

FUND KINGS: The BBJ highlights the city's top investing performers. 3

# Boston Business Journal

January 5-11, 2007 Vol. 26, No. 49

BostonBusinessJournal.com

©2007 Boston Business Journal. All rights reserved \$2.75

34 Boston Business Journal

M&A OUTLOOK

BostonBusinessJournal.com

January 5-11, 2007

## One year on: A local law firm offers merger lessons

It has been almost a year since the merger of Burns & Levinson LLP and Perkins, Smith & Cohen LLP. How do things look today?

In contemplating a merger, Burns & Levinson had created a strategic plan to build on our history representing midsize companies and the individuals who own them. We wanted to strengthen our capacity to serve technology-based enterprises, universities and institutions, entrepreneurs and mature technology-based companies, as well our traditional base of clients. We were always looking strategically for talented attorneys to join our strong corporate, real estate and international groups, our private clients' practice and our litigation areas. Perkins Smith had a strong intellectual property group that needed a corporate backbone. The firm's other lawyers needed more attorneys in the same disciplines with whom to practice.

We looked at the strengths and clients of each firm, the management structures, the staffing and, of course, the financial components. We jointly developed a plan showing what Burns & Levinson would look like with an additional 35 attorneys. As we developed a pro-forma image of a larger firm, we concurrently spent several months

with the partners getting to know each other. Through large and small meetings, we learned about philosophies regarding client service, who the clients and potential clients were, and all of our skills and strengths. We liked the image of how the expanded group of attorneys could work together to provide services to our clients.

Everyone talked about "culture," but no one really defined it. It seems to be that special "something" that makes each firm feel unique. We discovered similar attitudes toward our respective clients and how we respect our staff and colleagues. We found similar expectations of quality and work ethic. There were, of course, many differences, and we learned that there was no one right way to do things. We were willing to compromise and took the best from each group. We needed a common vocabulary to ensure that the words we take for granted to run our business mean the same thing to everyone.

The management staff worked on the details, while the partners were identifying synergies and the managers were discovering challenges that needed to be overcome. We identified those components that had the greatest urgency and built plans to address them.

With some reorganizing, everyone



INSIDER  
VIEW

Paul  
Morton

from the One Beacon Street office of Perkins Smith could fit at 125 Summer Street, so our real estate lawyers worked with both landlords. We lived in separate spaces for six months while we modified our offices at 125 Summer. Our human resources staff determined that there were some important differences in our benefits.

After analysis we combined systems in a way to ensure that no employees were penalized by the merger. Our technology staff crafted a plan to transition each of the practices to a single computer system.

Our marketing department, with the support of a number of consultants and friends, crafted a message about the merger and what it meant. From the very beginning, we saw the synergies that we hoped for: Our corporate clients were asking us to do more IP work, and our technology clients were seeking corporate support. We tracked

new business brought in through internal referrals and have landed many new clients that neither group would have gotten before. Our revenues have grown.

We have learned that communication and repetition of communication is critical. We cannot assume that everyone understands or can absorb all the changes at once. Listening to our clients and partners and staff has made this work. We realize that we hold a unique place in the market, serving clients who want and need the special attention offered by a small firm, but with the depth and expertise of a large firm. While it hasn't always been easy, it has been interesting. As we move forward as a larger firm we will continue to find more ways to service an expanding group of clients.

As companies evaluate merger plans in the new year and beyond there are many issues to consider. Companies need to perform due diligence, be mindful of ongoing and new obstacles and, most importantly, be ever vigilant in their communication with each other.

**PAUL MORTON** is the executive director for Burns & Levinson LLP, a Boston-based business law firm. He can be reached at pmorton@burnslev.com.

**PAN**  
communications