

Legal Sector Jobs Slump, But Firms Are Doing OK

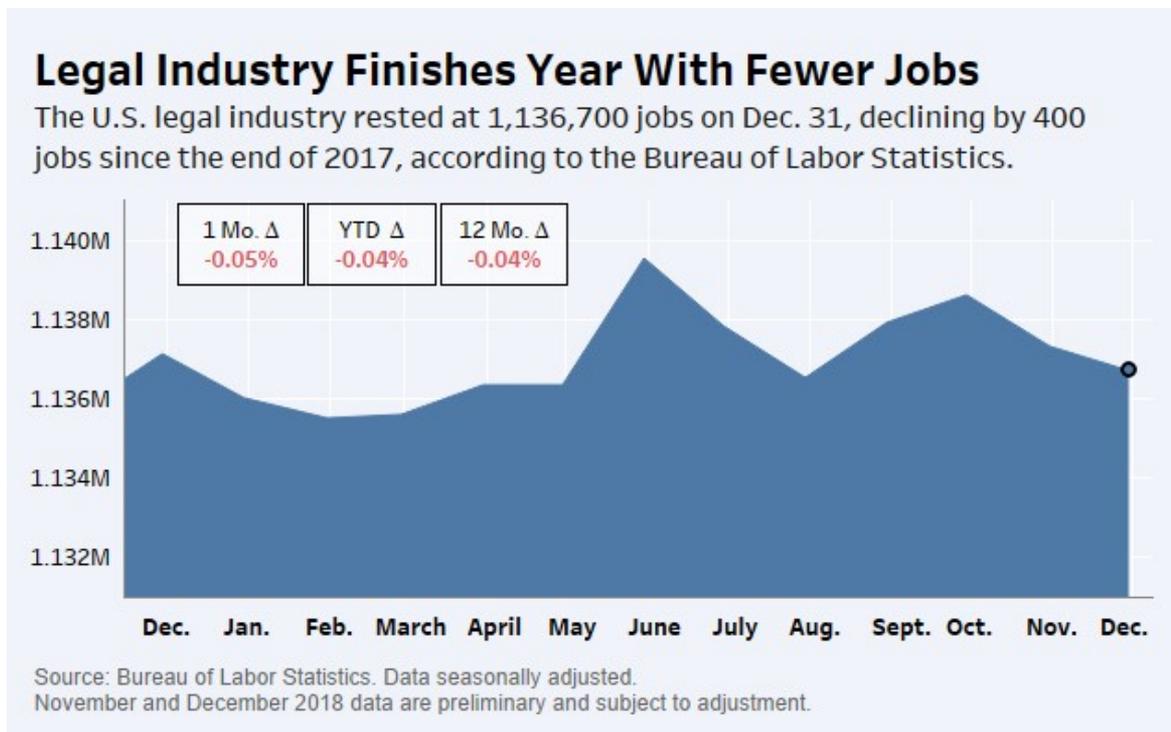
By **Aebra Coe**

Law360 (January 4, 2019, 4:48 PM EST) -- The total number of jobs in the legal sector declined by 1,900 between October and December and fell slightly overall from a year ago, according to preliminary data released Friday by the U.S. Department of Labor, but studies reveal a financially thriving legal industry.

The number of legal sector jobs landed at 1,136,700 at the end of December, according to the DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's 400 jobs fewer in the industry than at the end of 2017 and a decline of nearly 2,000 since October.

Legal industry consultants and legal recruiters said the sluggish numbers are not a major concern, pointing to the ways technology is helping law firms to be more efficient and operate with leaner staffing models, creating fewer jobs while still thriving financially.

"Legal employers now can do so much more — and more efficiently — with fewer people," said Valerie Fontaine of legal recruiting firm SeltzerFontaine. "We attribute much of that to advancing technology. There used to be one administrative assistant per lawyer. Now that same assistant can handle the work of four or more attorneys."



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While the job numbers may seem to point to struggling law firms, studies have shown the opposite to be true.

In December, **a report published** by Citi Private Bank Law Firm Group and Hildebrandt

Consulting found that last year was the U.S. legal industry's best for financial growth in nearly 10 years. According to the report, law firm revenues during the first nine months of 2018 grew on average by 6.3 percent due to hikes in billing rates and, to a lesser degree, demand growth.

While Fontaine says she sees the impact of efficiency and technology primarily on nonlawyer staff, others, like Jaap Bosman of TGO Consulting, say they see the same effect on lawyers.

Bosman pointed to online databases for research instead of print material, e-discovery and e-due-diligence replacing manual methods of performing those tasks, and other tools law firms have implemented to increase efficiency for attorneys.

"At present, efficiency per lawyer is growing faster than the market for legal services as a whole, so as a result fewer lawyers are needed to meet the demand. This trend will continue over the next years," Bosman predicted.

--Additional reporting by Sam Reisman. Editing by Alanna Weissman.