

The 9 Firms GCs Can't Stop Talking About

By **Vin Gurrieri**

Law360, New York (April 22, 2015, 6:38 PM ET) -- A general counsel's direct word-of-mouth endorsement of a law firm can be a powerful deciding factor for companies in choosing legal counsel, and only a select few firms have earned a place at the forefront of general counsels' minds, according to a new report.

Since legal decision makers at top companies will often hire a new service provider based on a single, unprompted recommendation from a peer, strong endorsements can go a long way in helping a law firm obtain new work, according to the BTI Brand Elite 2015 report from The BTI Consulting Group (Wellesley, Mass.).

The report named Alston & Bird LLP, Foley & Lardner LLP, Jones Day, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Littler Mendelson PC, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, Seyfarth Shaw LLP, Sidley Austin LLP and Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP as the firms that in-house counsel most often have on the tip of their tongues when they make recommendations.

Because firms often have a hard time differentiating themselves in the eyes of clients that work with an average of 36 to 45 firms daily, corporate counsel looking for a firm will often rely on the word of a trusted peer who suggests a particular firm, according to BTI President Michael B. Rynowecer.

"Sixty percent of executives will hire a firm based on the recommendation of a peer," Rynowecer said. "Because a recommendation is so trusted among peers, it drives business [for law firms]."

Each of the nine honorees also earned spots on the report's list of the 26 most elite law firm brand rankings, which drew on a range of market awareness factors, including value, best choices for bet-the-company work and client service.

As an advantage of receiving frequent recommendations, law firms can grow their businesses while focusing less time and energy on marketing themselves to prospective clients, according to Rynowecer.

Of the factors that drive corporate counsel to recommend particular law firms, superior client service tops the list, with nearly 55 percent of respondents to BTI's survey citing that as their primary reason for determining whether a firm has earned a recommendation.

In the eyes of general counsel, superior client service consists of putting the client's needs first, understanding the client's business, being responsive, delivering high value and achieving the client's targeted goals.

Rynowecer noted that many law firm partners often neglect to give clients regular updates on pending matters without being prompted, either because they are burdened by the daily pressures of billable hours or because they incorrectly perceive that clients already know the status of their issues.

Meanwhile, about 30 percent of the in-house counsel surveyed by BTI cited a firm's expertise as the main factor in doling out a recommendation.

Also listed in BTI Brand Elite report are the most frequently short-listed firms — core firms that clients turn to first when a new need arises.

The report names as such firms Baker & McKenzie LLP, Covington & Burling LLP, Faegre Baker Daniels, Foley & Lardner LLP, Gibson Dunn, Greenberg Traurig LLP, Hogan Lovells, Jones Day, Kirkland & Ellis, Latham & Watkins LLP, Littler Mendelson, Mayer Brown LLP, McGuireWoods LLP, Morgan Lewis, Norton Rose Fulbright, Sidley Austin and Skadden.

This group consists of primary and secondary providers of legal services to clients and accounts for more than 80 percent of a client's spending on outside counsel.

BTI's report was based on nearly 650 confidential interviews with legal decision makers conducted over a two-year period beginning in March 2013 to gauge which law firms stood out in a variety of categories. Represented companies had an average revenue of \$17.5 billion and a median revenue of \$4.5 billion.

--Editing by Kat Laskowski.