

10 Boutiques Giving Big Firms A Run For Their Money

By **Andrew McIntyre**

Law360, New York (September 30, 2014, 3:18 PM ET) -- Large firms are increasingly faced with various forces pushing against their model, and boutiques — whether small- or mid-size, specializing in one area or offering a wide spectrum of services — have become particularly attractive to clients, given their lower billing rates, analysts say.

While many such firms have found their niche by specializing in complex litigation, some boutiques have been successful by carving out expertise on white collar, employment, real estate, intellectual property, banking, international trade and financial services matters.

Here, Law360 looks at 10 such boutiques that analysts say are competing for a share of the work with big firms.

Adduci Mastriani & Schaumberg LLP

Adduci Mastriani & Schaumberg, a Washington, D.C.-based firm, has been successful by sticking to one area: the U.S. International Trade Commission.

The firm has focused its energy on growing that single practice and attracting high-caliber clients in that field, and the strategy's paid off, analysts say.

"The firm is widely known as among the best in the world for the strength of their Section 337 ITC practice," said Kent Zimmermann, a Chicago-based member of search firm Zeughauser Group LLC. "They don't try to spend their time and money growing a long list of areas like many firms do. They've instead narrowed their focus. The old saying 'there's riches in niches' applies. That is key to their success."

Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott LLP

With offices in Chicago and Denver, Bartlit Beck has found its niche in complex litigation, building its firm by keeping its focus narrow, analysts say.

"The firm is widely known for being a go-to for bet-the-company, complex litigation," Zimmermann said. "Bartlit has an unparalleled track record of success and [is] worthy of being litigation boutique of the year every year, year in and year out."

Earlier this year, the firm assumed representation of a Tyco International Ltd. subsidiary shortly before a

retrial of a case in which a prior jury had said the company failed to detect burglars who looted and burned down a warehouse. Plaintiffs claimed damages of more than \$50 million, but Bartlit managed to achieve \$2.75 million in theft-related damages for the plaintiffs, and no fire damages.

Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod LLP

Bilzin Sumberg, which operates out of a single office in Miami, has flourished by building a firm that has tapped into the myriad real estate work in the city as well as focusing on litigation work.

"They built a strong transactional and litigation practice mix with a big real estate practice, which in Miami has been very important and attractive," said Peter Zeughauser, the founder of Zeughauser Group. "They've had very disciplined management. John Sumberg, he's one of the more talented leader types that I've come across."

Bilzin Sumberg recently represented the Miami Dolphins and the owners of Sun Life Stadium in discussions with Miami-Dade County that resulted in a \$350 million stadium upgrade project.

Bird Marella Boxer Wolpert Nessim Dooks Lincenberg & Rhow PC

Practicing exclusively in civil and criminal litigation out of a single office in Los Angeles, Bird Marella has become one of the country's preeminent boutique litigation firms, analysts say.

While the firm handles its share of commercial litigation, it has carved out its niche by taking on some of the most complex white-collar matters, said Lyndon Parker of Jd Search Advisors LLC.

"Their reputation in the white-collar arena is very strong. They are one of the few boutiques around that would label themselves that way," Parker said. "There are not a lot of places like Bird Marella. They really are at the top of the heap."

Gary S. Lincenberg, one of the firm's heavy hitters in white-collar litigation, has tried dozens of cases and argued dozens of appeals, and has represented some of the nation's largest corporations, including Northrop Grumman Corp. and Hewlett-Packard Co.

Buchalter Nemer PLC

Buchalter Nemer, which has three offices in California and an office in Scottsdale, Arizona, has done well from the beginning by tapping into the financial services sector and keeping rates lower than those of big-firm competitors. Alongside supreme management from the top, this has helped the firm flourish, analysts say.

"They've built a very strong plan of succession. ... A plan of succession that allowed for participation by all," Parker said. "There's nothing more important than that for a boutique that's competing with big firms."

Buchalter Nemer says it has one of the West Coast's largest banking and finance practice groups. The firm has also had success corralling middle-market clients and has expanded to take on matters outside financial services, including real estate, labor and employment, litigation, and aerospace.

BuckleySandler LLP

Andrew L. Sandler and others left Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP in 2009 — amid the depths of the recession — to start their own firm, and in just five years, BuckleySandler has become a major financial regulatory player. The firm now has offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C., and recently opened up shop in London.

"It's the firm environment that they have that makes it attractive. They offer the opportunity to work from home on some days. It's a very relaxed environment culturally," said Katy Anderman, a recruiter at BCG Attorney Search Inc. in Washington, D.C. "It's very competitive in terms of hiring standards. They're very protective of their culture."

That unique culture, in tandem with very strict recruiting standards and providing associates with plenty of key matters early on, has helped BuckleySandler become a major player in the financial regulatory space, analysts say.

The firm is currently handling more than 20 U.S. Department of Justice and Office of Inspector General matters that have potential False Claims Act implications, and has been involved in more than 30 Consumer Financial Protection Bureau matters over the past 12 months.

Desmarais LLP

John M. Desmarais, who was formerly in the intellectual property practice group at Kirkland & Ellis LLP, left that firm to start his own shop and has since built a litigation firm that takes on high-profile complex matters, often focusing on technology disputes.

"I think the reason he's had success is he has significant client contacts," Anderman said. "He's also run a firm before. He has a great reputation in the legal community."

Desmarais has built the firm not only by having a large book of business, but also by recruiting marquee lawyers to join the firm, analysts say.

Recently, the firm helped plaintiff-side client Boston Scientific Corp. win more than \$42 million.

Fisch Sigler LLP

Intellectual property trial firm Fisch Sigler — which has offices in San Jose, California; New York; and Washington, D.C. — has carved out a niche, thanks in part to the experience of Alan M. Fisch.

Fisch's experience in the courtroom, as well as his savvy management and fee arrangements skills, has helped position to take on major intellectual property trial matters, analysts say.

"He's a very successful big case trial lawyer for patent litigation. Trial experience is worth a lot," Zeughauser said. "Somehow, what a lot of lawyers think is impossible comes naturally to him."

Among the firm's recent matters are defense wins for Gap Inc. and Barnes & Noble Inc. in trials in which plaintiffs had sought \$34.5 million and \$72 million, respectively.

Payne & Fears LLP

Payne & Fears, which has three locations in California and offices in Las Vegas and Salt Lake City, has built itself as a regional employment firm able to handle complex matters at rates lower than big firms, analysts say.

"When they first went out, they offered services compared to [Paul Hastings LLP] ... at a lower rate and with more creative fee arrangements," Zeughauser said. "What I noticed over time was they became an attractive destination for high-quality people who didn't want to be in at a big firm."

Through disciplined hiring, the firm has continued to be able to staff client matters with lawyers who have the same credentials as those of lawyers at big firms, Zeughauser said.

The firm last month won summary judgment for its client in a New Jersey state court whistleblower case.

Pircher Nichols & Meeks

Pircher Nichols & Meeks has carved out its niche in the real estate world, strategically tapping into both the Southern California and Midwest markets near its offices in Los Angeles and Chicago. Analysts say that while the firm has expanded to take on litigation over the years, the firm has largely stuck to real estate, its bread and butter.

"They've really played to their strength in the real estate arena," said Sandy Lechtick, president of legal search firm Esquire Inc., who added that he's seen the firm recently move back more towards the real estate transactional side. "They haven't tried to be all things to all people. They've had a really good client base over the years."

Analysts say Leo J. Pircher has over the years effectively managed the firm, which hasn't grown significantly or tried to take on too wide a scope of matters — all keys to the firm's success. The firm counts some of the nation's largest real estate investment trusts, pension funds and equity funds among its clients.

--Editing by Katherine Rautenberg and Patricia K. Cole.
