

As Clients Seek Out 'Dream Team' From Multiple Law Firms, Shook Offers Strategy Counseling

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Big Law litigation practices are poised to see further growth in 2024 after many law firms saw increased demand last year. And some law firms are capitalizing on the momentum with new offerings within litigation practices, particularly as mass torts increase and clients take a more “bespoke” approach to outside counsel.

Shook, Hardy & Bacon has created a group it calls the complex litigation strategic counseling practice. Shook Hardy said the practice will offer strategy counseling to clients who are navigating the challenges of coordinating litigation proceedings.

Practice leaders at Shook Hardy point to not only a general rise in litigation over the last year or so, but also a rise in mass torts, multi-district litigation and coordinated proceedings.

The firm’s practice leaders said even though clients have been dividing responsibility between lawyers and firms with different areas of expertise for years, more advertising, funding and organizing on the plaintiffs’ side has collided with the general surge in litigation



Jennifer Stevenson, co-chair of Shook, Hardy & Bacon's new complex litigation strategy group.



Patrick Oot, co-chair of Shook, Hardy & Bacon's new complex litigation strategy group.

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and increased ability to pull together law firm teams virtually to form teams for clients.

“With the rise of mass torts and consolidated actions, we’re seeing more and more clients form virtual law firms to select the best from each firm, a dream team, so to speak,” said Jennifer Stevenson, a co-chair of the new complex litigation strategy group who has spent nearly 20 years in the firm’s product liability practice.

“Shook is a regular player in this space, whether it’s national counsel, discovery or even trial counsel. We’ve done that for multiple clients

over the years. But even with all that success, we believe we can do even more,” she added.

The firm’s new counseling group has around 50 attorneys and business professionals and will draw from other areas within the firm. Patrick Oot, the other co-chair of the group, said the group is also looking to expand, and expects “a number of laterals” to join the firm over the next year.

He noted it’s a cross-office endeavor. Oot is based in Washington, D.C., but the firm has strength in Kansas City and on the West Coast, with three offices in California. “Also, we’re seeing more and more cases in Chicago,” he said.

Oot added that while he believes the cohesive litigation strategy deployed by Shook Hardy is unique, “I think a lot of firms are thinking about these problems for clients, in terms of managing these mass litigations.

“We’re seeing clients more and more focus on a bespoke approach, taking a custom view of pulling in the best and brightest, and that’s what the virtual law firm environment has turned into,” he said.

On the market in general, Stevenson said: “I do think we’re going to see more and more litigation. That’s continued over the last year, and I think it’ll continue to grow.”

A new analysis this week of law firm attorney job openings found that while the legal job market overall contracted last year, openings in litigation increased by 17%, to 7,232 from



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Shook, Hardy & Bacon’s office.

6,241 in 2022. And after a potential downtick next month, litigation openings are expected to rise again in March 2024, according to data from Leopard Solutions, which tracks associate, counsel and partner job openings on law firm webpages.

“Demand for counter-cyclical practices — defined as litigation, labor & employment, and bankruptcy — is accelerating,” analysts for Leopard wrote in their State of the Industry 2024 report, adding that while those practices were strong as far back as Q3 of 2022, they’d been “really driving growth” since the start of 2023.

They concluded later: “Litigation is STILL king.”

The report also noted that, while demand for countercyclical practices among larger firms hasn’t been as strong as for Second Hundred and midsize firms, “litigation has been particularly strong” across all three segments.