

California Boutique Expands to New York, Drawing Big Law Attorneys With Sophistication of Practices

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By Jessie Yount

What You Need to Know

- DTO Law launched in New York with a former Pennsylvania AUSA and Weil Gotshal litigator.
- The California boutique represents American Honda, Costco, Google, Microsoft and Toyota Financial.
- The firm's sophistication of practices and client matters is luring Big Law attorneys to the boutique.

California boutique law firm DTO Law has expanded to New York some three years after its inception, with plans to open in Chicago and Miami on the horizon.

The 18-attorney firm, which began in Los Angeles and Silicon Valley, touts a roster of clients including American Honda, Costco, Google, Microsoft, PayPal, Target and Walgreens.

It opened its doors in New York this month with the arrival of white-collar partner Alison Kehner, a former assistant U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Kehner is joined by Sudip Kundu, who was formerly counsel at Weil, Gotshal & Manges and specializes in intellectual property litigation.

"It was always the goal to expand to other geographic markets. Outside of California, New York was the big fish in the U.S. pond," said managing partner William Delgado, noting that he is barred in New York, and the firm already handles a number of cases in the state.

Finding Kehner and Kundu were "happy coincidences" in that the firm sought geographic expansion, as well as diversification in practice areas such as intellectual property litigation and white-collar defense.



(Courtesy photo)

William Delgado,
Managing Partner of DTO Law.

DTO launched in mid-2019, when Delgado and co-founder Megan O'Neill departed Los Angeles-based boutique Willenken. They were joined by former Sanchez & Amador corporate partner and Toyota Motor Credit Corp. managing counsel Mark Tarango.

Though DTO's launch was hindered in the early days of the pandemic, the firm has started to gain traction and recruit more attorneys based on its sophistication in litigation and transactional matters, as well as its reputation for excellent work product and

diverse representation among its ranks, according to Delgado.

“When people want to move from Big Law to a boutique, there is a fear that the sophistication of practice will drop off,” Delgado said. “That is not the case for us. We handle a lot of cases involving first impression [issues] and class actions that tend to be large and nationwide.”

On the litigation side of the house, DTO recently won a dismissal on the appeal of a summary judgment win, securing a victory for Costco and The Nature’s Bounty in a false advertising class action lawsuit. It also defended HP in a putative class action, in which the court ruled that the plaintiff could not represent a nationwide class.

The same is true on the transactional side, Delgado said, who pointed to Toyota Financial as one of the firm’s largest corporate clients. In addition to general corporate matters, the firm is particularly well-versed in finance and real estate matters.

Going forward, DTO aims to expand to Chicago and Miami and scale to roughly 50 attorneys.

“We aren’t striving to be a huge hundred-person firm,” Delgado said. “At a 200-attorney firm, it is hard to be everything to everyone. My view of it is, why dilute your talent if you can hover around 50 or 60 attorneys and be well-known for what it is we do?”

Delgado acknowledged that some matters require an army that clients find in Big Law. But

if Big Law is an army, DTO is SEAL Team Six, he said.

“If you need bodies and a firm that can offer you 30 practice areas, that is not us,” Delgado said. “We are smart, dedicated and focused. If you have a specific problem and are in need of specific expertise, we are the team to hire.”

He added that, despite economic uncertainty, the firm expects sustained growth.

“If corporate spend decreases as a result of recessionary fears, our value proposition is even better [because] we have talented former Big Law attorneys but not necessarily the Big Law hourly rates,” Delgado said. “We have no reason to believe our trajectory will be anything but what it has been in the past—which is upward.”