

Law360 Names Law Firms Of The Year

By **Max Stendahl**

Law360, New York (January 01, 2014, 10:09 AM ET) -- A pair of legal powerhouses flipped an old adage on its head in 2013 by becoming the masters of all trades, racking up 17 combined Law360 Practice Group of the Year awards to be named Law360's Firms of the Year.

Latham & Watkins LLP and Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP earned the distinction after securing nine and eight Practice Group of the Year awards, respectively. Law360 selected a total of 154 practice groups for the series, to be profiled over the coming weeks.

In a crowded and fiercely competitive legal market, some firms have chosen in recent years to devote resources to a handful practice areas, or to just one, as in the case of boutiques. That kind of laser focus, the thinking goes, can help a firm stand out.

But Latham and Gibson Dunn are among a group of white-shoe law firms that have managed to spread resources across a broad swath of practice areas without sacrificing quality.

Latham, for its part, has grown from less than 600 lawyers in 1994 to more than 2,000 today.

"We're a huge institution with huge expertise," Global Chair and Managing Partner Robert Dell said. "But if someone sits in a silo and does their work for a client, they're not bringing the full value of the firm to bear."

Latham

Mergers and acquisitions, bankruptcy, appellate and securities were just a few of the practice groups that helped catapult Latham to alpha-dog status in 2013.

The firm represented US Airways Group Inc. in its recently consummated megamerger with bankrupt American Airlines Inc. parent AMR Corp., a deal that creates the world's largest airline. As is typical for the firm, Latham provided counsel on several aspects of the tie-up, including bankruptcy, environmental and competition issues.

Indeed, Dell said the firm's success is based in large part on the willingness of attorneys to work across multiple practice areas. That need factors into the firm's hiring strategy, he said.

"Occasionally, we find people that we bring in laterally or who are homegrown, where it's just not part

of their DNA to approach the practice that way, and ultimately they need to move on and find another firm," Dell said.

In a case that sparked national controversy while providing fodder for New York tabloids, Latham lawyers helped the American Beverage Association defeat New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's proposal to ban large sodas. The March 11 ruling was upheld July 30 by a state appeals court. The state's highest court has since agreed to review the case.

And in one of the biggest securities fraud cases of the year, Latham represented billionaire Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban in an insider trading suit by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. A Texas federal jury tossed the case in October, dealing a major setback to the SEC and raising fresh questions about its trial performance. Indeed, experts have said Latham's victory could embolden defense counsel everywhere to more vigorously challenge the SEC's claims in court.

Latham's other winning practice groups for 2013 are competition, project finance, environmental, hospitality and privacy, an impressive list given the increased competition in the legal industry these days.

According to Dell, that pressure has forced Latham and other powerhouse firms to demonstrate value to clients in multiple ways. That has meant altering pricing, performing work faster or making attorneys available 24/7 for "concierge service," he said.

"Clients expect that when they're paying at the top end for their legal services," Dell said.

Gibson Dunn

Gibson Dunn cemented its status as one of the top appellate firms in the country in 2013, but the firm's banner year didn't end there, with outstanding contributions from its employment, class action and media and entertainment practice groups, among others.

Star partner Ted Olson helped to secure a historic victory for same-sex couples when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled June 26 that proponents of California's gay marriage ban, called Proposition 8, didn't have legal standing to appeal a district court ruling invalidating the ban. In another landmark case, the Supreme Court decertified an antitrust action against Gibson Dunn client Comcast Corp., raising the bar for plaintiffs who seek damages as a class.

"We are making law across the country," Gibson Dunn Chairman and Managing Partner Kenneth Doran said.

The firm's employment team stood out by successfully defending Wynn Casino in a tip-pooling class action. And they helped New York City Comptroller John Liu dodge a suit challenging his wage determination for cleaners employed by a private contractor in public schools.

Gibson Dunn also made its celebrity clients happy in 2013. Mark Zuckerberg found plenty to like about the firm after winning a favorable ruling in a suit by Paul Ceglia seeking a 50 percent stake in Facebook. Meanwhile, NFL quarterback Tom Brady, along with the NFL Players Association, can thank Gibson Dunn for blocking a \$150 million suit by retired players stemming from the league's contentious labor dispute.

Like Latham, Gibson Dunn often handled a range of matters for the same client, forcing its attorneys to

work across practice group boundaries. Comcast was an entertainment industry client for whom the firm performed antitrust, class action and other services, Doran noted.

"That's an example of a single client who turned to us for some of its toughest problems that touch a number of boxes," he said.

Gibson Dunn's other winning practice groups are competition, real estate, bankruptcy and intellectual property.

Honorable Mention

Latham and Gibson Dunn weren't the only firms to win multiple Practice Group of the Year awards in 2013. Five firms, each with six awards, earned a spot on the Honorable Mention list:

Jones Day
Kirkland & Ellis LLP
Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP
Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP
Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP

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