitted, reflects the bench strength and depth of your firm. However, this does not mean that you should submit every Partner in your practice group. We will touch more on this later.

Chambers has its own specific strategy regarding rankings. Rankings are considered across the medium-to-long term as part of their cumulative research process. For both firms and Partners, previous years' research is taken into account as part of the current year's decisions. This is why changes in the directory may take longer than anticipated to come to fruition, a frequent point of frustration for firms and Partners.

This point in particular shows the need for a short, medium and long-term strategy for your Chambers submissions. To plan for the next research cycle but also to plan for how your firm can attain your desired rankings in 3-5 years' time.

### Planning ahead

Your ranking strategy needs to be based on an understanding of Chambers' cumulative approach and internal ranking framework.

It is vital to consider which Partners you put forward for ranking. Selecting the right Partners for submission can be as important as the content of the submissions themselves. Consider your medium and long-term strategy when making this decision, in order to benefit from Chambers' cumulative research strategy.



## TIP

### Ask Chambers for feedback

- You are able to ask for free feedback on a limited number of ranking decisions, depending on the directory. While the information can be limited, it can help to inform your strategy for future research cycles.
- Law firms are also able to pay for detailed reports (Chambers Insight) which include every quote they've received from your referees and peers, as well as other in-depth analysis. Purchasing these reports every 2-3 years can help guide your long-term planning and strategy.





## 2

### Writing a persuasive submission

#### How many Partners should I put forward?

Sometimes less is more. As we previously highlighted, not all eligible Partners should be submitted. Consider which Partners are best placed to represent your firm across different clients and types of work.

It is important to not forget diversity and inclusion when selecting candidates. Ensure that your nominated Partners are representative of the make-up of your firm and be mindful that their submissions are handled with the same amount of care and attention. Chambers has been very proactive in recent years to establish more D&I initiatives and training for editors and researchers to address unconscious bias and gendered language. Chambers saw a 5% increase in female ranked lawyers across the whole of the Asia-Pacific guide from 2016-2021. With 22% of the individual rankings in the 2021 guide held by female practitioners<sup>2</sup>.

For large practice areas, your firm may already have a number of Partners ranked. Pitch two or three strong new nominees to complement those already ranked. Select those who are likely to attract recognition from clients and peers.

Much like the directories and practice areas you select for your medium to long-term strategies, opt for Partners who mirror these strategies long term.

Another key factor in deciding which Partners to pitch in your submission is their market profile and reputation among peers. Chambers will ask other law firms about Partner candidates for new or improved rankings. Select Partners who are likely to attract good feedback from peers at other firms.

**Have a strategy in place, ready to approach your submissions and set goals before the submission process begins.**

**The Kidd Aitken team is well versed in what constitutes a good legal directory submission, for Chambers, Legal 500, ILFR and more.**

There are a number of tips when it comes to crafting the perfect legal directory submission. We will concentrate on:

- What a legal directory researcher wants to read
- Narrative pitches
- Work highlights

#### Capture the attention of your legal directory researcher

Due to the large number of researchers at Chambers and other directories, knowledge of your firm should not be presumed. It is very possible that you may not have the same researcher reviewing your submission year-on-year.

Make certain that you include important and relevant messaging about your firm and the practice in question year-on-year. This ensures that key messages about your firm or the nominated Partner are reinforced. While making sure to still include growth messages, new developments and your response to recent market trends to keep your submission up-to-date.

Regarding length, be concise. Researchers will read hundreds of submissions during a research cycle, so overly long submissions may not get the attention they deserve. At Kidd Aitken, one of the first things we do when reviewing submissions is to cut the length by at least a third.



## Writing a legal directory submission

You should aim to have consistent firm-wide messaging across your various submissions. Depending on the jurisdiction, the same researcher may review many or sometimes all of your submissions. Your firm's tone of voice and messaging needs to come across strongly and distinctly to the researcher. Aim to be instantly recognisable.

Each submission is divided into two parts:

**1** The narrative pitches at firm and individual level.

**2** The work highlights that support those pitches

### Narrative pitches

A narrative pitch introduces a Partner or your firm to the researcher. It should demonstrate your standout attributes and how you differ from your competitors in the practice area. This is your “statement” to which the “evidence” (work highlights) will follow.

Assess every point you make against a sceptical “So what?” evaluation. This helps keep your pitch concise and ensures only statements that add to your pitch are included. Ask yourself:

- Why does this statement matter?
- What does it demonstrate about the firm or Partner?
- How does it bolster your ranking claim?

It is equally important to avoid excessive technical and legal jargon. This may sound counter-intuitive, however focusing on a more human tone creates an easily digestible writing style and pitch. Especially for directory researchers who are often not trained lawyers or sector specialists.

### Work highlights: Select your cases and clients

The work highlights section provides evidence to support the assertions made in your narrative pitch. They become the ‘how?’ to your ‘why?’.

Evaluate the clients and cases that you plan to include before you draft your submission. Ensure that your highlight features a good selection of clients and matter types to demonstrate a rounded experience.

Chambers allows 20 clients and work highlights per submission. Your work highlights should utilise this allowance fully as Chambers expects high-ranking firms to be able to complete a full submission form.

## Writing an effective work highlight

When it comes to writing a work highlight, take a similar approach to your narrative pitch.

- Be as concise as possible and use the same tone of voice as you did in the narrative pitch.
- Only write a sentence or two describing and outlining the factual nature of the matter, including the firm or Partner's role within it.

Then ask yourself the “So what?” question for each matter to ensure it provides value when highlighting your work. Other questions include:

- Is this a real highlight of the practice area?
- What did I/we bring to the table?
- Why was I/were we instructed on this matter in the first place?

## TIP

### Don't assume knowledge

We recommend allocating no more than 150 words per matter. Once you have included all necessary factual detail, use the remainder of the word count to highlight key aspects of each case. There are no set rules about what you need to include. Don't take the researcher's knowledge for granted. Provide insight into the importance of each case and your experience:

- Why were you instructed on the matter?
- What was its significance in the wider market?
- Was it a landmark matter for your client?
- Was it the largest in the market?

By using these tips, you will create a submission that is succinct yet full of value to the Chambers researcher. By checking that all of your content is relevant, the researcher will grasp the context of your submission and how you compare to your competitors.

# 3

## Make the most of the client referee process

The client feedback process is vital to improved rankings. Both for your firm and your nominated Partners. Other directories are not as client feedback-driven, but Chambers places a particularly strong emphasis on this part of the process.

While your submission is focussed on the impressive work of your firm, the feedback process depends on your clients responding in sufficient volume and detail to impress the researcher. However, this does not mean that you have no control. By utilising a similar approach for the referee process as you did for your submissions, you can ensure that client feedback bolsters your rankings.

### Compiling effective referee lists

The first stage is to select referees who support your ranking goals. For Chambers, you are limited to 20 clients per submission. Each should meet the following criteria:

- Well-known and trusted clients. This is your primary consideration. Select clients who you can rely on to provide stellar feedback. Negative feedback should be avoided as it can torpedo your ranking chances.
- Clients you have worked with in the last 12 months. They do not have to directly relate to the cases that you have submitted as evidence. You simply must have worked with them in the chosen practice area within the period specified.
- Clients who can speak to the sophistication and complexity of your work.

It is worth noting that some directories – such as Chambers Latin America – generally want referees to be linked to the matters on the submission. Make sure to clarify your guide's position on this before putting together your client referee list.

Once you have identified your list of 20 referees, you need to obtain their permission to be put forward. Once the Chambers process starts, you will need to remind them to check their inbox for a Chambers email. In our experience, this is often when firms miss out on valuable feedback.

Chambers will give you details regarding the response rate from your clients. If feedback from your clients has been delayed, you can politely remind your referees. It is highly recommended that you use this process to ensure your chosen referees respond within the research window. If they don't, you will have to wait another year until they get another chance.



## TIP

### Tackling unconscious bias

Gaining better representation in directories across all genders is a growing priority for Chambers. Firms can begin this important work at home, within their submissions and client references. Avoid heavily gender-biased references by encouraging your referees to:

- Give an honest portrait of your Partners' key skills and intellectual qualities (not just their personality or organisational traits).
- Read through their reference with an eye for any unconscious bias.
- Ask themselves how they'd like to be described in their role. Would they prefer to be described as being 'nice' to work with or would they hope to be referred to as 'unrivalled legal talent'?



## TIP

### The 3-month policy

This policy can be a challenging part of the submission process. However, it is important to know how to navigate it in order to maximise your referee response rate. Any client referee who has been contacted by Chambers on behalf of any firm in your jurisdiction over the previous three months will not be contacted again. You should therefore avoid putting the same individual forward on more than one referee list. However, it can be helpful to put forward junior referees from within the same organisation who will give similarly helpful feedback to their more senior colleagues.

If possible, avoid listing the same clients as referees for multiple directories. This will only overburden them with multiple requests to provide feedback.

Above all, it is imperative that you meet all Chambers deadlines. Both yourself as the firm, and your clients as referees.

By organising your client list in advance, you will be clear about who to approach and confirm as referees. As they are engaged, you are more likely to receive client feedback in a timely manner. This serves to uphold and reinforce the reputation of your firm and Partners.

## Conclusion

Legal directory submissions, particularly for Chambers and Partners, can be a minefield. As we have highlighted your ranking is not predicated solely on your submission but encompasses a variety of factors:

- Your approach and strategy for your submissions
- Optimising the writing process of your submission
- Maximising your client feedback process

By integrating these practices into your approach to Chambers submissions, not only will you feel more confident about why you are doing it, you will start to reap the benefits earlier. For both the research cycle you are submitting to, and for other guides in the future.

At Kidd Aitken, we love legal directory submissions. We really do. That's why we published this guide to give you an insight into the submission process. We know how complex legal directories can be. Our team has helped over 200 law firms globally since we were founded five years ago. Collectively, we have reviewed tens of thousands of legal directory submissions.

We hope you find this guide to be helpful and that it supports you in aiming for the Chambers rankings you deserve. If you require further advice or a more personalised insight into your submission strategy, please contact us for more information.

### About Us

Kidd Aitken is the world's largest legal directories and awards consultancy. We believe that appearing in the top tiers of legal directory rankings is the best form of marketing any law firm can have. Our international team comprises former editors and researchers from Chambers, Legal 500 and other major legal directories who operate in both US and UK time zones.

We undertake the entire legal directory submission process, significantly easing the burden on firms. In-house marketing teams and Partners are free to redirect their time and resource to other projects. We deliver both first-time and improved rankings for firms of all sizes and sectors in all major directories.





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