

OC METRO

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 1728
SANTA ANA, CA

**MEN'S
HEALTH
ISSUE**

**FIT FOR
BUSINESS**

**HONING
YOUR
WINNING
EDGE**

www.ocmetro.com



COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE STARS


WHY TOMASELLI AND ZEHNER SHINE

BY STEVE THOMAS

>> **BUSINESS DETECTIVES**
SPIES, LIES AND VIDEOTAPE

>> **OC'S ULTIMATE TRAIL**
A BIKING/HIKING ODYSSEY

P R E V I E W
**GOVERNOR'S
CONFERENCE FOR
WOMEN**



Legal Counsel

Research, references and referrals can lead you to the right law firm.

BY SHERYLL ALEXANDER

Seeking out a law firm for you or for your company can seem like a full-time job. Lawyers will tell you to read websites and publications, call or meet with former clients, find out about their commitment to the community, make sure the firm hires the best attorneys and learn about the firm's history, reputation, and practice specialties. And while this sounds like lots of work, choosing the wrong law firm could be a huge business blunder. So, how do you really go about it?

Well, it isn't easy. There's even a bit of controversy about what truly makes a law firm "top-notch." Nicole Whyte, founding partner of Bremer Whyte Brown & O'Meara LLP (www.bremerandwhyte.com), says that top firms have "the ability to be responsive and adaptive to the client's needs and to obtain excellent results at a reasonable cost." Headquartered in Newport Beach, Bremer & Whyte has about 60 attorneys in six Western states locations.

Whyte also recommends that potential clients consult independent resources such as Martindale-Hubbell (www.martindale.com) to determine how the firm and its partners are rated. Along with getting high marks from a firm's current clients and other law firms in the same field, Whyte says that "all of this information taken together demonstrates the firm's reputation in its field."

Words are one thing and success on paper seems to be something altogether different. William O'Hare, administrative partner with Snell & Wilmer LLP (www.swlaw.com), says "a record of sustained growth over time is a sign that a firm is gaining and retaining gifted lawyers and valued clients." O'Hare says that Snell & Wilmer has grown from 12 to 67 attorneys in the past 15 years. "It's a dynamic of our office that doesn't go unnoticed by new



and prospective clients."

Snell & Wilmer has a local office in Costa Mesa and is a full-service Southwest regional business law firm with specialties in real estate development, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, technology and financial institutions.

"A top-notch law firm is recognized by its unsurpassed expertise in various areas of law and should receive broad recognition for its outstanding work," says Dean Zipser, managing partner at Morrison & Foerster's Irvine office (www.mofo.com). Zipser also believes that a top-notch firm's mission should be to deliver success to its clients and to offer comprehensive, global legal services. Morrison & Foerster has more than 1,000 lawyers in 19 offices around the world.

Litigation cases, of course, make the homework of finding a lawyer even more important. References and referrals become one of the best gauges in determining a firm's suitability towards your particular lawsuit. "Experience and results in the courtroom speak volumes," says Whyte.

In addition, check out professional and media organizations, which annually rank the best verdicts, attorneys and firms. O'Hare says that prospective clients are impressed with Snell & Wilmer's recent performance. It is the only firm in California to earn two spots among California's top

10 defense verdicts for 2005.

Talk to any lawyer, though, and they'll tell you that a firm's success lies in the individual lawyers, not in the firm as a whole. "You want to make sure that the law firm attracts and retains the best attorneys and that it has the expertise and the depth you need," says Morrison & Foerster's Zipser.

So, how do you decide which lawyer is best for you or your company? "A client can determine this by checking the firm's website, interviewing the attorneys who will be working on the case, researching previous litigation matters handled by the firm, and requesting and checking client references," says Zipser.

And should an impressive client list sway your decision? No, says Whyte. "Just because a particular client is on a list does not mean that client was satisfied with the services provided," says Whyte. "The potential client should press to find out the good and bad, and learn what might have been done differently with the wisdom of hindsight."

O'Hare says that a client list mostly tells the tale about a firm's legal niche and reputation. "I would contact an existing client of a prospective lawyer much like any employment reference and probably do it by phone," says O'Hare, whose firm represents clients like Disney, Allergan, Ford and Bank of America.

Whyte says that the hallmarks of a top firm are high energy, responsiveness and capability. Her ultimate recommendation: Find a law firm with collective decades of experience in all aspects of civil litigation and client counseling with seasoned trial attorneys who have taken every imaginable case to trial. **OCM**

Sheryll Alexander is a lifestyles writer based in Costa Mesa. She is a regular contributor.