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# Insights from Lewis Roca Rothgerber Christie's Managing Partner on Regional Firm Growth and Market Positioning

This month we continue our interview series of legal industry leaders. This interview is with Ken Van Winkle, the Managing Partner of Lewis Roca Rothgerber Christie, where he has served as Managing Partner since 2004 and practiced law since 1987.

***Can you start by telling us a bit about your firm, its history of growth, and current strategy?***

Our firm is roughly 250 attorneys in ten offices located in Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada with key of practices in litigation, real estate, banking and finance, corporate and securities, intellectual property, insurance, regulatory and government, energy and utilities, and labor and employment. Our growth strategy has been simple: we are cautious, strategic and opportunistic.  Firms of our size cannot afford a large investment mistake. Our firm has grown through mergers which have provided an opportunity to grow practice areas of strategic focus, or expand into markets where our clients have demand for our services. Through our two most recent mergers, with Rothgerber Johnson & Lyons in 2013 and Christie Parker & Hale in 2016, we solidified our Western regional position as a full-service business and commercial law firm with an emphasis on key practice areas and industry verticals.

While we have grown substantially through merger, we have not pursued growth for the sake of it. We avoid wasting time on non-strategic as well as “match-maker” opportunities - those where neither party has any true strategic interest in the combination. We focus our energy on select opportunities which support our strategy and areas of practice focus. We have been a little more aggressive with individuals or small groups where we can balance our investment through risk-sharing compensation arrangements. This both protects the downside and ensures that the laterals truly believe in the facts they represent to the firm.

***How are changes in the legal market impacting LRRC?***

Growth of our regional and midsize competitors is having a major impact on our markets. Clients continue to seek out the premium brand, and our competitors are building their brand recognition through headcount and geographic growth. Some are even becoming household names that are safe for a GC to be comfortable using to protect against their Board questioning their decision. In addition, growth allows firms to drive down costs. Increasing profitability in today's environment requires both containing costs and growing top line revenue. We need to get more revenue using our costs. We can grow without adding overhead and can, in fact, reduce costs by joining forces on an attorney allocation basis. Further the wave of technology, knowledge management, and cyber security requires much greater investment in order to remain competitive. Growth enables us to continue to absorb those rising costs of business.

***What are some of the competitive opportunities for regional firms? What are some of the competitive challenges?***

Clearly the cost benefits of being a regional firm are a major strategic advantage. We have demonstrated such by consolidating all of our central services to Arizona at a significant cost savings. Also, our locations offer our attorneys a higher quality of life, while still retaining an urban lifestyle that many young attorneys seek. As a result, we can attract top talent in our markets. Top talent matched with our lower cost structure allows us to provide the highest quality legal services to the market at very competitive pricing. This is demonstrated by looking at the line-up of national and international clients based outside our jurisdictions that we represent on a national scale. The biggest challenge is convincing GCs to give us a shot. But once we have them, we can retain and grow them by leveraging our client service model. We offer a tailored approach with our clients while ensuring a consistent experience. Our size gives us a competitive advantage in providing that consistency in service.

In terms of challenges to the regional firm model, larger national firms also see opportunities in our lower cost regional markets and many are moving in. They have the name brand and pedigree that attract clients, even middle market ones. That is a particular threat to us and other regional firms, as middle market clients are a regional firm's bread and butter.

***How is LRRC tackling those challenges and positioning itself for long term success?***

We continue to hire the best talent and control our costs. We also try to focus on practices to provide differentiation. We cannot be all things to all clients, but we can be exemplary at a few things. As a result, we take the time and energy to invest in the practices and industries where we can excel based on our bench of attorneys and the market's demand for services. You can see this from a few of our focuses like IP prosecution, gaming and real estate. By being recognized as a market leader in a few areas, the overall profile of the firm is lifted, which benefits all of our practices.

***What advice do you have for other regional firms looking to combat industry change and maintain market share in the future?***

To not "combat" it - embrace change and figure out how to take advantage of the changes in the industry. Be first to pursue practices in emerging industries, i.e., e-discovery, cyber security, gray wave representation. Adopt technology that promotes knowledge management, practice efficiency, client connectivity and service delivery, and cost efficiencies. Encourage and support your younger lawyers to innovate and engage with their peers in the market. They understand the changes and can adapt and move quickly.

The market has always evolved, and the practice of law has always adapted. In the past, we did not have as much information about the changes going on around us. Our firm – and others – will continue to change and will try to get ahead of change. We will adapt, and those firms who adapt will survive and thrive as they did in the past.

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