

Here's a closer look at *Australasian Lawyer's* fastest-growing firms for 2016

=10



Number of partners
20



Number of offices
4



Launched
1960



Year-on-year revenue growth
112%



Year-on-year partner growth
111%

HOLMAN WEBB

COMMITMENT TO career development has been crucial to growth at Holman Webb, where nine staff members advanced within the firm in July.

"If we feel there is a gap in skills, we devise a career development plan with our employee and their supervisor in conjunction with our HR department, to work towards closing that gap," says chairman John Wakefield.

"We have found this policy to assist in our staff retention. It lets the staff member know that we are committed to them and their career progression.

"We have a formal policy which clearly outlines what is required to develop their career at Holman Webb."

Flexible working, providing lawyers with a better work-life balance, has seen over 15% of the firm's employees working part-time, having a shortened working day, or implementing arrangements to work from home. The firm also has formal wellness programs, which include exercise classes for staff.

Wakefield says revenue growth for Holman Webb over the past 12 months has largely come from existing clients, particularly in the insurance, employment and



JOHN WAKEFIELD, chairman

health sectors. "This has been by expanding areas of advice," he says.

"We believe that this is the result of the exceptional professional profiles of our partners in these areas and our commitment to raising awareness of our expertise, industry knowledge and experience through active business development programs."



Number of partners
1



Number of offices
1



Launched
2012



Year-on-year revenue growth
182%



Year-on-year partner growth
n.a.

LRG LAWYERS

DIRECTOR, PRINCIPAL lawyer and migration agent Louisa Ryan has achieved massive year-on-year revenue growth of 182%. Specialising in migration, Ryan services clients all over the world on all classes of visa applications and on legal matters. She puts her year-on-year revenue bump down to coffee, and having quality people around her.

"[It's] quality over quantity when it comes to staff: the right people in the right positions," she says.

"[We're] developing systems that build more flexibility into our business. As a result we are more productive."

She says keeping abreast of domestic and international political and economic drivers has been key to the firm's immense growth in revenue over the last 12 months.

"Regional Australia as well as Asia have been thriving market sectors in immigration law, in particular China



LOUISA RYAN, principal lawyer and director

in terms of business and investor opportunities into the Australian economy," she says.

FAST FIRMS

9



Number of
partners
7



Number of
offices
1



Launched
1996



Year-on-year
revenue growth
135%



Year-on-year
partner growth
175%

CHAMBERLAINS LAW FIRM

CHAMBERLAINS HAS increased its head count by 50% since 1 July 2015, growing its number of partners from four to seven. As a result, the firm has seen strong growth in all practice areas, including establishing the ACT region's only equine law specialist, which opened the door to new clients and new areas for growth.

Mark North, in the corporate and commercial practice area, has been appointed to the firm's partnership, as well as Rory Markham in dispute resolution and corporate risk. In July, the firm also appointed Louise Morris to the partnership in the property practice.

While Chamberlains is careful to select the right culture fit for new recruits, Vik Sundar, director and practice leader, advisory – private wealth, says changing the buy-in requirements has made it easier for the firm to grow. "The rapid growth of Chamberlains at the director and senior level of the firm has largely been due to the implementation of a decapitalised equity model that places little value on the goodwill of the firm," he says.

"Our biggest asset is our staff and their unique expertise, so when we find highly skilled staff, we are able to bring them into ownership of the firm without the need



VIK SUNDAR, director and practice leader, advisory – private wealth

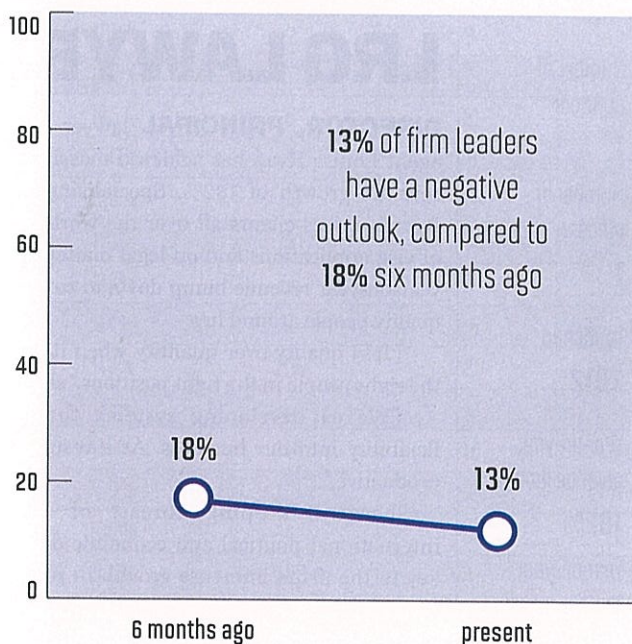
for that person to pay a significant entry fee or mortgage their home to fund that entry fee."

Over the past 12 months, the ACT-based firm has focused on taking on private and commercial work and stopped picking up government work.

"As a result of our strategic decision ... we have seen a significant growth in revenue over the last 12 months," Sundar says.

MID-TIERS ARE MUCH MORE CONFIDENT THAN THE TOP-TIERS ABOUT THE STATE OF THE MARKET

For law firm leaders, confidence in the economic outlook has risen over the past six months, and fewer law firm leaders have reported that they think the Australian economy will perform badly. Mid-tier firms reported much more confidence in the economy than top-tier firms. Around one in five mid-tier firms predicted the economy would perform well over the next six-month period. Top-tier firms were significantly less confident: only 9% of firms expressed a positive view of the economy, down from 33% six months ago.



Source: Legal Market Pulse Report, CommBank

GILCHRIST CONNELL

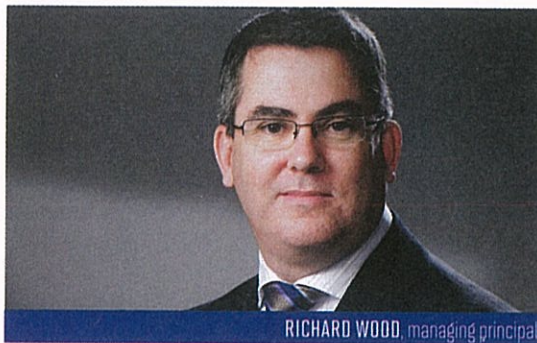
CONTINUING ITS steady growth of the last few years, Gilchrist Connell has increased its number of lawyers from 53 to 62 in the last year, and the partnership from 14 to 19. The firm's founding principals launched Gilchrist Connell after breaking away from the insurance practice of Thomson Geer in 2008, when it had around 30 lawyers in Sydney and Adelaide. In 2015, Gilchrist Connell opened a Brisbane office, becoming the only Australian law firm specialising purely in insurance law with an office in every mainland state – a lofty goal the firm managed to achieve in just seven years.

"When we set up the firm we embarked on a strategy to position ourselves to be able to provide our specialist insurance law services to clients nationally," says managing principal Richard Wood.

"A large part of our revenue increase was the fact that our Perth, Melbourne and Brisbane offices all hit the ground running and gained real client support.

"Our Sydney office also grew in terms of revenue. In terms of turnover we've increased significantly year-on-year since we started in 2008."

Employment practices liability has been a major growth



RICHARD WOOD, managing principal

area for the firm, which has established a dedicated national EPL team led by an accredited employment law specialist. Financial lines and construction-related professional indemnity have also been significant growth areas.

"From our time in the industry we can safely say that our work is countercyclical and that, as an extreme generalisation, litigation picks up when the economy gets a bit harder," Wood says.

The firm has a strong track record for being a flexible workplace with a large proportion of part-time fee earners, keeping it a magnet for talent.

8



Number of partners
19



Number of offices
5



Launched
2008



Year-on-year revenue growth
119%



Year-on-year partner growth
136%

SQUIRE PATTON BOGGS (AUSTRALIA)

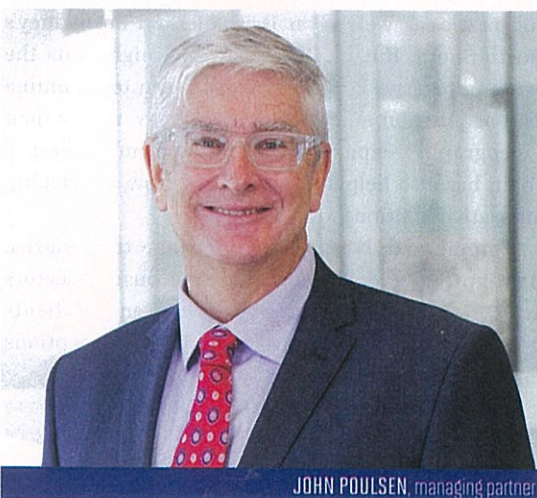
SQUIRE PATTON BOGGS made three internal promotions this year, taking the partnership to 20. And after three years and over 100 interviews for potential lateral hires, the firm has finally found two who are the right cultural, strategic and financial fit.

"Part of the success can be attributed to selling our vision and our differentiators, one of them being that as a global firm we work in a truly collaborative and borderless way," says managing partner John Poulsen.

"Work is shared across the Nullarbor and not defined by region, and that is reflected in our reporting structures. Globally our firm does not have a head office – rather centres of management and support.

"As a global board member, I along with my colleagues I am responsible to ensure that collaboration is real. Lateral hires are attracted by prominently our values, global footprint and our quality of work."

Litigation, construction disputes, real estate and infrastructure, mid-tier M&A work and financial services have all been big drivers of work for the



JOHN POULSEN, managing partner

firm over the last 12 months.

"We are hitting and exceeding our budgets and I am very thankful to our whole team of amazing people," Poulsen says.

7



Number of partners
20



Number of offices
3



Launched
2011



Year-on-year revenue growth
129%



Year-on-year partner growth
118%

FAST FIRMS

6



Number of
partners
64



Number of
offices
5



Launched
1917



Year-on-year
revenue growth
126%



Year-on-year
partner growth
121%

HALL & WILCOX

OVER THE last 12 months, Hall & Wilcox has broadened its presence, opening up offices in Perth and Canberra as part of a long-term expansion strategy.

"We've made no secret of our desire for a national footprint," says managing partner Tony Macvean. "Our strategy has included select acquisitions of partners and teams we believe fit with the Hall & Wilcox purpose, strategy and culture, while also continuing to grow great talent internally."

The firm only opened its second Australian office in Sydney in 2014 and has continued its rapid growth since then. "A lot of the growth has been based on client demand, with clients wanting an increasingly integrated team nationally," Macvean says.

"Clients are responding positively to our growth and are seeing how it benefits them."

Financial services and insurance are key focuses for the firm and key contributors to its growth.

"We have depth and strength across all areas required by the financial services and insurance sector, from claims processing to advising on major IPOs and M&As within the sector, and everything in between,"



TONY MACVEAN, managing partner

Macvean says. "The financial services and insurance sector continues to be a focus for the firm, and we are seeing great development in the work we are doing."

Macvean says the firm is looking to continue to develop expertise in its chosen industries. New recruits have to be a good commercial and cultural fit, a key retention strategy, he says.

"We invest time and money in ensuring our people can get together and collaborate, nationally."

"We truly believe we are better together and do everything we can to support this aspect of our culture."

5



Number of
partners
9



Number of
offices
5



Launched
2013



Year-on-year
revenue growth
191%



Year-on-year
partner growth
150%

LEGALVISION

THIS HAS been a busy year over at LegalVision, as the business has opened up offices in Melbourne and Newcastle, as well as in Brisbane and on Sydney's North Shore. But CEO Lachlan McKnight puts the firm's impressive revenue growth down to an online lead acquisition and outbound strategy, rather than a geographic expansion. Backing from Gilbert + Tobin has also helped the business grow, developing innovative solutions for clients.

Commercial leasing, franchising, trademarks, start-up law and IT have been the busiest sectors in 2016. "This strong growth is driven by clients looking for more cost-effective and fixed-fee options compared to traditional firms," McKnight says.

"This is coupled with our tech model allowing us to deliver legal work done efficiently."

The LegalVision team has achieved high growth numbers, driven by the flexible nature of the work. McKnight says the firm's culture has significantly aided staff retention.

"The ability to work from home or part-time has attracted many senior lawyers leaving traditional



LACHLAN MCKNIGHT, CEO

firms looking for flexible arrangements," he says.

"We have retained our team members due to the firm's start-up and dynamic workplace culture, where there is no hierarchy and a true vision to improve access to legal services in Australia through tech and innovation."

The innovative model allows practice leaders to focus on delivering legal work rather than bringing in clients, which is the job of the specialised inbound client care and outbound sales teams.

In June 2015, LegalVision acquired Capacity HQ, a curated marketplace of consultant lawyers.

PINSENT MASONS (AUSTRALIA)

PINSENT MASONS entered the Australian market in 2015 with a focus on the infrastructure sector, spruiking deep sector expertise, local knowledge and international experience.

"We have achieved rapid growth since opening our doors and are now one of the largest and most experienced infrastructure practices in the Asia-Pacific, with the capability to handle major projects or litigation of any size," says Australia head David Rennick.

"Investment in infrastructure across the region is expected to continue to rise over the next 10 years, which leads to growing demand for expert legal advice and services."

Rennick says the strength of the Australian practice was a significant factor in achieving a 5.5% jump in global revenue last financial year.

"We attribute this to our clear focus on a proposition built around market-leading expertise in the infrastructure sector, recruitment of people who can deliver on this promise, and the support and confidence of our international and local clients," he says.



DAVID RENNICK, partner – head of Australia

Providing agile services to clients and support and flexibility to staff has aided staff retention.

"Our people are attracted to a leading global brand with a strong and growing presence in the Asia-Pacific region, which provides significant diversity of professional opportunity," Rennick says.

4



Number of partners
7



Number of offices
2



Launched
2015



Year-on-year revenue growth
669%



Year-on-year partner growth
700%

LEXVOCO

IN THE last 12 months, Lexvoco has opened up offices in Canberra and Adelaide, as well as two offices in New Zealand. The firm is now doing more Australian work for clients based abroad.

"We don't focus on specific sectors. We just want to help organisations who need and want more from their lawyers," says Australia lead Anthony Wright.

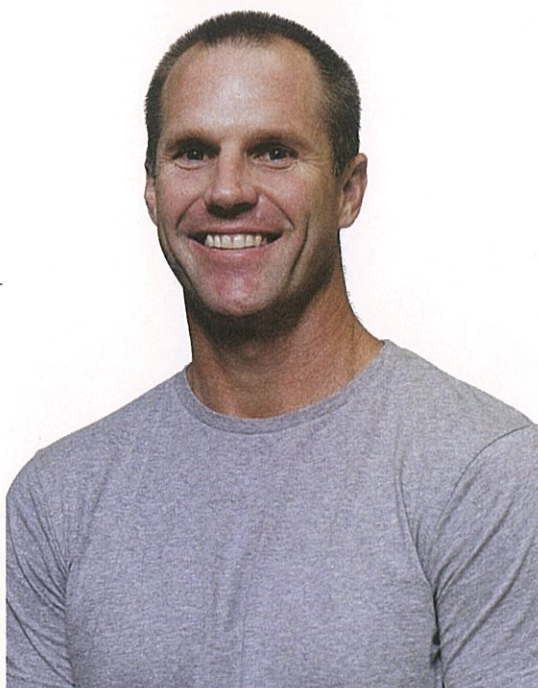
He says that for Lexvoco achieving growth is all about finding top talent.

"We always start with doing the best we can to attract great, smart, innovative team members, and treat them very well, and we're grateful," Wright says.

"Business growth and a strong, unwavering culture that encourages ownership, rewards, flexibility and responsibility have enabled us to grow our senior management and partnership."

Offering lawyers the opportunity to work flexibly is a key value of the business.

"Provided that we never let clients or one another down, our team can work when and where they want, and they can wear what they want," says Wright.



ANTHONY WRIGHT, principal and Australia lead

3



Number of partners
5



Number of offices
6



Launched
2015



Year-on-year revenue growth
750%



Year-on-year partner growth
500%

FAST FIRMS

2



Number of partners
23



Number of offices
4



Launched
2102



Year-on-year
revenue growth
2,900%



Year-on-year
partner growth
177%

CLYDE & CO (AUSTRALIA)



JOHN EDMOND, Australia managing partner

IT'S BEEN lateral hires this year that have seen the Clyde & Co Australia partnership jump from 13 to 23. The firm merged with insurance boutique Lee & Lyons in early 2016, growing the partnership by five. Thirty Lee & Lyons staff also made the move. Two partners and several lawyers also joined the firm from Norton Rose Fulbright this year.

"Clyde & Co has been on a strong growth trajectory since launching in Australia in late 2012," says Australia managing partner John Edmond.

"We have in the past 12 months made eight strategic lateral partner hires to further bolster our capabilities in Australia, while also promoting two partners from within our ranks."

Edmond says the firm has had 100% retention of the partners appointed in Australia since launching. He says the firm has brought on people who are a good cultural fit, as well as being at the forefront of their respective industries.

"The firm has a clear strategy to be a leader in its core sectors of global trade and commerce, construction and infrastructure, insurance, energy and transport," Edmond says.

"By having a clear mandate and support globally we are able to offer our partners and people the

"We have seen growth in all of our key practice areas in the past 12 months"

opportunity to do top legal work, for top clients, in a positive environment."

The firm's expanding presence in the Australian market is increasing its ability to provide cohesive legal advice to clients, Edmond says.

"We have seen growth in all of our key practice areas in the past 12 months, and we expect to see even more as our new partners and teams further settle into Clyde & Co and build profile within the market," he says.

"Of particular note is the successful growth of our construction practice, our marine and transport practice and our OHSS practice.

"We have had an excellent 12 months in our corporate and regulatory insurance group, a capability which really sets us apart from other firms who have insurance as a core practice."

FAST FIRMS



Number of partners
84



Number of offices
5



Launched
1864



Year-on-year
revenue growth
129%



Year-on-year
partner growth
112%

MILLS OAKLEY

BOASTING ONE of the longest track records of consistent growth in the Australian market, Mills Oakley has grown without entering into any mergers or opening new offices. FY16 is the 12th consecutive year of double-digit revenue growth for the firm, with growth up by 37% and 32% in FY15 and FY14 respectively. Mills Oakley crossed the \$100m revenue threshold in 2015 and has still managed to achieve the high growth of a start-up firm, but a mature one.

CEO John Nerurker says the firm's growth from 75 partners in 2015 to 84 in 2016 has been in response to client demand. Over half the partnership growth this year was in the construction, planning and environment, and projects and infrastructure practice areas.

"In the case of construction, more work from existing clients and the addition of new clients has warranted further capacity," Nerurker says.

"The latter two areas are new practices where we have identified an opportunity to offer additional services to existing clients of the firm."

The Melbourne corporate team has had one of its busiest years, 25% ahead of last year. Inbound M&A has been particularly active.

"There has been a preponderance of buyers from the US and Europe in particular, and the agribusiness and retail sectors are particularly hot," Nerurker says.

A reflection of the continuing popularity of property investment compared to shares, Nerurker says the property team has had a busy year. Low interest rates and low unemployment have been contributing factors, along with media coverage of capital growth.

"We are assisting a number of overseas developers, particularly Chinese, Malaysian and Singaporean entrants, to undertake their first projects in Australia," he says. "We believe we have also improved our market share in the property space owing to Australian

ASX-listed property trusts and developers embracing the 'flight to value' away from international and large national firms, who are not always as agile and have a tendency to overservice clients."

In 2017 the firm will look to expand in the corporate, disputes and insurance practice areas.

But it's not all about the strongest practice areas; Nerurker says the firm has a two-pronged strategy for revenue growth.

"The first involves demonstrating consistent value to clients as a platform for long-term relationships; essentially, our work with our clients grows over the years as their businesses grow," he says.

"Secondly, we actively acquire leading partner talent who bring to the firm new clients and capabilities.

"This strategy has delivered consistent, double-digit revenue growth for Mills Oakley over the last 12 years, and we are on track to hold this record going forward."

The firm has prioritised strategies to deliver a more flexible and diverse workplace, recognising the link between organisational performance and high retention rates.

"We recognise that staff retention is core to a consistent service experience for clients, and so we have pursued initiatives that will give us one of the lowest turnover rates in

the Australian legal sector," Nerurker says.

A flexible working policy, formalising a commitment to work-life balance, the upgrading of the parental leave policy and an equitable briefing policy have all been achieved in the last 12 months.

The firm has established a gender diversity committee reporting to the CEO and board. In the interests of transparency, the committee also reports to its key clients and the firm has undertaken to continue external reporting on a quarterly basis.

"We believe we have also improved our market share in the property space owing to Australian ASX-listed property trusts and developers embracing the 'flight to value' away from international and large national firms, who are not always as agile and have a tendency to overservice clients"