

## GCs Name Rolls Royce Of Law Firms

By **Jeff Overley**

*Law360, New York (April 22, 2013, 7:17 PM ET)* -- A new survey based on interviews with corporate counsel has identified the 18 law firms with the strongest brands in the legal market, with newcomers knocking off some of last year's elites.

While there were few differences at the very top of the list, change was the name of the game overall. Seven of the 18 firms viewed most favorably last year by general counsel were ousted by rivals, according to the 2013 BTI Brand Elite: Client Perceptions of the Best-Branded Law Firms **report** from The BTI Consulting Group (Wellesley, Mass.).

Most notably, Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP tumbled out of the rankings entirely after notching a fifth-place slot last year, the survey of 540 in-house attorneys found.

"What happened with Weil is while they do a very good job, and they certainly have their branding, other firms have just been much more effective in their branding activities," BTI President Michael Rynowecer told Law360 on Friday.

The same is perhaps true of the other firms that waved goodbye to their stations among the legal world's creme de la creme — Holland & Knight LLP, Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP, Bryan Cave LLP, Steptoe & Johnson LLP, White & Case LLP and Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP.

Nudging them aside were seven well-known powerhouses — Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Latham & Watkins LLP, Reed Smith LLP, McGuireWoods LLP, Mayer Brown LLP, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP and Morrison & Foerster LLP — that outmuscled their peers in three areas.

Squeezing into the top 18 meant a firm was more likely to be recommended, more innovative with technology and billing, and able to justify its premium pricing with wins on complicated and high-stakes courtroom fights.

The extensive turnover should be a wakeup call to anyone doubting that the battle for clients is anything but intense right now, Rynowecer said.

"Law firms are trying to outdo each other," he said. "This is hand-to-hand combat."

The fragmented nature of the legal industry, with hundreds of firms vying for the same business, makes it relatively easy for a corporation to cut ties with one legal team and quickly find all the help it needs from another firm. When that happens, it's not necessarily because one firm is underperforming, but because another outlet is stepping up and "doing a much better job," Rynowecer said.

It's not good enough to point clients to a brilliant track record — firms need to be constantly evolving and staying on the cutting edge if they don't want revenues to evaporate, Rynowecer said.

"If you don't continue to build and improve ... clients will move elsewhere," he said.

To see how it's done, look no further than the top three — Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP, Jones Day and Baker & McKenzie LLP — which was unchanged from last year.

"Skadden reigns supreme as the most differentiated and best-branded law firm," the report said. "A triple-threat, Skadden stands out in all three factors driving law firm brand — innovation, client service and consideration for hire, and premium value."

Jones Day was viewed as offering second-to-none client service, wielding innovative educational tools and having a "growing reputation of success with complex, bet-the-company matters," the report found.

As for Baker & McKenzie, corporate counsel gave it high marks on client service, lauded its alternative billing arrangements and came away impressed with increasing integration of its massive international footprint, which spans more than 40 countries.

Any firm looking to break into next year's list likely has some heavy lifting ahead. The list is confined to 18 firms because after that, there's a "sharp dropoff" in ratings, Rynowecer said.

In ranked order, the report's 18 firms with elite brands are Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP, Jones Day, Baker & McKenzie LLP, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, Sidley Austin LLP, Latham & Watkins LLP, DLA Piper, Reed Smith LLP, Seyfarth Shaw LLP, McGuireWoods LLP, Mayer Brown LLP, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP, Wachtell Lipton Rosen & Katz, Hogan Lovells, Sullivan & Cromwell LLP, Fulbright & Jaworski LLP and Morrison & Foerster LLP.

*BTI's 2013 report was based on more than 500 individual interviews conducted between January 2011 and September 2012 with in-house counsel at the world's largest organizations.*

--Editing by Andrew Park.