

## Law360 Names Law Firms Of The Year

By **Natalie Rodriguez**

*Law360, New York (December 21, 2014, 8:54 PM ET)* -- Showcasing strength in numbers and the agility needed to serve up top-notch client service on a number of fronts, two law firms secured a combined 18 Law360 Practice Group of the Year awards in 2014 to earn the distinction of Law360's Firms of the Year.

For the second year in a row, Latham & Watkins LLP and Gibson Dunn came out on top, each securing nine Practice Group of the Year awards. In total, Law360 selected 158 winners across 26 practice areas to honor for the Practice Group series.

Latham's wins skewed a bit toward the transactional side, while Gibson Dunn had successes in the litigation categories. But both firms were once again neck-and-neck at the finish line, thanks to strong cross-practice and cross-office relations that ensure they are at the top of any short list for big-ticket cases or deals.

"I think that's very much part of our DNA, and it has been for a very long time. We preach it, we require it, and I would say our compensation system is very much aligned with the core values of collegiality and teamwork," said Ken Doran, chairman and managing partner of Gibson Dunn.

A laser focus on client services drives much of the firms' success.

"Our clients want meaningful services from multiple offices at the same time, whether it be multijurisdictional litigation ... or if it's a cross-border acquisition that touches three or four countries. Our clients are making it pretty clear to us they want teams of lawyers working together," said William H. Voge, who will take over as Latham's global chair and managing partner Jan. 1.

While the two firms' work covers a vast expanse of legal terrain, they met at least once, with Gibson Dunn representing Williams Partners LP and Latham representing Access Midstream Partners LP in an approximately \$50 billion merger that created a new giant in the U.S. midstream energy sector.

Here's a closer look at how the firms stood out on a head-to-head basis:

### **Latham & Watkins**

The firm was a heavyweight in a number of deals-focused practices this year, with several blockbuster private equity and mergers and acquisitions transactions landing on the firm's trophy shelf.

“I think what's really been special for us is the fact that so many of our private equity and M&A transactions have touched multiple countries in which we do business. A lot of cross-border transactions have made a difference this year for Latham,” Voge said.

Many of the deals also underscore the cross-practice camaraderie and entrepreneurial spirit the firm is intent on fostering, according to Voge.

For example, Latham's M&A and life sciences teams came together to defend Allergan Inc. against an unsolicited \$53 billion takeover offer by Valeant Pharmaceuticals International Inc. this year and helped it strike a \$66 billion merger deal with Actavis PLC.

And in recent months, Latham attorneys gained antitrust and competition clearance for WhatsApp's \$21.8 billion sale to Facebook in the U.S. and the EU and finessed The Carlyle Group's complex \$4.15 billion acquisition of Ortho-Clinical Diagnostics, which required structuring closings in 45 jurisdictions across a three-year period.

Latham also scored several high-profile court victories, navigating US Airways Group out of shareholder litigation over its \$11 billion merger with American Airlines and securing dismissals of securities suits against former Wal-Mart Latin America CEO Eduardo Solorzano Morales tied to an alleged bribery scheme.

The firm has been pushing to bolster both its white collar and intellectual property litigation groups, each of which saw several lateral hires this year.

“I look at some of the intellectual property litigation we handled this year, and those are some of the most complicated matters to do for clients, often bringing together trial expertise, intellectual property expertise and sometimes really heavy science or heavy technology,” Voge noted. “That group over the last several years has really shined. ... I enjoy watching their trial victories from one coast to the other.”

Latham's nine Practice Group of the Year victories were in class action, competition, energy, health, intellectual property, life sciences, mergers & acquisitions, private equity and white collar.

### **Gibson Dunn**

Gibson Dunn, whose formidable appellate group scored at least six U.S. Supreme Court wins this year, throws a significant amount of weight behind its litigation-focused practices.

These wins included two high court victories for client NML Capital Ltd. in its long-running effort to collect \$1.8 billion from the Republic of Argentina and an affirmation that three contested recess appointments to the National Labor Relations Board were unconstitutional.

“I think we have without question the best appellate practice in the country, and that's not only a superb Supreme Court practice; we're in the appellate courts across the county. Our appellate team is very much a part of our spectacular litigation team,” Doran said.

Any given case is likely to see members from a range of practices. The complex, large-scale work the firm attracts often means tapping the class action group, but a number of others have also been at the forefront of the numerous big-ticket wins Gibson Dunn raked in this year.

For example, the firm's white collar and securities groups came together to help defeat the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in a long-running **insider trading case** against client Nelson Obus. And its environmental and energy groups secured a major win for long-standing client Chevron Corp. when a court found New York attorney Steven Donziger, his Ecuadorean clients and others liable under the Racketeering Influences and Corrupt Organizations Act for allegedly obtaining a \$19 billion judgment against the energy giant through fraudulent means.

"I think we're well-positioned around the world to handle problems for our multinational clients," Doran said, noting that the firm actively reassesses where resources should be funneled. "We try to stay close to our clients and anticipate their need."

So far, that has helped keep Gibson Dunn at the forefront of energy issues in the U.S., the Gulf and Asia and has helped its intellectual property and securities teams dominate on a coast-to-coast basis, he said.

On the transactional side, too, the Gibson Dunn real estate team has had a far-reaching impact, guiding at least \$20 billion in deals over the past year, including The Related Cos.'s \$1.3 billion acquisition of Time Warner's Manhattan headquarters and Divco West Properties's \$800 million purchase of a Silicon Valley office portfolio.

Gibson Dunn's nine victories were in appellate, class action, employment, energy, environmental, intellectual property, real estate, securities and white collar.

But Doran hopes to see the firm continue its success in delivering high-quality client services and growing its reputation across a myriad of groups.

"Hopefully next year we're talking about even more practice areas where we distinguish ourselves," he said.

### **Honorable Mentions**

Latham and Gibson Dunn weren't the only firms to come in strong on multiple fronts in 2014. Scoring honorable mentions are Kirkland & Ellis LLP, which racked up eight Practice Group of the Year awards; Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP, which came in with seven awards; and Jones Day and Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP, each of which picked up six awards.

--Editing by Kat Laskowski and Chris Yates.