

Manatt Continues Investing in 'Hybridized' Model With Latest Calif. Additions

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By Justin Henry

At Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, the term “nonlawyer,” as it would be used to refer to consultants or advisers without a legal background, is a “bad word,” CEO and managing partner Donna Wilson said.

Why? She said the firm’s professional services model, which has been built out with strategic talent recruitment and client relationships in health care, fintech and the entertainment industry, seeks to be as integrated and innovative as the evolving needs of clients.

“Especially these days, most clients the firm works with don’t have purely legal or purely business problems,” Wilson said. “Let’s say 10% have purely one or the other. The vast majority will have both.”

One practice area that is in high-growth mode can be seen



Jennifer Millard, Farnaz Alemi and Kalon Gutierrez, Manatt, Phelps & Phillips.

(Courtesy photos)

at the firm’s digital and technology group, with the most recent recruitment of two professionals from Sanctum Insights, which does consulting for tech, retail and financial services clients, as well as a lawyer who has worked in-house for a major entertainment association and a Big Four accounting firm.

Over the last 12 months, according to Wilson, clients have increasingly sought a “hybridized” approach to professional services, integrating

consulting and legal solutions to help navigate an ever-changing realm of digital technology.

The latest recruits, consultants Jennifer Millard and Kalon Gutierrez, began at Manatt as managing directors of the digital and technology group Jan. 4, hailing from a consulting firm of their founding, Sanctum Insights. They are based in San Francisco.

Millard’s background in omnichannel retail technology, financial services innovation

and consulting within the venture capital and private equity communities has landed her in executive roles at Mastercard, Truaxis and Saks Fifth Avenue. Gutierrez has worked with consumer, retail, media and entertainment technology companies, guiding them through the processes of brand development and investment opportunities, according to Manatt.

For Los Angeles litigator and IP-focused lawyer Farnaz Alemi—who also joined the firm Monday as a partner in the firm’s digital and technology group—the firm mirrors Alemi’s own “blended” experience from her time in Big Law, in-house and consulting work. Alemi joins the group having served as vice president of the global content protection counsel for the Motion Picture Association, where she was tasked with preserving the intellectual property rights of its six studio members.

“We have legal, consulting and advisory professionals across the firm, and what we’re trying to do is build that out across our platform,” Wilson said in an interview. “One of the values of

our model is that it is futuristic, but it is also inevitable.”

Industry leaders say when it comes to professional services businesses, cybersecurity, digital media and digital forensics has shown significant and lasting signs of growth since the global shift to virtual work.

John Unice, CEO of Pittsburgh-based legal tech firm bit-x-bit, said his highest growth practices are digital forensics and cybersecurity due to lax security of remote work.

“In this uncertain time we’re in, people are switching jobs or working remotely, where there might be less attention to doing security the right way,” Unice said. “That gives rise to a higher incidence of leaving a company open to hacks.”

Asked to detail how much revenue comes from legal versus consultant or advisory work, Wilson said Manatt doesn’t tabulate revenue based on lawyer versus nonlawyer status because the firm’s practices are so thoroughly integrated. She added that that dichotomy “cuts against what the firm is trying to achieve.”

But, she said, consultants, roughly one-third of the firm’s

professional workforce, are some of the biggest rainmakers at the firm, which achieved \$322 million in revenue in 2019, an increase from 2018’s \$313 million. In her experience, she said, Big Law firms tend to announce a nonlawyer team of consultants or advisory professionals when they join, but segment them off from the firm’s culture.

Wilson said her firm looks for hires who take an integrative approach to their professional services work. She said Manatt has established itself with clients seeking to achieve cross-industry business goals, such as tech companies looking to get into health care or fintech companies looking at entertainment.

“I think the secret sauce to our approach is we’re inclusive,” Wilson said. “The way we look at it is what talent, what tools do we have to solve our clients’ problems and help them achieve business goals.”

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