The Firms That Dominated In 2018

By **Sam Reisman**

Law360 (January 13, 2019, 9:04 PM EST) -- Law360's top four Firms of the Year notched a combined 32 Practice Group of the Year awards after successfully securing wins in bet-the-company matters and closing high-profile, big-ticket deals for clients throughout 2018.

Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP led the pack with 11 winning practice areas, with Covington & Burling LLP, Mayer Brown LLP and King & Spalding LLP each tied at seven.

Although the wins are broken down by practice group, firm principals say they are best able to deliver value to their clients by cultivating world-class expertise and working across different groups to develop holistic solutions to complex problems.

"Clients don't think of a problem as an employment problem, per se," Ken Doran, managing partner of Gibson Dunn, said in an interview. "They have a problem and they rely on a firm to put together a team to address that problem. ... The groups that do best are those who are able to very nimbly work with other practice groups to field the very best team."

Congratulations to the 2018 Firms of the Year.

Gibson Dunn

In 2017, Gibson Dunn added an energy-focused group in Houston, and the group's strong showing in 2018 is an early indicator that the investment is paying off.

"We are intent on becoming a very significant player in energy generally," Doran said. "It's not a new area for us, in the sense that we've had a team in place, but the addition of this very strong team in Houston, plus [our] capabilities in London, ties it all together and makes it much more of a global practice."

Among the energy-related transactions Gibson Dunn took the lead on was client Concho Resources Inc.'s $9.5 billion merger in March with RSP Permian Inc.,

Firm of the Year
GIBSON DUNN

» Appellate
» Class Action
» Competition
» Cybersecurity & Privacy
» Employment
» Energy
» Environmental
» Real Estate
» Securities
» Sports
» Transportation

representing the largest transaction for the Permian Basin.

Doran also singled out the appellate group, a winner for Gibson Dunn for the third year in a row, as a core strength for the firm and one area where he believes the firm has built the strongest team in the country.

The appellate team represented the state of New Jersey in a case that led to a Supreme Court decision in May that struck down the federal law that prohibited states from legalizing sports betting, as well as successfully arguing that U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission administrative law judges are "inferior officers" and must be appointed.

A relatively nascent area where the firm has already demonstrated its standing as a go-to firm is its cybersecurity and data privacy practice, in which Gibson Dunn serves as lead counsel on matters for tech heavyweights like Yahoo, Uber and Facebook.

"It's boardroom news when something goes wrong and it requires a firm capable, as we are, to deploy a team of experts with the right expertise in the right places," Doran said of cybersecurity and data privacy. "We're able to ... analyze the problem, to get to the bottom of it, to give proper advice to the client. Some of it is regulatory, a lot of it is just litigation, but all of it is fast moving."

Gibson Dunn won Practice Group of the Year awards in the Appellate, Class Action, Competition, Cybersecurity & Privacy, Employment, Energy, Environmental, Real Estate, Securities, Sports and Transportation categories.

Covington & Burling

Covington & Burling entered the top-ranking firms this year on the strength of its Banking, Government Contracts, Insurance, International Trade, Product Liability, Sports and White Collar groups.

The sports team garnered recognition for its representation of the U.S. Olympics Committee in multiple high-profile matters, including securing a dismissal from the Ninth Circuit in August of a lawsuit that imperiled the U.S. team's ability to raise funds through sponsorship.

In addition to handling traditional sports matters, the group represented both video game companies and professional sports organizations as they developed and launched their own eSports leagues.

The white collar group, too, stood out for its world-class expertise. In February, the group was retained to serve as coordinating counsel for car service behemoth Uber as it faced multiple federal, state and local investigations from an array of government agencies.

Additionally, Covington's white collar team was tapped to co-lead a probe into one of the largest #MeToo scandals to hit corporate America, when CBS Corp. brought in the firm to investigate the alleged misconduct of chairman and CEO Leslie Moonves, as well as

Firm of the Year
COVINGTON
» Banking
» Government Contracts
» Insurance
» International Trade
» Product Liability
» Sports
» White Collar

the culture at large within the network.

Timothy Hester, Covington's chair, told Law360 that the awards were "an affirmation of our clients' trust that we can help them navigate their most complex business problems, deals and disputes."

He continued, "What sets Covington apart — and is borne out by these Practice Group of the Year awards — is our ability to combine the tremendous strength in our litigation, investigations and corporate practices with deep knowledge of policy and policymakers and one of the world's leading regulatory practices."

King & Spalding

King & Spalding, which last appeared as one of Law360's Firms of the Year in 2016, re-entered the top tier this year on the strength of seven Practice Group of the Year wins, in the Automotive, Construction, Environmental, Health, Life Sciences, Product Liability and International Arbitration areas.

"These are certainly core areas for our firm strategy, which is focused on the cross-disciplinary expertise and great teamwork which our clients value," Robert D. Hays, chairman of King & Spalding, said in a statement.

As it has for the past few years, the firm's International Arbitration group won accolades for its work, which included the successful representation of Chevron and its subsidiary, Texaco Petroleum Co., at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in 2018.

Firm of the Year
KING & SPALDING
» Automotive   » Life Sciences
» Construction » Product Liability
» Environmental » International
» Healthcare   Arbitration

In what the firm billed as "a complete victory for our clients," the tribunal **in August** unanimously struck down a $9.5 billion judgment against King & Spalding client Chevron as fraudulent, finding that it "violates international public policy" and "should not be recognized or enforced by the courts of other states."

The tribunal went so far as to say that Chevron's counsel had presented "the most thorough documentary, video, and testimonial proof of fraud ever put before an arbitral tribunal."

Mayer Brown

"Firms like to say that they handle bet-the-company matters, and we certainly do that for our clients," Paul Theiss, chairman of Mayer Brown, said in a recent phone interview. "In 2018, we handled a number of bet-the-industry-type matters," which he defined as "a matter the outcome of which has a profound effect on entire industries and on the companies engaged in that industry."

Firm of the Year
MAYER BROWN
» Consumer   » Food & Beverage
  Protection   » Government
» Cybersecurity   Contracts
  & Privacy   » Project Finance
» Environmental » Telecom

Among those "bet-the-industry" matters where the firm prevailed in 2018, Theiss singled out representations led by the firm's winning Food & Beverage and Consumer Protection groups.

The firm described one recent victory, on behalf of client Foster Poultry Farms, as "a big win for ... the entire poultry industry."

A state judge in May struck down a would-be class action over the allegedly misleading use of the word "humane," saying the definition was "subjective and debated, not objective and scientific."

Cybersecurity was another one of the seven practice groups in which Mayer Brown received honors for 2018. The firm successfully defended clients Bristol-Myers Squibb Co., AT&T Corp. and Citigroup Inc. in separate TCPA class action suits.

Mayer Brown took home Practice Group of the Year awards in the Consumer Protection, Cybersecurity & Privacy, Environmental, Food & Beverage, Government Contracts, Project Finance and Telecommunications categories.

"[A] distinguishing factor of all these practice specialties ... is we take very seriously the need to collaborate with one another, and with our clients across practice area lines and across geographies, so that we can deliver service to our clients the same way they think about their businesses, which is as one seamless enterprise," Theiss said.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller and Katherine Rautenberg.