

EDGE Roundtable

In each issue of the Edge International Review, we pose a “big picture” question of significance to our clients and the legal marketplace generally, and ask our partners to supply answers. This edition’s question is simple:

“What single issue is keeping your clients up at night right now?”

Here are some of our responses.



“Dealing with the uncertainty and related challenges caused by the fast pace of change in the legal environment: new pressures from clients and new competitors, coupled with the ramifications of uncertainty around international business markets, mainly in Europe. The change is coming in the form of law firm clients seriously starting to call some shots, new entrants such as outsourced suppliers and multidisciplinary practices (depending on the jurisdiction), pricing and business model reconfiguration, and the need to at least consider the possibility of some form of merger, alliance or similar arrangements. All this against the backdrop of rampant poaching and movement of partners and senior lawyers. Never has it been more important for law firms to ensure their strategies are robust and have been properly stress-tested.”

– Sean Larkan, Australia



“One area of worry which constantly seems to me to keep managing partners awake is the linked challenges of their own career plan and the firm’s succession planning for the next generation of leadership of the organization. These issues are often further linked to the managing partner’s own feelings of insecurity and, at times, their loneliness. Most managing partners can discuss some of their issues some of the time with some of their colleagues, but there is hardly ever any single person within the firm with whom they can freely talk about all such problems. The answer can be to identify an external mentor who can act as a sounding board.”

– Nick Jarrett-Kerr, UK



“For senior lawyers well along in their careers, personal career management concerns are causing sleepless nights. For lawyers whose self-image and personal identity have always been linked to their professional role and achievements, ‘What will I do next with my life and career?’ is suddenly a pressing and often unfathomable question. Even great lawyers are finding that they are rank

amateurs at career management, planning second or ‘encore’ careers, or figuring out how to relinquish the reins of power. The recent recession has made many senior lawyers even more reluctant to move into uncharted territory, even as successor generations press for center-stage, top billing, and a bigger piece of the pie.”

– Doug Richardson, US

“Right now, my UK clients are trying to keep ahead of the fast-moving developments in the wake of the *Legal Services Act*. With a much higher number of Alternative Business Structure applications than most people had predicted and a rash of high-profile acquisitions of and investment in law firms announced, nobody is quite sure what to expect next and how it will impact their business. Beyond the LSA, mid-tier firms are anxious about consolidating competitors, new entrants and online services emerging to pitch to their clients. Many of the larger firms are struggling to identify the right pace and model for the international expansion they feel is so essential.”

– Chris Bull, UK

“Many managing partners worry about balancing their firm’s drive for high profits-per-partner with the costs of the escalating pace of the innovation. New approaches and technologies are expensive, but they are crucial for addressing evolving client needs. Still, it’s a quadruple bind: addressing cost-cutting imperatives, keeping pace with competitors’ innovations, keeping clients happy and still keeping partners satisfied and motivated. Although they understand that failure to invest now will cost their firm dearly 18 to 24 months down the road, many say their partners cut them off at the knees even as the managing partner reaches for the stars.”

– Pam Woldow, US

“For my clients who are directors of talent, lateral partner integration is challenging. We know that lateral partners are vulnerable to poaching in a couple of years. We need to make them ‘sticky’ by investing more time in cross-practice business development and broadening their client work for others in the firm. On the cultural side of integration, new partners have to experience our way of mentoring, managing work and playing well in teams. Until our lawyers get invested, pass the Ambien.”

– David Cruickshank, US

“Lawyers’ clients sense the shift of power in their favor and the resulting downward pressure on fees. Many lawyers are petrified about how to respond, fearing that they are between a rock and a hard place: lose the client, or lower revenues to the point where they do not allow for a reasonable return to the firm. The good news is that lawyers can be trained to face fee pressures, enhance the client’s appreciation of the value of legal services, and even gain share of wallet or market share in the process.”

– Gerry Riskin, Anguilla

