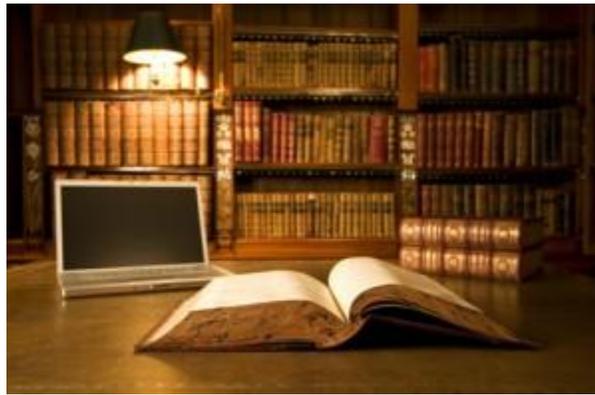


## The Winner's Circle: Best Legal Departments of 2011

Posted by [Martha Newman, J.D., PCC, TopLawyerCoach, LLC](#) • May 24, 2011

### *Corporate Counsel Names its Top 3*



The list of this year's [Best Legal Departments](#) is out. These are coveted spots, but choosing them was quite a challenge for Corporate Counsel.

They solicited nominations from legal departments around the country, gleaning information on things like:

- **Internal operations.**
- **Litigation strategy.**
- **Outside firm management.**
- **Use of technology.**
- **Diversity efforts.**
- **Pro bono programs.**

Competition was fierce, but Corporate Counsel was able to find a common thread among their honorees: A certain spark, an audacity that sets them apart from everyone else.

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## Here are the Best Legal Departments of 2011 named by Corporate Counsel.

### [The Winner: Google](#)

*[The following is an excerpt.]*

The company's lawyers often find themselves in the thick of it-before, during, and after "disruptions." And you might expect them to sound a little upset, since they have to deal with the sometimes messy consequences. But they, too, seem to relish rattling the barricades.

Many of their cases are cutting-edge. "Bleeding-edge," an in-house lawyer amends. They test the limits of laws perpetually lagging behind new technology. Can advertisers use trademarked terms in Google ads? Can Google scan and make available copyrighted but out-of-print books? Is the company liable if results of its search engine direct users to counterfeit or pirated products? These are just a few of the questions that courts-and Google's lawyers-have been grappling with.

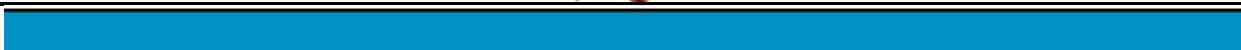
It's an exciting time to be Google's general counsel, says Kent Walker. They win a lot of cases that define the boundaries of the law. The biggest was the summary judgment last June in which a judge ruled that Google's YouTube was not liable for the posting of Viacom's video clips. "We lose some," Walker adds, "as we did today," referring to the decision by another judge rejecting the Book Search settlement Google had reached with the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers. The ruling leaves years of legal work in limbo.

The company has only been around for a dozen years, so the lawyers aren't exactly encumbered by tradition. They're trying to craft approaches of their own, says Walker, sitting in a conference room near his office -- er, make that desk. There are no offices. The renovation of their building that Walker ordered last year for the law department was part of an "open style" in hierarchy and architecture. "We don't have an open-door policy," he explains. "We have a no-door policy."

And they reach decisions by consensus, abetted by a multitude of inviting spaces where lawyers are encouraged to congregate -- including a library reading room with a virtual fireplace. "Sometimes there's an advantage to having a scrum," says Walker, "where a whole group of people come together on these issues." And it's also -- are you ready for this? -- fun.

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## **Finalist: UPS**

*[The following is an excerpt.]*

The in-house lawyers recently helped in restructuring the largest business unit, which handles small packages. The lawyers took part in selecting employees for the new operating units. During the downsizing, they also drafted employee agreements and helped design and implement a special program to aid eligible workers.

## **Finalist: Wellpoint**

*[The following is an excerpt.]*

One reason may be that WellPoint clearly goes out of its way to secure the best talent. Cannon says that a key to the legal department's success is that he surrounds himself with the best and the brightest-wherever he may find them. Only ten of the company's 97 lawyers work in its Indianapolis headquarters. The rest are spread across 28 different offices.

The dispersal of WellPoint's lawyers is at least partly intentional. Since health insurance has been largely regulated at the state level, the company has found it beneficial to have lawyers on the ground in the states in which it operates. Its lawyers are also spread out because of the numerous mergers and acquisitions that the company has undertaken over the years.

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