

Double Vision: Evolving Perspectives on Law Firms

By Pamela Woldow, Esq.
Edge International US, LLC



If the legal profession is indeed driving toward a “new normal,” it has not yet resolved which road it will take. On one hand, the Goliaths continue to bulk up, and there clearly is a lot of life left in the Big-Bigger-BiggestLaw model.

2010 was a dormant year for mergers, but in 2011 the big fellas are reshaping the landscape through a plethora of mergers producing numerous offices and ever-larger footprints. The formula seems clear: create big, impressive edifices supported by humongo global platforms that justify – and compel – rate increases.

In short: old formula, done large. Big firms with a Big Brand.

Heading down the other fork is an expanding array of Davids sharpening their stones. Etherized and virtualized, some utterly devoid of bricks and mortar, these firms emphasize their nimbleness and cast their out-of-the-box value propositions by making a positive statement of what they are *not*: Big. Traditional. Hierarchical. Expensive.

But don't equate that with unsophisticated or inexperienced. A review of the professional backgrounds in the "David" firms reveals top-notch talent, one of the reasons so many [companies](#) are comfortable [moving legal work](#) to them.

We see three types of Davids. Some maintain office space but disdain hourly-billing in favor of value-based or alternative fee arrangements, some eschew bricks and mortar in favor of virtual operation, and some do both. These avant-garders will never take the big dogs down – they are outnumbered and outgunned – but they are launching surgical strikes that are taking big bites out of the behemoths.



Perhaps best known among the smaller, nimbler “David” firms that continue to lease office space but have tossed hourly billing to the curb are:

[Bartlit & Beck](#)
[Bunker Law Group](#)
[Donesky Law Firm](#)
[Exemplar Law Partners](#)

[Raymond & Bennett](#)
[Shepherd Law Group](#)
[Summit Law Group](#)
[Traverse Legal](#)
[Valorem Law Group](#)

Other firms have migrated into the digital ethersphere, happily forsaking bricks and mortar for totally virtual operations. Among them:

[Axiom](#)

[Clearspire](#)

[Ernst & Riley](#)

[FSB Fisher Broyles](#)

[Halebury](#)

[Keystone Law](#)

[Rimon Law Group](#)

[Scomo](#)

[Texas Wills & Trusts](#)

[Virtual Law Partners](#)

And there's a subset that have done both – no bricks and no billable hours:

[Bespoke Law](#)

[Kimbrow Legal Services](#)

[Maryland Family Lawyer](#)

[Natoli- Lapin](#)

In listing these firms, we are neither endorsing them nor, while admitting a fondness for innovators, even suggesting that precision strikes will ultimately prevail over carpet bombing; generally this is not direct *mano a mano* warfare. David has sharp aim whereas Goliath has big stones.

But the legal marketplace battlefield is certainly changing, leaving an inevitable question: *where will these trends leave the middle market firms?* In an upcoming post, we will hear from a few middle market firms on their strategies to walk the tightrope between national/global footprints and virtual firms that can beat them on price.

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