

## 10 Firms Back In GCs' Good Graces

By **Jeff Overley**

*Law360, New York (December 03, 2012, 7:27 PM ET)* -- Ten law firms that tumbled off the throne reserved for corporate counsel's most beloved legal allies have reclaimed their princely positions, and an 11th firm has ascended to the cream-of-the-crop list for the first time, according to a new survey.

Among the 10 firms, Mayer Brown LLP (No. 2) and McGuireWoods LLP (No. 4) made the most notable returns to glory, thoroughly wowing general counsel and landing near the peak of the Client Service 30 in the 2013 BTI Client Services A-Team report, published by The BTI Consulting Group Inc. (Wellesley, Mass.).

Employment law heavyweight Jackson Lewis LLP (No. 11), meanwhile, made its premier appearance on the all-star lineup, propelled by high marks on its ability to deliver super-sized value.

The Client Service 30, compiled from a survey of 240 corporate counsel at large and Fortune 1000 clients, represent the shiniest stars in a universe of 650 core law firms, half of which were nominated for superior client services. Compared with their counterparts, members of the Client Service 30 scored at least four times better and as much as 15 times better.

In the case of Mayer Brown, which had been absent from the list for two years, there was improvement in all 17 categories the survey examined, an across-the-board feat no other firm achieved. In five of those categories — client focus, innovation, value, quality and unprompted communication — Mayer Brown earned the highest possible marks.

“The firm has really made a firmwide effort to try to develop deeper and more institutionalized understanding of their clients and what they want, and also what excellent client service is,” BTI President Michael Rynowecer said.

Paul Theiss, chairman of Mayer Brown, told Law360 that the glowing feedback is vindication of the firm's decision to view client relationships as a “two-way street.”

“What the [survey] results signify is that all of our partners have bought into that,” he said.

In some instances, that means being receptive to the need for alternative fee arrangements in an age of shriveled legal budgets at major corporations, Theiss said. In addition, it means proactively keeping the client in the loop instead of merely responding when needed.

“Clients really appreciate when their [attorneys] are thinking of them 24/7 and won't hesitate to pick up the phone to communicate with them, and [won't] wait to pick up the phone and be given an assignment,” Theiss said.

McGuireWoods climbed back to the Client Service 30 after being away for three years, fueled by many of the same attributes — client focus and value — that were key to Mayer Brown's return and to which the survey gives special weight.

Rynowecer credited McGuireWoods' soaring prestige to “a big client outreach program where they go out to get to know their clients better.” In addition, he said both McGuireWoods and Mayer Brown brought aboard new chief marketing officers in recent years, which might have contributed to their rising stock.

Jackson Lewis' debut on the Client Service 30 was driven by its superlative value; Rynowecer described the firm's officials as “unmatched in their aggressiveness in finding a fee structure that works for their clients.”

“Clients said that was kind of the marquee issue for them,” Rynowecer said.

Patrick Vaccaro, managing partner of Jackson Lewis, told Law360 that the firm has for decades embraced novel compensation arrangements, such as open-ended retainers and fee caps. More recently, Jackson Lewis “has been moving as much as we can away from the traditional hourly rate model” in a nod to the certainty and flexibility that corporate counsel crave, Vaccaro said.

“Alternative fee arrangements are the wave of the future. If you're not willing to be flexible enough to meet the client's needs, then you're not going to work,” Vaccaro said. “We know we're not the only game in town. We have to be very responsive to what the client wants.”

Firms that didn't retain their spots on the Client Service 30 weren't slacking off so much as failing to get better, according to Rynowecer, who suggested that bodes well for corporate clients that want the most for their money.

“If you stay the same or don't keep up with the best performers, you're falling behind,” Rynowecer said. “They were — almost all of them — bumped by high performers. So you have the makings of a truly competitive marketplace.”

--Editing by Andrew Park.