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Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

The 12 Firms GCs Won't Stop Talking About

By **Andrew Strickler**

Law360, New York (April 26, 2014, 4:01 PM ET) -- A general counsel's personal recommendation of a law firm to a peer remains the gold standard for judging a firm's standing in the market, and twelve firms stood out in general counsels' minds when asked who they were most likely to recommend.

With most in-house counsel saying they would hire an outside firm based on a single recommendation, unprompted and heartfelt approbation from general counsels helped land a dozen firms at the top of the heap when it comes to client preferences, according to the 2014 BTI Brand Elite: Client Perceptions of the Best-Branded Law Firms report from The BTI Consulting Group (Wellesley, Mass.).

The report named Baker & McKenzie LLP, Faegre Baker Daniels LLP, Foley & Lardner LLP, Hogan Lovells, Jones Day, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Latham & Watkins LLP, Littler Mendelson PC, Mayer Brown LLP, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, Sidley Austin LLP and Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP as the firms that general counsel most frequently recommend to peers and short-list for important work.

While firms often have difficulty distinguishing the factors that truly set them apart from those they just think should differentiate them to clients, a GC's personal recommendation "cuts through all the noise," said BTI President Michael Rynowecer.

"The power of an unprompted recommendation from a disinterested third party represents an investment in the relationship and the performance of the firm, and when you have a third party make that investment, it's extraordinarily powerful," he said.

All these honorees were also represented in the report's "Brand Elite 26" rankings, which drew on a range of market awareness factors, including value, best choices for bet-the-company work and client service, as well as the firms GCs said they most often recommend to peers.

Baker & McKenzie, Hogan Lovells, Jones Day, Latham & Watkins, Morgan Lewis and Skadden were also repeat honorees in the most recommended category from last year's report.

Rynowecer said the honorees distinguish themselves on long lists of firms — corporate counsel at major companies now work with an average of 47 firms, according to BTI — with a highly consistent level of service across partners, offices and practices.

And while a particular firm might recognize some or all of its own strengths, the fact that clients work with many firms and partners give them a far better vantage point for making good comparisons.

“It's very difficult for a firm to convince a client of a differentiator unless they deliver on a behavior,” Rynowecer said. With a firm demonstrating the same high level of service from all corners of the firm, “there is a clarity and magnification of the firm's brand because they see the same behaviors over and over.”

The report and rankings were based on more than 300 individual interviews with corporate in-house counsel between March 2013 and July 2013, according to BTI. Represented companies had an average revenue of \$16.4 billion and a median revenue of \$4.1 billion.

--Editing by Andrew Park.

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