

# Differentiation is dead.

Law firms & the search for distinctiveness

Thirteen.Be.Distinctive.

How do law firms market themselves?  
Are the in-house legal community  
impressed? We wanted to find out.

So we looked at the top 200 law firms' values, messaging & positioning. Then we asked in-house lawyers what they think of the pitches & propositions firms put to them.

This is what we **found**.

In their own words. The words & phrases  
clients wish law firms would **stop** using:

Commercial

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We understand your business - when they patently don't

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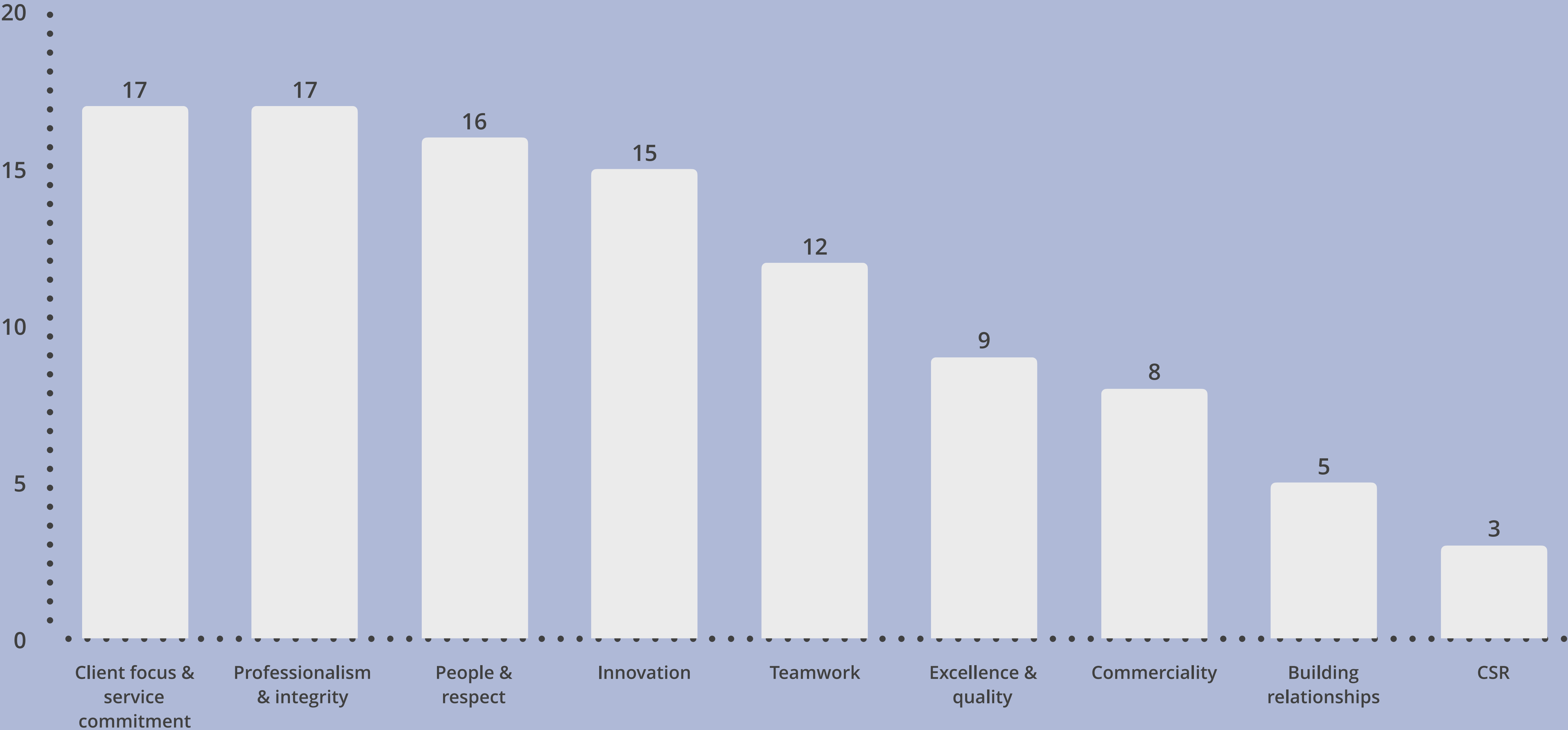
Strategic

Your values should be the DNA of what makes you distinctive. But most law firm values are about the generic. About the behaviours that are the same.

Putting clients first. Accountability.  
Working hard. Meeting client  
expectations. Mutual respect. Treating  
people fairly. Taking responsibility.  
Having integrity. The sort of behaviours  
you expect as **standard**.



# Types of values across all firms - % of all firms



The most common values across the top  
200 law firms, in **descending** order:

**Teamwork**

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**Integrity**

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**Respect**

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**Excellence**

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**Commitment**

So maybe it's not surprising that most firms describe themselves in exactly the same way.

A premier national law firm with offices  
strategically located throughout the  
country. You **know**. You've been there.

# Most common ways law firms describe themselves - % of firms



And it's definitely not surprising that in-house teams aren't impressed by the language that firms use in their pitches.





In their own words. What in-house legal teams want to see **less** of in law firm pitches:

Generic marketing speak

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Standard CVs

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Previous triumphs for other clients

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Boilerplate rhetoric

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Waffle

Next, all law firm marketing is about one  
of **eight** features.

**Client focus &  
service delivery**

**Size & scale**

**Sector &  
commercial  
knowledge**

**Geography**

**How we  
help**

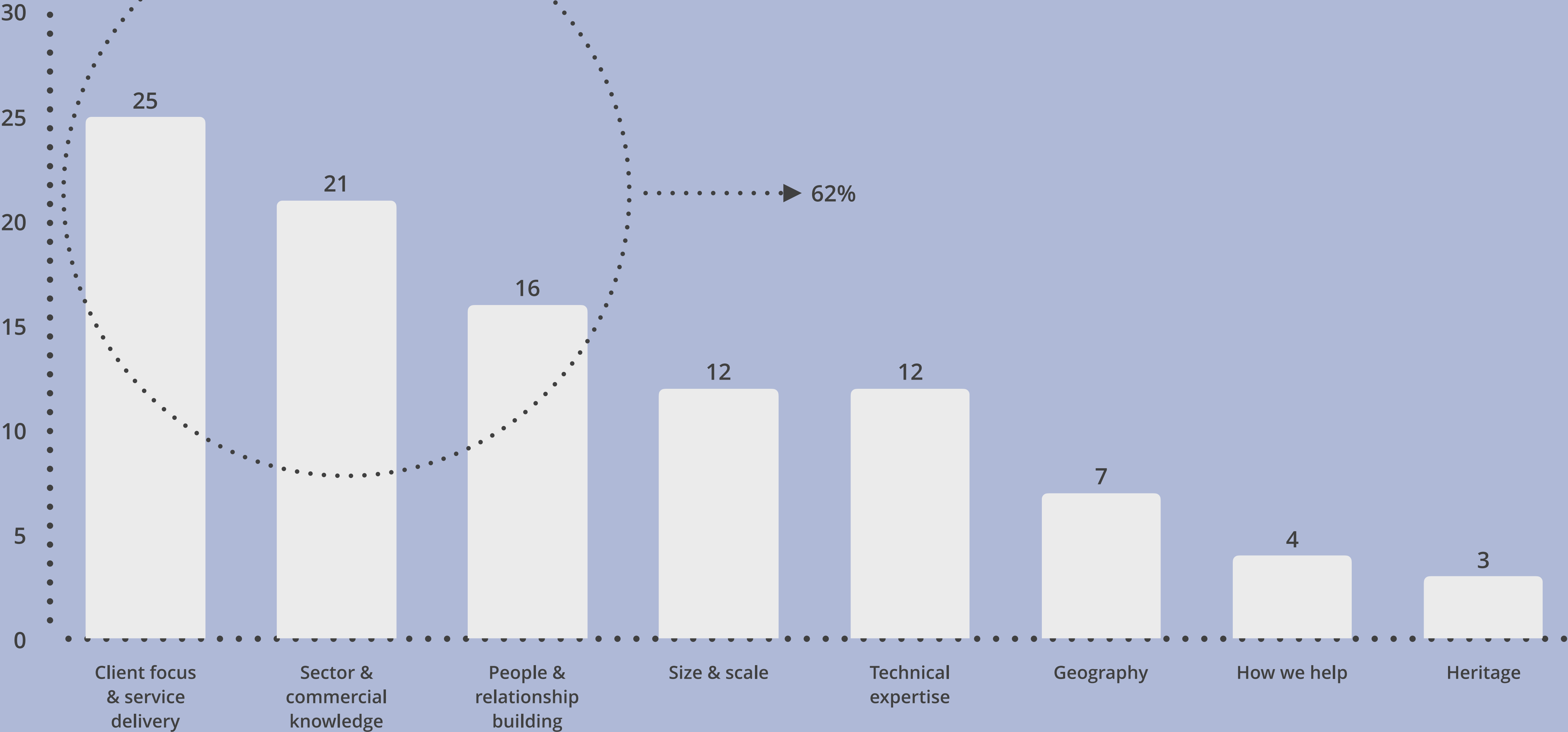
**Heritage**

**Technical  
expertise**

**People &  
relationship  
building**

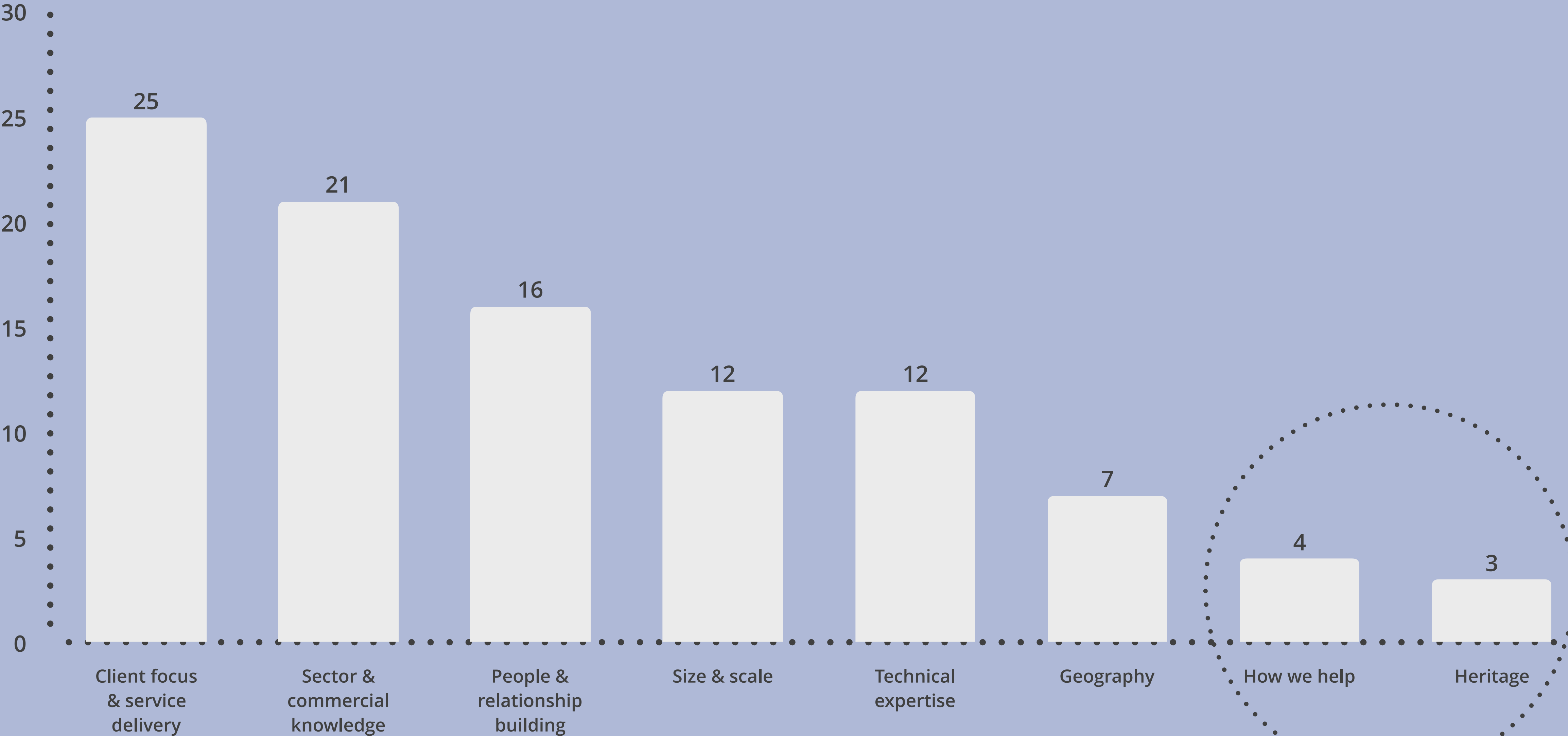
Worryingly, almost two thirds of that marketing is about just three features.

# % of marketing content devoted to each type of message



And firms spend virtually the least amount of time talking about what clients are most interested in - how the firm can help them.

# % of marketing content devoted to each type of message





According to in-house legal teams, firms say pretty much the **same** thing about what makes them **different**.



And what they say isn't that relevant  
either.



In their own words. What in-house legal teams  
want to see **more** of in law firm pitches:

Answering the questions they were actually asked

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Using their experience to give me a solution

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Tailoring

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Specific interest in my business

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Thinking about how an issue affects us specifically

The bad news is that firms rarely present their clients with propositions that are genuinely distinctive vs. the competition.





And clients rarely feel like they're reading  
a pitch that's been written just for them.



The good news is that firms can increase their chances of winning more work if their pitches are more distinctive.



In their own words. What in-house legal teams  
want to see **more** of in law firm pitches:

Genuine value add they can bring to the table

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Focus

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Clarity in commercial propositions

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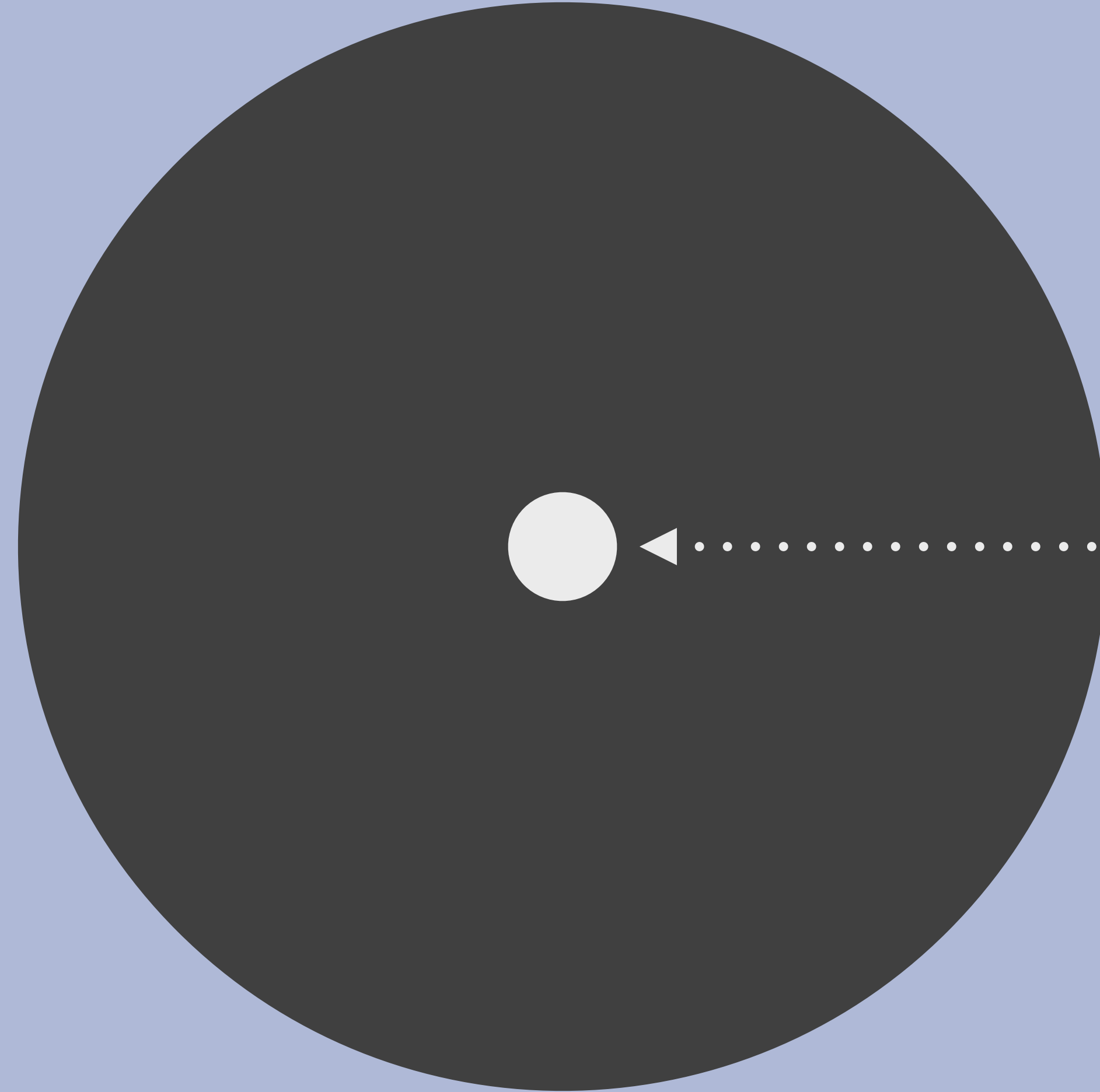
Succinctness

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Evidence they understand what we want

Firms need to remember that 90% of what one firm does is exactly the same as another. But 10% is distinctive.

**Generic**



**Distinctive**



At the moment firms are marketing themselves on the 90% that's generic. On the elements of parity they share with everyone else.

Think of your firm with three layers, like  
this:



Uncover what makes you distinctive &  
everything flows from there.

Your brand essence & positioning

Saying what you do

**Share knowledge** internally so that everyone can talk consistently and passionately about the business

Every bit of content on your **website** should reinforce your distinctiveness, either implicitly or explicitly

**Bids & tenders** need to tell a consistent story about how you're distinctive and what it means to clients

**Marketing materials** need to be consistent with what you say on your website and in your bids & tenders

**Coach people** on how to tell the firm story in a relevant & tailored way for specific sectors, practices and markets

**Thought leadership** should look to the future, share your point of view about key issues & link to your brand essence & positioning

Focus **directory & award submissions** on case studies & examples that support your brand essence & positioning

Doing what you say

Define a set of **values** and behaviours to act as a guide for people so they know what's expected of them

Deliver a great **client & people experience** that's distinctive to you & reflects your brand essence & positioning

Align **performance & reward** to values and behaviours so that people can see a link between the two

Ensure your **visual identity** reflects how your brand essence & positioning through your imagery, logo & colour scheme

Develop a consistent language & **tone of voice** that's used in all of your internal and external materials

Make your **buildings & offices** look consistent & reflect your brand essence - so clients & prospects always know who they're with

Collect regular **client feedback** to check that you're delivering on your promise & doing what you say you will

**Thirteen** gives B2B & professional firms -  
by articulating, communicating &  
demonstrating what makes them  
distinctive. Find out more **here**. You  
know you want to.