

MIDSIZE HOT LIST

The National Law Journal's inaugural Midsize Hot List represents 20 law firms across the country that have demonstrated creative, innovative strategies to stay competitive. From piles of nominations received, we've selected firms that have found new ways to recruit and retain top talent, develop practice areas, manage their operations and position themselves to stay on track during the economic upheaval.

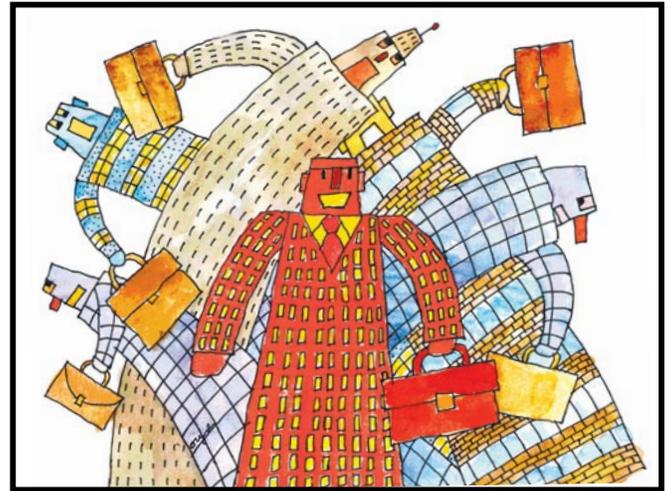
Midsize law firms haven't managed to completely dodge the recession's punch, but they have proven more agile than their bigger competitors.

The recession has delivered a savage blow to many law firm giants. Layoffs, employment deferrals and full-blown failures of firms have revealed some deep flaws in the big-law business model.

In many cases, midsize law firms—between 50 and 300 lawyers, for our purposes—have been more adept in addressing clients' concerns about price constraints, their frustrations with traditional billing structures and their desire to staff matters efficiently.

Staff reporter Jeff Jeffrey and regular NLJ contributor Roger Adler put together the 20 thumbnail profiles of each firm. We recognize that many more firms could have made the list. That said, those included here have shown the nimbleness and adaptability that come from lean operations and strong client ties.

—LEIGH JONES



KEAN MILLER HAWTHORNE D'ARMOND MCCOWAN & JARMAN

Creative compensation and billing arrangements, a commitment to diversity and a culture of stability are hallmarks of Baton Rouge, La.-based Kean Miller Hawthorne D'Armond McCowan & Jarman. The 125-attorney law firm maintains long-term client relationships by using innovative arrangements that include blended hourly rates, fees determined by experience, level monthly billing and tiered volume discounts. Partners own varying percentage interests in the firm, and their compensation is tied to net profit. Recent cases involved biofuel energy sustainability and alleged contamination from crawfish farms.

The firm heads the Louisiana Diversity Forum, with speakers drawn from clients such as Shell Oil Co. and Chevron Corp. It runs the Kean Miller Connection, a law school preparatory program drawing students from traditionally underrepresented groups. Using a "speed dating" format, participants interview experts from various practice areas. The firm was formed in Baton Rouge 25 years ago, and its growth paralleled the expansion of the area's energy and petrochemicals industry. It maintains a pair of Baton Rouge offices, with others located in New Orleans, Lake Charles and Plaquemine, La.