

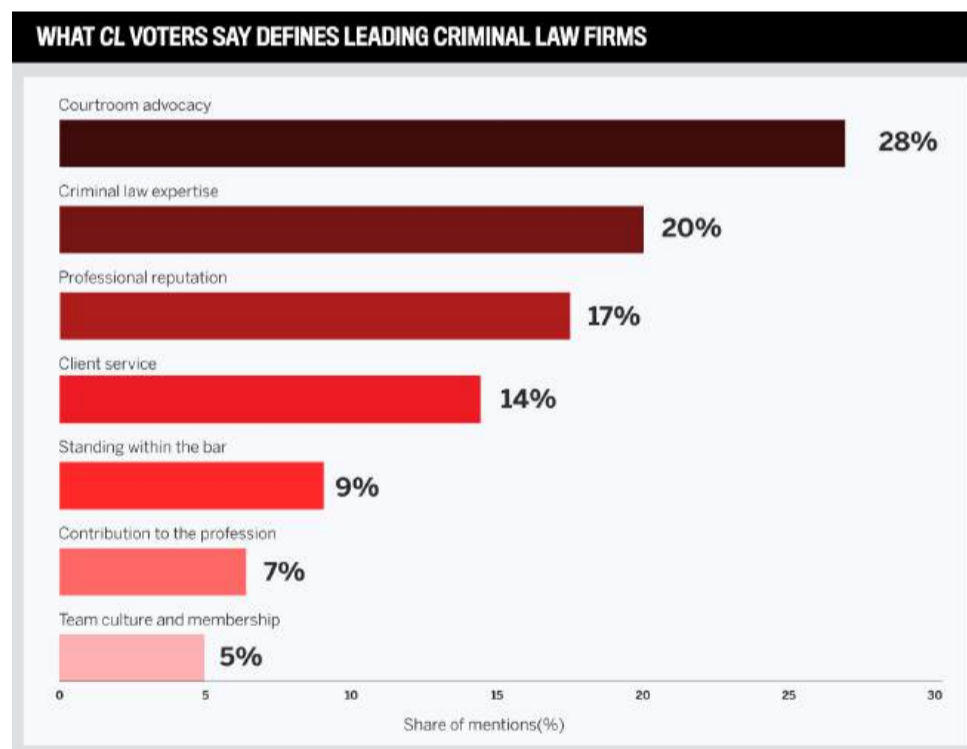


Top Criminal Law Firms in Canada

[Jump to winners](#) | [Jump to methodology](#)

Prepared to defend

When *Canadian Lawyer's* readers weigh up what defines criminal defence excellence, the verdict rests on courtroom advocacy. It's the visible measure of a lawyer's ability and a fundamental factor in how firms earn their reputation.



Criminal defence also occupies a significant place within Canada's legal services sector. According to IBISWorld, law firm revenue was projected to reach [\\$21.4 billion by 2025](#), with steady annual growth.

Legal aid plan expenditures further provide a gauge of the size of criminal defence work. Justice Canada reports that [legal aid plans spent more than \\$1.15 billion in 2023-24](#), with 52 percent tied to criminal matters, representing approximately \$617 million in criminal legal aid work.

Legal aid data also illustrates the volume of criminal defence work moving

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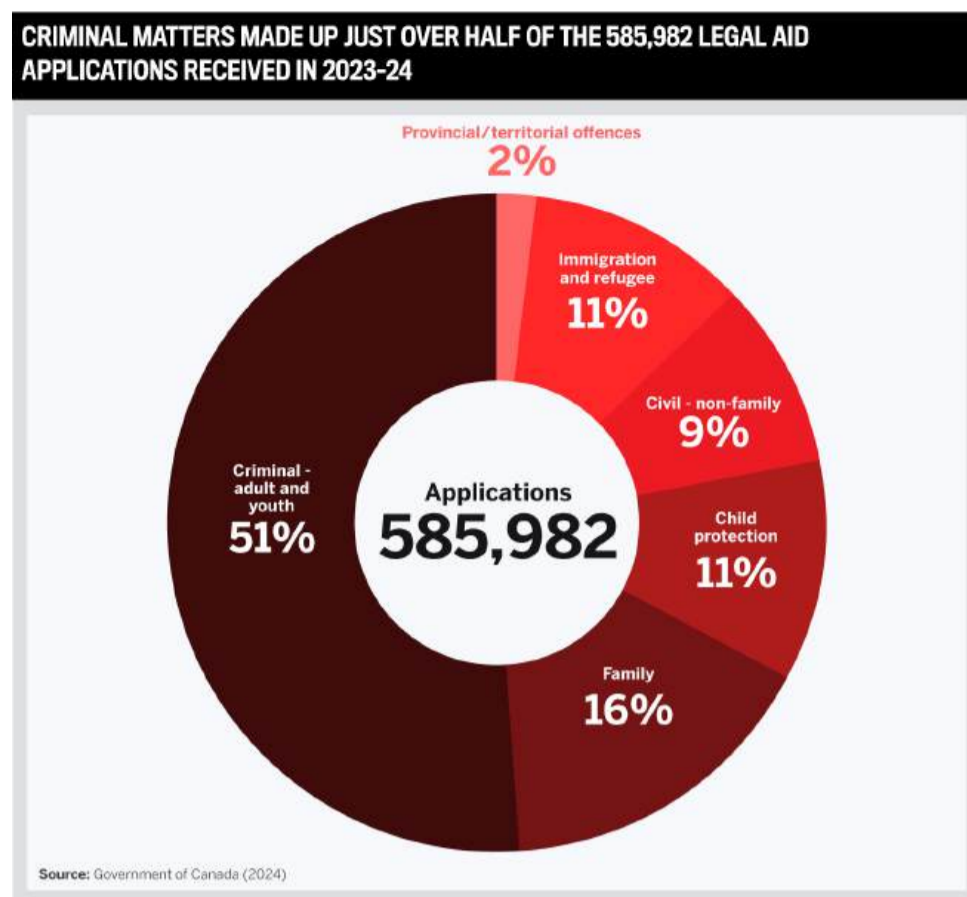
Case Management Built For Growth.

Business Intelligence

175+ Integrations

Book A Demo

applications. Duty counsel provided 1,418,093 assists nationwide in the same year.



CL invited readers to rank the country's top criminal law boutiques from a preliminary list, with the option to nominate additional firms. The process produced 47 nominated firms and 325 votes. The results of the national vote were then combined with input from senior members of the bar and regional considerations.

What wins cases today

Courtroom advocacy was the critical element in measuring criminal defence. It is where arguments are tested and outcomes decided. But across this year's top criminal law firms, advocacy is the result of a meticulous process.

Preparation is at the heart of that approach and runs through every stage of a case. Firms point to detailed knowledge of the record, command of the law, and the development of a strategy that can withstand challenges.



Top Criminal Law Boutique in Canada

[Bottos Law Group](#), based in Edmonton, Alberta, practices exclusively in criminal law and regulatory offences, being involved in many of Alberta's high-profile criminal cases. Founded in 2012, the firm represents clients across serious matters ranging from homicide and sexual assault to fraud, drug offences, and impaired driving, with advocacy that extends from trial courts to appellate work.

"It comes down to four things: knowledge, judgment, preparation, and delivery," says [Dino Bottos, K.C.](#)

He explains that the first three elements lead to the fourth and that they all remain active throughout the course of litigation and trial.

Bottos says effective criminal defence advocacy includes:

- having a **keen awareness of the facts and evidence**, as well as proficiency in the substantive law and the law of evidence related to the matter
- **continuously adjusting** how best to defend the client and determining the most appropriate course of action
- **undertaking extensive preparation**, which is the most time-consuming part of going to trial and may take months or even years
- **delivering the defence strategy** through professional submissions, cross-examinations, and persuasive advocacy to demonstrate to the judge and jury that the client has a credible case and a rational path to acquittal



"Defence lawyers are not fixers. They are integral to maintaining integrity in the criminal justice system"

Dino Bottos
Bottos Law Group

[Daniel Brown Law LLP](#) handles a large volume of trials and appeals while building a national reputation for appellate advocacy. The Toronto-based firm operates a collaborative litigation model that combines trial work with a strong focus on appeals and precedent-setting cases.

"You need preparation, preparation, and preparation. You need to be authoritative and cutting-edge about the law, and you need to know your client and their human story," says partner [Hilary Dudding](#). "The second element is the ability to pivot. You need to be limber and nimble. Things move fast, and the more chaos can become your tool, the more effective you're going to be as an advocate."

WHAT DRIVES CASELOADS

Criminal work in Canada by the numbers



591,856
violent crimes
reported in 2024



215,460
level 1 assaults



87,500
assaults with a
weapon or causing
bodily harm



35,956
level 1 sexual
assaults



13,108
sexual violations
against children

Source: Statistics Canada

She emphasizes mastery of the record combined with adaptability in cases shaped by digital evidence and fast-moving developments as crucial to cutting through the noise and making the strongest possible case.

Beyond preparation, firms point to strategy as the differentiator. Advocacy is shaped through early decisions about how a case is positioned, which issues are advanced, and how risk is managed before a trial ever begins.



“It is the ongoing work of keeping the balance correct between the power of the state and the individual’s rights that keeps our system honest”

Hilary Dudding

Daniel Brown Law LLP

[AGP LLP](#) defends complex criminal cases through trial and appeal, including matters before the Supreme Court of Canada. The Ottawa-based firm has grown from a small defence practice into a seasoned litigation team handling serious and high-profile cases.

“Quite often, the most efficient and effective advocacy is done outside of court, before a trial ever reaches the courtroom door,” says partner [Michael Spratt](#). “Courtroom advocacy is obviously very important, but it’s really the tip of the iceberg.”

This approach treats courtroom advocacy as part of a broader strategy that includes negotiation, issue narrowing, and resolution before trial, creating a reputation that allows the authority to achieve results.

For leading law firms operating in complex or high-stakes matters, advocacy extends further. It requires coordination across multiple fronts, including regulatory exposure, civil liability, and reputational risk.



“Criminal defence lawyers are the only lawyers explicitly referenced in the Constitution. When someone is arrested, they have the right to call a lawyer, and that means a criminal lawyer”

Michael Spratt

AGP LLP

[Narwal Litigation LLP](#) focuses on high-stakes trials and appeals involving criminal, securities, and regulatory matters from its Vancouver office. The firm represents individuals and corporations in complex criminal, regulatory, and white-collar investigations across Canada.

Managing partner [Joven Narwal, K.C.](#), explains that domestic investigations increasingly evolve into multijurisdictional matters and are often shaped by shifting geopolitical priorities and enforcement agendas.

He notes that effective advocacy requires:

- anticipating collateral regulatory and civil consequences
- managing reputational risk
- coordinating parallel domestic proceedings
- navigating cross-border and international enforcement activity
- ensuring that strategic decisions align with a client’s broader vulnerabilities and objectives

“As I have noted publicly in my teaching and writing, these shifts frequently expose inconsistencies and gaps between legislative intent, enforcement ambition, and regulatory capacity that can have profound consequences for clients caught in complex, interjurisdictional investigations,” he says.

This multidimensional advocacy highlights a model where the courtroom is only one element of a wider strategic environment. Even at its most technical, advocacy remains grounded in decision-making. The difference between winning and losing often comes down to choices made under pressure, informed by experience and judgment.



“While the criminal courtroom remains the central arena, it is only one



component of a much broader strategic landscape”

Joven Narwal

Narwal Litigation LLP

[Weisberg Law Criminal Lawyers LLP](#), based in Toronto, defends serious criminal matters across Ontario, including homicide, sexual assault, drug, and fraud cases. The newly minted top-tier firm appears regularly in trial and appellate courts, handling complex matters across the criminal justice system.

“Knowing the law, mastering the facts, and developing persuasive arguments are the base of what is required for effective criminal defence advocacy,” says managing partner [Adam Weisberg](#).

This illustrates a focus on tactics and execution, where preparation and legal knowledge are necessary, but not sufficient on their own.



“We are often quietly helping clients change for the better even in cases where we are going to defend the allegations at trial or an appeal”

Adam Weisberg

Weisberg Law Criminal Lawyers LLP

How credibility is built

Respect in criminal defence is cumulative. It is earned over time through:

- conduct in court
- consistency across cases
- trust that develops between counsel and the bench

“Consistent work in the courts perpetuates success,” says AGP LLP’s Spratt. “Being in court frequently means you’re up to date on case law, refining your cross-examination techniques and submissions, and you become familiar with the people the justice system relies on.”

Repeated appearances matter. Judges learn how counsel prepares, argues, and responds under pressure. Credibility also depends on how cases are managed, clients are advised, and decisions are made when the stakes are highest. It

requires sound judgment and a professional approach that doesn't shift with the circumstances.

Spratt adds, "If you have a reputation where they can rely on you, you can have frank conversations to narrow issues, focus the case, or potentially resolve it. Those relationships and that knowledge can only be built over a career in the courtroom. They can't be manufactured quickly. Longevity and consistency are critical."

Daniel Brown Law's Dudding says consistency requires discipline in how cases are handled, even when the work is difficult or unpopular. That credibility is reinforced when lawyers take on complex matters and maintain professional standards regardless of public perception.

"It also means being the person who is willing to push back when the system gets it wrong," she adds. "If you bring integrity to that role, credibility will follow you."

For firms handling complex litigation, credibility is also tied to contribution. At Narwal Litigation, teaching and advancing legal arguments all play a role in shaping how a lawyer is viewed within the profession.

Narwal has argued cases that have shaped Canadian jurisprudence and teaches complex criminal litigation and white-collar crime at the Peter A. Allard School of Law, a course he created.

"Each year brings new case experiences, what my students call 'war stories,' and new lessons that reinforce a central truth: the risk of wrongful conviction is not confined to violent crime but arises with equal force in white-collar and regulatory prosecutions," Narwal says.

Firm partner [Cheryl D'Sa, K.C.](#), has been elected as a bencher of the Law Society of British Columbia for the past six years and served as the first minority female president of the Vancouver Bar Association. Narwal, also a past president and the first minority male of the association, has served as chair of the Canadian Bar Association British Columbia Criminal Justice Subsection in Vancouver.

At its core, credibility remains tied to consistency. That principle is reflected across firms that appear regularly in serious matters.

Bottos Law Group's Bottos says, "You hopefully build a reputation for being prepared and showing sound and professional judgment in court. The court will then find you credible; your adversary will respect you, and they know that when they're up against you. They'd better have their pencil sharpened because you will certainly be ready to go."

Every interaction contributes to that process. Each case, client, and professional relationship can either strengthen or weaken standing within the bar.

Weisberg Law Criminal Lawyers' Weisberg echoes that reality, saying, "Reputations are not static. Every case and professional contact can either increase or lower your reputation. Credibility is sustained by being responsive to clients, being resourceful, and always working hard on every case."

Managing complexity in modern litigation

Criminal defence finds firms dealing with larger disclosures, digital evidence, and cases that extend across multiple legal and regulatory domains.

The most immediate change for lawyers is the growth of digital evidence. Files now include extensive video, data, and documentation that must be reviewed, organized, and analyzed within tight timelines.

DIGITAL EVIDENCE

The rise of digital cases

■ 41,162 cybercrimes were reported in the first half of 2024, of which:



56%
involved fraud



16%
involved child
pornography
offences



14%
involved harassing
or threatening
behaviour



6%
involved extortion

Source: Statistics Canada

The key skill is identifying what matters within large volumes of disclosure, ensuring critical evidence is not overlooked. At AGP, efficiency and focus define effective case management in data-heavy files.

"It used to be a VHS tape with a minute of grainy security footage. Now we receive hours of high-definition footage from multiple camera angles, including body cameras. We're also given extensive documentation and statements," explains Spratt. "The amount of material to digest, cross-reference, and synthesize is immense. That's an important skill to develop because time is our most precious resource. You don't get second chances. Missing one key piece of evidence in a large disclosure can make the difference between winning and losing."

That expansion is not confined to disclosure. Criminal practice now extends across white-collar matters, cross-border enforcement, and emerging areas involving AI and social media.

[Heather Suttie](#), legal market strategy and management consultant at Suttie, says, "This type of expansion calls for individuals with dedicated knowledge and expertise in a narrow range of particular criminal law fields who have a deep, range-relevant client representation track record, as well as demonstrable courtroom performance when required."

FRAUD AND FINANCIAL CRIME

A growing area of defence work



**2024 fraud rates
increased 92%
since 2014**



**Only 5–10% of
fraud is reported**



**Canadians lost over
\$704 million to fraud
in 2025, up from \$638
million the year prior**

Source: Statistics Canada

Preparation begins earlier, and strategy must account for evidentiary issues well before trial, particularly in areas where legal thresholds are higher.

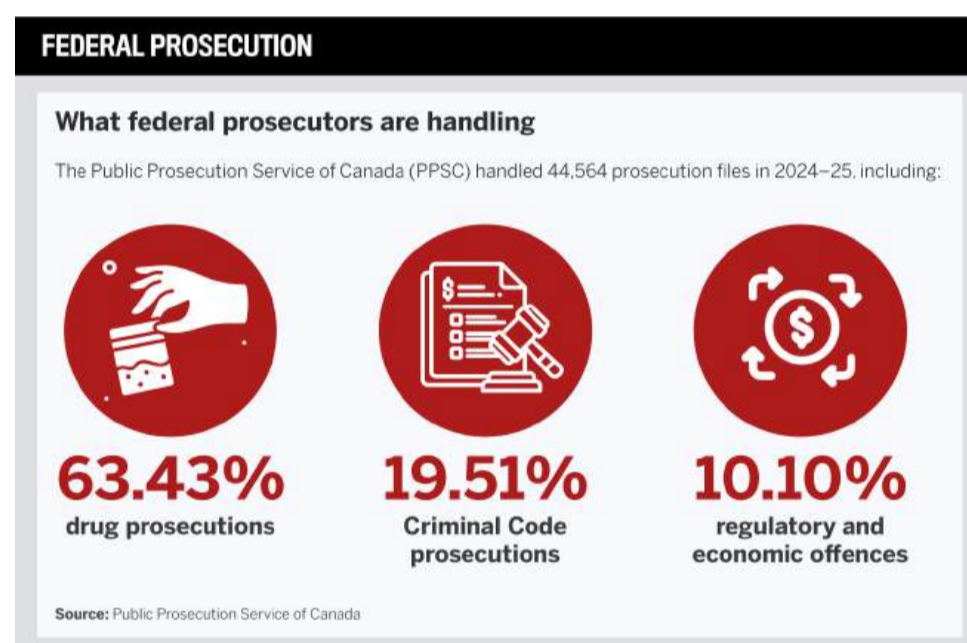
Cases must be understood early, with a strategy developed months in advance to address evidentiary hurdles before trial, explains Bottos. It's an approach that treats early case analysis as essential to trial success.

"For example, in a sexual assault case, which I do a lot of, there is now a lot of restriction on what you may think is usable evidence to assist your client, but that usable evidence may not be usable at all if you don't think through your strategy as to how it's going to be presented in court and be prepared for the legal hurdles you'll have to cross to make that happen," Bottos adds.

The pace of legal change has also accelerated. Top criminal law firms must track developments in areas such as charter litigation and sexual assault while adapting to new evidentiary frameworks.

Daniel Brown Law has responded by investing in knowledge, working collaboratively, and preparing for how the law may evolve as well as where it stands now.

A team-based model strengthens analysis in complex cases, according to Dudding. "The analysis benefits from multiple perspectives before the strategy is set," she says. "That includes the senior litigation partnership, but we also benefit from an extremely strong team of junior lawyers who come from different places and backgrounds. That allows us to handle the most complex litigation with confidence."



For some practices, complexity often involves parallel proceedings, regulatory exposure, and international elements, such as those handled by Narwal Litigation.

"We have built a model designed for this reality," says Narwal. "We are a unique criminal defence firm with a multidisciplinary foundation that enables us to represent clients whose matters do not fit nicely within practice area categories and frequently involve simultaneous proceedings across multiple forums."

That approach includes integrating strategic crisis management and proactive regulatory engagement alongside courtroom advocacy.

Firms are also adapting through internal collaboration and technology, using shared expertise and tools to manage increasingly demanding files, as is the case at Weisberg Law Criminal Lawyers.

"We play to our strengths to benefit our clients," says Weisberg. "We also run internal educational programming to keep our firm members up to date on the latest changes in criminal law."

Technology plays a growing role in that process, particularly in preparing and organizing large volumes of material. Its value, however, depends on how it is applied.

Suttie notes that technology and AI will continue to enable early-stage case preparation. However, law is a people business, with criminal law being one of the few areas where process and resolution affect individuals, their families, and communities.

“Humanity is both our greatest curse and strength, which means using tech tools for what they can provide, balanced against and augmented by human traits of consideration and judgment,” she adds.

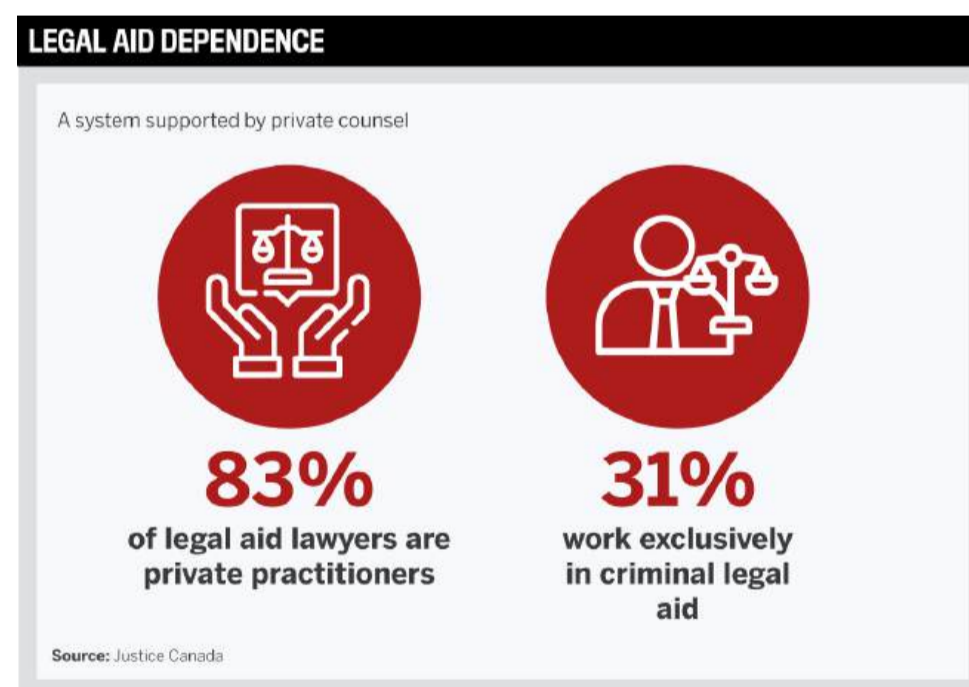
The role is more than it seems

The work of the criminal defence bar is often described in terms of representation. In practice, it is structural to the justice system. Defence counsel ensures that:

- the state meets its burden
- evidence is tested
- legal standards are applied as they are written

This work is continuous and often unseen. Bottos frames the defence bar as a structural safeguard within the justice system, ensuring that state power is tested and outcomes are reached through process.

“You cannot have a fair trial if you do not have a prepared and zealous advocate for the accused, up against the potentially overwhelming power of the state,” he says. “Some people in the public understand that defence lawyers have a role, but I sometimes think they don’t appreciate just how important that role is to maintaining integrity in the entire criminal justice system so that any verdict is fair and just and not simply the product of power imparted by the state against the individual.”



In many cases, defence lawyers operate with fewer resources than the institutions they oppose. The work requires managing administrative demands while maintaining focus on client outcomes.

AGP’s Spratt says that over the past few years, a significant amount of work and cost has been downloaded onto the criminal defence bar.

Firms have taken on many responsibilities while not having the same institutional support in the same way as the Crown, such as access to government resources, investigative teams, or forensic labs.

“We’re used to doing more with less. It can be challenging, but it’s part of the job if you want to achieve results,” Spratt adds. “Ultimately, our role is to hold the state to account and ensure that individual rights and civil liberties are upheld.”

The role also extends beyond individual cases. Daniel Brown Law’s Dudding says members of the criminal defence bar are the people holding the state to account every day.

“If we are not willing to challenge the Crown’s case rigorously in every case, no matter how popular or unpopular the litigant or the cause, constitutional rights start to become theoretical,” she explains. “We sometimes need to take a step back and remember that no individual accused person, case, or complainant stands for the whole system.”

In some practices, the work includes guiding clients through personal and practical challenges in addition to legal defence.

Weisberg says, “Our help might include bettering the client’s insight into their own personal situations and assisting by connecting them with resources to improve their life or address past traumas.”

For Narwal, the role of the defence bar crosses over to managing systemic risk across jurisdictions. In complex matters involving overlapping criminal, regulatory, and civil exposure, defence counsel coordinate strategy across multiple proceedings, anticipate collateral consequences, and align legal decisions with a client’s broader vulnerabilities and objectives.

Conclusion: what the Top Criminal Law Boutiques in Canada understand

Across Canada’s leading criminal law boutiques, a common understanding of effective advocacy has taken shape. It is grounded not only in courtroom skill but also in the strategic, often unseen work that determines how cases are built, managed, and ultimately resolved.

- **The most important advocacy often leaves no record:** Decisions that change the course of a case are frequently made in negotiations, disclosure strategy, and issue selection, not in open court.
- **Reputation functions as a form of leverage:** Credibility does more than build trust; it shapes how cases are managed, how issues are narrowed, and whether resolution is possible.
- **Complexity is no longer an exception:** It defines routine practice, where digital evidence and parallel exposure are part of the file.

Top Criminal Law Firms in Canada



Bottos Law Group



Daniel Brown Law LLP



Narwal Litigation LLP



Neuberger & Partners LLP



Weisberg Law Criminal Lawyers LLP



Addario Law Group LLP





AGP LLP



► **Ottawa and Montreal**

► **Toronto**

► **Western**

Insights

As part of our editorial process, *Canadian Lawyer's* researchers interviewed the subject matter expert below for an independent analysis of this report and its findings.



Heather Suttie

Legal Market Strategy and Management

Consultant

Suttie

Methodology

In January, *Canadian Lawyer* asked readers from across Canada to vote on criminal law boutiques. The readers were asked to rank their top firms from a preliminary list, with a chance to nominate a firm that was not included. To be considered in the vote, firms were required to have the majority of their business come from their work in criminal law.

The quantitative results were combined with input from senior members of the bar and regional diversity considerations.

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