



GLOBAL DATA REVIEW



100

2021

The guide to the world's
leading data law firms



Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher

Practice profile

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher is a giant of US corporate law, and its privacy, cybersecurity and consumer protection practice is no exception. The firm works for the highest-profile clients on some of the biggest-ticket matters imaginable. Most notably, Gibson Dunn's data practice represented Facebook in its dealings with the Federal Trade Commission that led to a US\$5 billion settlement – the largest-ever penalty related to privacy issues. Many observers considered the deal to be a net win for Facebook, despite the eye-watering payout.

As a US-based firm, much of the practice's expertise comes from an investigations, cybersecurity and litigation perspective, as opposed to the European school of data protection. But with the 2017 hire of Ahmed Baladi, the co-chair of the firm's privacy practice, Gibson Dunn now also has serious European data protection chops. Baladi shares leadership of the practice with former Manhattan assistant US attorney Alexander Southwell. As is Gibson Dunn's style, the data team does not shy away from a fight, having taken on dozens of class action and government enforcement cases – though it offers up a sophisticated advisory service too.

Leading individuals

New York-based **Alexander Southwell** brings serious firepower to Gibson Dunn's data and privacy practice, which he co-chairs. He's a seasoned trial lawyer as well as deft counsellor and has extremely broad horizons as a data, white collar defence and investigations and technology expert. Southwell worked on the gigantic Facebook settlement, alongside **Orin Snyder**, **Joshua Lipshutz** and **Ryan Bergsieker** among others. **Ahmed Baladi** is the firm's face in Europe, having joined from Allen & Overy in 2017. He is an excellent negotiator of technology transactions and has an affinity for fast-developing technology areas such as artificial intelligence and the internet of things. A more recent arrival from Allen & Overy, **Connell O'Neill**, joined Gibson Dunn's Hong Kong office in summer 2020; he's a key contact on technology and privacy matters in the Asia-Pacific region.

Work highlights

The firm's highlight reel must without a doubt begin with the headline-grabbing US\$5 billion settlement between the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Facebook,

which followed an in-depth probe of the company's privacy practices. The settlement, negotiated with the help of Gibson Dunn, formed part of probably the most serious scrutiny ever faced by Facebook, one of the world's biggest collectors and users of personal data. Though the ten-figure penalty attracted many headlines, the settlement was generally considered to be good news for Facebook – with two FTC commissioners even saying so themselves.

Other household name clients include AT&T, Berkshire Hathaway, WhatsApp, Yahoo!, Renault and many more. In an area universally agreed to be growing in strategic importance, Ahmed Baladi advised Platinum Equity Advisors on acquisition-related data advice – most notably in its recent acquisition of PR and marketing company Cision.