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Temps With a Twist

CorpLaw Associates LLC and Principal Charles B. Brown Highlighted in *Corporate Counsel Magazine*

By Heather Smith

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Law departments looking to outsource their work have generally been limited to either the high end of law firms or the low end of temp agencies. In recent years, however, a new breed of legal services providers has started to emerge. These businesses say that they give clients a third option, offering attorneys with more experience than can be found at a temp agency, yet for a fraction of the prices charged by a law firm. If the steady growth of these legal services outfits is any indication, it's a pitch that many companies are ready to hear.

The largest of these agencies is New York-based Axiom Legal Solutions Inc. It was founded in 2000 by Mark Harris, then a second-year corporate associate at Davis Polk & Wardwell, and Alec Guettel, a former executive at an environmental technology company. According to Harris, their aim was to "take the traditional [law] firm and put it in a wind tunnel like engineers would do, and strip away all the pieces that create drag and waste."

Today Axiom has over 200 clients, including Time Warner Inc., Zurich Capital Markets Inc., and AT&T Corp. Harris, who serves as the agency's CEO, says that it started with five lawyers, but now has more than 60. They have an average of 13 years of legal experience, according to Harris; two-thirds have an in-house background.

Axiom's attorneys handle a variety of assignments, from open-ended stints as part-time general counsel, to finite in-house projects. While some lawyers work in their own home or office, most work on-site with the client. Under the monthly contracts that Axiom has with most of its customers, the hourly rate works out to about \$100-\$170, Harris says. He claims that the equivalent rate for a law firm attorney would be \$300-\$400.

Elsewhere, other agencies are following a similar model. After he worked on an assignment for Axiom, Jonathan Levitt went on to found Boston-based Outside GC LLC in 2002. A former general counsel at Quadstone Inc., a small software company, Levitt has assembled a staff of seven other attorneys, all of whom are former chief legal officers. According to Levitt, they generally work as de facto general counsel for small to midsize New England-based technology companies that aren't large enough yet to need a full-time staff lawyer. The agency currently has about 100 clients on its roster, including GTECH Holdings Corporation, BladeLogic, Inc., and Softricity, Inc.

The in-house credentials of Outside GC's attorneys set the firm apart, Levitt says. In his view, "The experience of having been an executive of a company allows you to bring a different, more business-oriented perspective to your job."



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Both Outside GC and Axiom are relative newcomers compared to CorpLaw Associates LLC, based in the Chicago suburb of Northfield, Illinois. Charles Brown founded CorpLaw in 1998. The agency has three other attorneys on its staff, all with an in-house background. Together they serve about 25 clients, including the German insurance giant Allianz Group, Motorola, Inc., and CSG Systems International, Inc.

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Having worked as a staff attorney at various companies for more than a dozen years, Brown says he knows how difficult it can be to adjust to shifting in-house legal needs. "The average law department is staffed for the valleys, not the peaks," he explains. "[CorpLaw] allows general counsel to terminate services when they don't need help anymore, which they can't do with a full-time employee."

While these firms loathe being described as temp agencies, they often find it's hard to avoid the label. One general counsel who currently uses Axiom calls it a "high-end temp agency." And Edward Fargis, the former GC of Multex.com, Inc., says that when he first hired Axiom, he viewed it as "a temp agency on steroids." But Fargis was satisfied with the work that Axiom's attorneys did for Multex.com. "No deal ever blew up or left...a bad taste," he says.

Axiom also gets high marks from Oscar Grut, GC at

The Economist Group Limited, the London-based publisher of The Economist newsmagazine. After his New York-based deputy left in 2002, Grut was told that the company couldn't afford to hire a replacement. The departing attorney suggested that Grut contact Axiom, which offered Mark Rotenstreich, a former GC for U.S. News & World Report, L.P. A year and a half later, Grut says that Rotenstreich is "part of the system."

Many attorneys go to work for Axiom and its peers because they want a lighter schedule in order to raise kids or improve their quality of life. Rotenstreich is an exception, however; the 42-year-old attorney estimates that he works 50-60 hours a week. But he says he loves the variety of work, and the opportunity to make as much money as his industriousness will allow. In addition to spending two days a week on Economist matters (he's hired for 80 hours per month), Rotenstreich works for about eight other Axiom clients from his home office.

Rotenstreich admits that a law firm or law department would offer some of the same benefits that he gets from being with Axiom. But he prefers the variety of work that multiple clients throw his way. Working for Axiom, he says, is "the perfect match."

About Charles B. Brown

Charlie is an accomplished business legal adviser, having practiced corporate law for 23 years. He has held senior law department roles in major companies, including as General Counsel. While specializing in IP (patent management, trademarks and trade secrets), he counsels company boards and executives in the U.S. and abroad in a wide range of business issues. His experience spans a number of industries, including management consulting, consumer branded goods, sporting goods, Information Technology (IT), electronics, manufacturing, entertainment, telecommunications, equipment, software and financial services. Charlie has served as the President of the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) Chicago Chapter, and has twice chaired the Chicago Bar Association Corporate Law Department Committee. He is active in civic affairs. Charlie's e-mail address is charlie@corplaw.com.

About CorpLaw Associates LLC

CorpLaw Associates LLC is a law firm of experienced business attorneys who deeply understand their clients' businesses and who use best practices to achieve their clients' business goals. The firm provides full support for businesses. For clients who need on-site legal help, CorpLaw is one of only a few firms that specializes in this model. Our mailing address is CorpLaw Associates LLC, 400 Central Avenue, Suite 150, Northfield, Illinois 60093. We can be contacted at 847.784.1300 or at firm@corplaw.com. Our web address is www.corplaw.com.