

New York's Best Midsize Firms Take Varied Paths to Success

Are midsize law firms the Rodney Dangerfield of the legal profession? For years, they may have had a legitimate gripe that they did not get enough respect from corporate clients or top-shelf talent. But now it is 2018, Rodney has passed on, and so too has any colorable argument that midsize firms are getting short shrift from anyone.

A [recent study showed](#) that the 20 largest firms in the nation trailed their peers in The Am Law 200® on virtually every metric that matters to clients, including outcomes, cost and the likelihood that the client would recommend the firm to others. Of course, The Am Law 200 includes very large firms, but the point is this: there's no doubt that corporate clients are increasingly questioning the legal profession's long-time assumption that there is a positive correlation between size and quality. In fact, that same study showed that lawyers in "midsize" markets—those who had perhaps left a bigger firm "for a different quality of life"—tended to [score higher on client satisfaction](#).

The latest evidence that midsize firms are gaining respect is the decision by Vault to issue its first-ever [ranking of midsize law firms in New York](#). (For any who don't know it, [Vault](#) is a respected source of information on law firms and law schools.)

The rankings are revealing. They demonstrate that, as with anything that has previously gone underappreciated, there is much more variation among midsize firms than those outside may have realized. Indeed, Vault's list of New York's top 15 midsize firms shows that there are plenty of different avenues for midsize firms to reach the top.

Here, we break down the four different kinds of firms to make the list, along with some background on the impressive honorees.

Full-Service Firms

Pryor Cashman LLP (No. 1 overall): This firm has a tremendous grounding in entertainment industry work (and a second office in LA), but has broadened its offerings to include award-winning IP and M&A practices, among a host of others. But when your clients include Lady Gaga, Justin Timberlake and Michael Strahan, there's no wonder your firm has sizzle. Recently, managing partner Ron Shechtman, who also chairs the labor group, helped the original cast members from *Hamilton* earn a share of the musical's profits.

Others on the list: **Morrison Cohen LLP** (No. 8); **Carter Ledyard & Milburn LLP** (No. 7); and **Moses & Singer LLP** (No. 12).

Litigation Boutiques

Holwell Shuster & Goldberg LLP (No. 9 overall): Litigation boutiques seem to be a popular form of legal "startup" these days, and HSG came racing out of the gates in 2012 with a trio of name partners headed by former Southern District of New York Judge Richard Holwell. Something good is in the water at HSG, where a number of the partners make a hobby of sailing.

The firm has been showered in accolades over its first six years and has become a destination for Supreme Court clerks, who are adding to a growing appellate practice. HSG is also a leader in the RMBS putback litigation, which is resolving billions in liability associated with the credit crisis.

Others on the list: **Kobre & Kim LLP** (No. 2); **Morville Abramowitz Grand Iason & Anello PC** (No. 3); **Molo Lamken LLP** (No. 10); and **Friedman Kaplan Seiler & Adelman LLP** (No. 11).

Intellectual Property Firms

Desmarais LLP (No. 4 overall): When you can afford to pay first-year associates \$200,000 (which exceeds even the prevailing high-end rate of \$190,000), you're doing something right. As if that weren't enough to attract associate candidates, owing to the firm's reliance on flat and contingency fees, Desmarais has dispensed with billable hours entirely. This firm could qualify as a litigation boutique, given its focus on trial and appellate work. Regardless, with clients like Apple, Cisco and IBM, it goes toward the top of whatever category you want to put it in.

Another on the list: **Fitzpatrick, Cella, Harper & Scinto** (No. 5).

Niche Firms

Davis & Gilbert LLP (No. 6 overall): This proud, 110-year-old firm is the epitome of one that has smartly carved out a niche for itself and owned it. Unlike the firm's below, which focus on financial services, Davis & Gilbert has staked its claim in the area of advertising, marketing and media. Since it advised on the creation of radio's first "soap opera" (so-named for their sponsors), Davis & Gilbert has stayed at the forefront of the ever-changing marketing landscape. Now, it advises the biggest brands in the world on their digital and more traditional campaigns. It also provides the full spectrum of legal services, including M&A work, to the many large ad agencies that it represents.

Others on the list: **Buckley Sandler LLP** (No. 11); and **Richards Kibbe & Orbe LLP** (No. 15).

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