

The 5 Law Firms Corporate Clients Recommend Most

By Michele Gorman

Law360 (August 1, 2018, 5:47 PM EDT) -- Despite hundreds of firms to choose from, five names come out on top when decision makers at large corporations think about the legal shops worth recommending to peers, according to a new report published Wednesday.

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP, Jones Day, Latham & Watkins LLP and Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP gained more unprompted recommendations from legal decision makers than others in the BTI Most Recommended Law Firms report. BTI had asked which firms the participants would suggest to another professional during interviews conducted between Feb. 20 and July 3 with 363 legal decision makers, defined as those who hire firms or have substantial influence over the firms a company employs, representing more than 15 of the largest-spending industries.

“The peer-to-peer recommendation is serious business. Every recommendation is a personal statement about the type of provider — the commitment, service, quality and demeanor — you are willing to entrust to a peer — from whom they would expect the same,” the report says.

An unprompted recommendation is a powerful indicator of future growth potential and sustainable business development because more than half of corporate legal decision makers will hire a firm based on a single, unprompted recommendation from a law professional, according to the report.

Jones Day has been in the most-recommended category for 17 years in a row, and both Akin Gump and Latham have had “very aggressive” client-facing programs in place for several years, said BTI President Michael Rynowecer.

“To have a firm like Jones Day be able to improve their client service every year to stay at the top, that’s impressive,” he said. “You don’t stay as a most-recommended firm by being the same. Clients expect you to improve all the time.”

BTI's Most Recommended Firms

These firms stand out above all others, gaining more recommendations from legal decision makers than other law firms.

- Akin Gump
- Gibson Dunn
- Jones Day
- Latham
- Skadden



Out of 650 core firms serving corporate clients, only 94 got the nod by participants in BTI's research. In addition to the five firms name-dropped by corporate counsel, the report also includes 10 firms that were highly recommended for demonstrating such things as superior client service and a culture driven by a focus on clients.

They are Cadwalader Wickersham & Taft LLP, Cooley LLP, Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP, Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, Dechert LLP, Dentons, Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP, Sidley Austin LLP and Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP.

For 18 years, client service has been the dominant reason legal decision makers recommend their primary firms to a peer, Rynowecer said. This year, they identified superior service nearly five times more than any other single factor.

In other years, value and individual attorneys were two other determinants that legal decision makers gave for reasons they chose specific firms, Rynowecer said.

"You could have the best legal strategy in the world, but your client may not be successful," he said.

The changing definitions of client service over the nearly two decades that BTI has conducted research for the report have surprised Rynowecer. This year, the research reveals that clients' definition of excellent service includes delivering a uniformly high level of service across the firm, having a dedicated team with a clearly accountable leader, understanding matter-specific risks and exposures, inquiring about and delivering on communication preferences, and asking for feedback.

Components of exceptional service identified from the research include meeting client-targeted objectives even as they change and evolve, adding business context through an understanding of a client's business, providing key information and insights to clients before they ask, delivering higher value than expected and bringing certainty in fees.

"When a firm makes client service its top priority, that focus becomes embedded in the culture — as a way of doing and a way of thinking," said Mike Attanasio, Cooley's litigation department chair.

At Cadwalader, attorneys go beyond understanding their clients' business needs and expectations by investing in partnerships, which include shared pro bono projects and community service, said Pat Quinn, managing partner at the firm.

"The deeper our relationships with clients," he said, "the better job we can do serving them."

--Editing by Janice Carter Brown.

Highly Recommended Firms

These firms provide superior client service, demonstrating a culture driven by client focus and understanding clients' business.

- **Cadwalader**
- **Cooley**
- **Cravath**
- **Davis Polk**
- **Debevoise**
- **Dechert**
- **Dentons**
- **Hunton**
- **Sidley**
- **Willkie**