

# EDGE *Roundtable*

In each issue of the Edge International Review, we pose a “big picture” question of significance to our clients and the legal marketplace generally, and ask our partners to supply answers. This edition’s question is:

**Trans-oceanic law firm mergers, legal process outsourcing companies, and the economic momentum of China and India are making the legal marketplace truly globalized. What global trends and developments affecting lawyers do you see emerging in 2011-12?**



Here are some of our responses.



“To the credit of the broader legal profession, I have seen a much greater comfort level among law firms to consider mergers (or at least alliances), outsourcing in various forms, and involvement in China and India as viable and sometimes strategically essential options. There is a new dynamism in play and I see this continuing.

“These trends have important brand implications. Whether firms are geographically located or aligned in particular markets, particularly the (emerging) Indian and (emerged) Chinese markets, can be critically important to growing or existing global legal brands. Clients and potential clients will sometimes judge brands on this basis alone. This can only evolve even faster in future.”

– Sean Larkan, Sydney



“New global legal economic engines undoubtedly will foster sophisticated structures, processes, and metrics for rationalizing operations across offices, cities, countries and global economic regions.

“But these innovative structures will not necessarily produce effective cross-cultural collaboration — either within an organization or between globally dispersed lawyers and clients. They tend to be assembled without much concern for the human factors that inspire trust (or not), for cohesive organizational cultures, or for assuring that unprecedented power is shared

skillfully among people who do not regularly interact personally.

“At the human level, I foresee a Babel of escalating power struggles, turf wars, and escalating cross-cultural communication gaps.”

– *Doug Richardson, Philadelphia*

“**K**eeping in mind the ways in which most Indian law firms are managed and operated today, a key development would be the introduction of systems and workflow processes like project management that are already common in other organizations.

“This would upgrade the productivity of each lawyer, whether a firm leader or simply a firm member. Consistency across the spectrum of firm activities would also improve; for example, HR is a well-managed activity, but the completion of time sheets remains a regular bone of contention.”

– *Juhi Garg, Delhi*



“**I**’m tempted to cite the relentless advance of technology as a means of both producing and delivering legal work, as well as macro-economic trends that will especially affect the U.S. and European markets, as 2011’s biggest story.

“But I can’t think that any development will have more long-term significance than the October 6, 2011 activation of the Alternative Business Structure (ABS) provisions of the U.K.’s *Legal Services Act*. The flow of non-lawyer equity capital, ownership and influence into the legal marketplace (and into non-firm vehicles especially) through ABSs will change the underlying rules and assumptions of this marketplace for the balance of the decade. It’s the law’s Big Bang, and global firms in particular must be ready for it.”

– *Jordan Furlong, Ottawa*



**T**he managing partner of a client firm sent me a link to the New York Times article titled “Armies of Expensive Lawyers, Replaced by Cheaper Software” (March 4, 2011). What sounded like science fiction five years ago is now widely accepted. Corporations are driving down their legal spends, so law firms that can adapt will have a distinct competitive advantage. I predict that 2011 will be a year when the luddite law firms will insist that these trends are temporary and will go away as soon as the problems surface. The most progressive law firms are busy training their people to craft alternative fee proposals, engage in legal project management, and actually raise these issues with clients before the clients have to do so themselves.

– *Gerry Riskin, Anguilla*

