

## Law Firm Leaders: Gordon & Rees' Dion Cominos

By Aebra Coe

*Law360 (November 6, 2019, 12:40 PM EST)* -- Dion Cominos has served as managing partner of Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani LLP since 2006. During that time, the firm has grown significantly and, this spring, opened up an office in Hawaii that completed its goal of being the first law firm to have an office in all 50 states.

Here, Cominos chats with Law360 about the firm's path from California to all 50 states and what his goals are for the future.

**Your law firm is the first to have an office in each of the 50 states. Recently we heard from leaders of Dentons that they are poised to become the first "truly national" law firm. Do you think they're mistaken? Is your firm already "truly national"?**

I don't think anyone is mistaken. I think there's plenty of room for a number of preeminent national law firms. Each of them has different nuances, each of them services different sectors and has different practice emphases. Certainly one could not imagine a situation where there would only be a single national law firm. However, we have the distinction of having been the first and only law firm with offices in all 50 states and this was an important achievement for us to brand ourselves in the marketplace in that way. Also, it has been very well-received by our clients knowing that wherever their needs may be, we have the resources to service them.

**What has your road been to reach all 50 states? What has the growth trajectory been?**

The firm started in California in 1974. And we were pretty much a California-centric firm for the first 20 or so years of our existence. Then we started to branch out within California and then to neighboring western states; then in 2005 we became bicoastal, opening an office in New York. At that point it was a matter of completing our manifest destiny of having offices across the country. About a year and a half ago, we had offices, I believe, in 37 states, and the decision was then made to make the push to all 50 states.



Dion Cominos  
Gordon & Rees  
managing partner

### **What do you think the benefit is of having an office in so many places?**

It allows clients to think of us without having to think about us. What I mean by that is it becomes almost instinctual. They don't have to sit and think, "Do you have someone in North Carolina, do you have someone in Louisiana, can you help us in Alaska?" They automatically know as a matter of fact that we have offices and capabilities throughout the country. Therefore, when it comes time to make a purchasing decision, they don't have to sit and think through where we have locations and where we don't. They would start with us. It's kind of like Amazon. You want to be omnipresent and you want to be the first in mind for your clients. When they are making a hiring decision, you're at the top of the list. It doesn't necessarily mean you can handle everything everywhere. It means they start with you. I think that branding proposition was very important for us in creating an identity and almost a Pavlovian response in our clients, so that when they have a legal need, they automatically think of us.

### **What is your goal for the law firm for the next five years?**

Predominantly to build out our national platform to a point where we have a robust presence in all the major metropolitan areas. To make sure all of our core competencies are represented everywhere throughout the country and to be thought of as a preeminent national law firm.

### **What are your core competencies?**

Mostly civil litigation on the defense side. The key areas that we service are employment, commercial litigation, construction/environmental, insurance, product liability, drug and medical device, intellectual property, energy, health care and maritime. And we're growing a transactional group as well.

### **What is your approach to attracting and retaining talent?**

Our best successes in the lateral recruiting world have come from having our recruits recruit. They know the best talent, the best people in their jurisdictions. They have professional relationships and friendships and are able to bring us really high-quality candidates. And they make good spokespeople for the firm. They can go to someone and say, "I joined Gordon & Rees and my experience has been outstanding in terms of integration into the firm and proliferating my business." That, to me, would be much more persuasive to a prospective lateral than hearing from a lifer like myself. So we've found that to attract great lateral talent our best allies have been our own lateral hires.

On the retention side, we strive to break down the barriers between "us" and "them." We want everybody to be one with us and have a stake in the growth and fortunes of the firm. We want people to be contributors of ideas and think by giving them a stake in their future success, it helps truly bind them to the organization long term.

### **How do you do that?**

For example, if a lateral opens a new location for us, they have a significant amount of autonomy to structure the office in their image and per their vision. Each office does have somewhat of a different character to it because of that. By giving them a stake in the construction of that part of the organization, that makes them feel part of a much bigger whole.

## **How is your law firm adapting to the changing legal industry with new players like alternative legal service providers?**

I think it's important for us to work productively with alternative service providers instead of crawling into a hole and pretending they're not there. They're not going away. The law is becoming more demystified in a lot of ways. We've tried a few things. One is to work with existing alternative service providers that might give us a more efficient way of practicing law and conducting our business. The second is to contemplate a future where nonlawyer ownership may be allowed in law firms, nonlawyers may be allowed to offer legal advice, and how to integrate that in our platform in a constructive way, rather than trying to fight against it.

## **What's one mistake attorneys often make early on in their careers?**

Not realizing that less is sometimes more. When you're a young lawyer, you feel a real need to prove yourself and be noticed and have your brilliance recognized by everyone. As a result, you're sometimes not judicious about your choice of actions and words. As you mature you listen more, you say less, and ultimately will be recognized for your wisdom and won't feel as strong of a need to prove yourself.

## **What well-known lawyer, alive or dead, would you most like to have lunch with? Why?**

I would probably pick a historical figure who also happened to be a lawyer just because I would find that to be the most interesting or fulfilling discussion. It could be Robespierre, Cicero, Thomas Moore, someone like that who had an amazing historical perspective to offer in addition to being a lawyer.

--Editing by Katherine Rautenberg.