MERGERS
THAT
WORK

Mergers That Click

Here's What's Working at Mergers of Equals

BY JEFF COBURN AND BRUCE HEINTZ

For many U.S. law firms, the late 20th century brought unprecedented growth and prosperity. Unfortunately, for many law firm leaders, this has also been a time of unprecedented anxiety.

For law firms throughout the United States, the gap has never been wider between short-term success and long-term uncertainty. As law firm leaders look beyond their short-term success to their longer-term future, many are growing concerned about what they see:

- a gradually eroding market share;
- the widening gap between top-tier firms and the rest;
- greater difficulty recruiting and retaining top lawyers; and
- a harder time attracting good clients and premium work.

Growing evidence suggests that size is becoming a significant factor in the U.S. legal industry. According to the *National Law Journal's* most recent NLJ 250, the largest firms are getting larger at the expense of their smaller brethren. In 2000, U.S. mega firms — those with more than 500 lawyers — grew 14 percent. During the same period, firms in the 250 + attorney category grew 9.4 percent, while those with fewer than 200 lawyers grew only 2.5 percent.

There is also evidence that the largest firms are more profitable than smaller ones. Looking at 50 largest firms, there is a 50 percent difference in the average per-partner profitability between firms in the first decile ($731,000 per partner) and those in the fifth decile ($490,000). Further analysis suggests that average per-partner profitability drops the further down the AmLaw 200 list you go.

A growing number of law firms are concerned that their lack of size, depth and geographic reach may be preventing them from competing at the higher end of the market. In addition, the challenge facing most smaller and mid-sized firms – and many larger firms as well – is how to break out from the world of undifferentiated law firms into something more distinctive. Overcoming "commodification" is one of the most formidable challenges facing law firm leaders.

Against this backdrop, as law firm leaders look out five or 10 years, many are wondering whether their firm is both the "right size" and the "right shape" not only to survive but, more importantly, to thrive in the hyper-competitive legal market of the future. At their retreats and in their management committee meetings, these management professionals are asking themselves some tough questions:

- Are we competing at the right level in our market? How can we move to a higher tier?
- Are we getting "invited to the party" enough? When we are, are we winning?
- What do our clients expect from us? What aspects of their legal needs are we not capable of handling?
- To what extent do we need to significantly strengthen or grow our existing practices — or add new ones? Could we take some practices national if they were larger and deeper?
- Do we have the right "platform" to ensure our longer-term success? Would being larger lead to higher profitability or provide us with a greater ability to invest in such areas as recruiting, marketing, and technology?

Merging is a means to an end and not an end in itself. It is a means for achieving certain strategic objectives — such as reaching critical mass in selected practice areas, offering greater depth of specialization, broadening the firm's existing service lines, diversifying into new services, enabling some practices to go national (or international) or extending the firm into new geographic markets.

Merging just to get larger — "bulking up" — is not in itself a justifiable end and should never be the sole rationale for seeking a merger. In this regard, the "merge or not to merge" debate currently raging in U.S. law firms is not about mergers at all. It's about the firm's need to "re-dimension" itself to achieve one or more of these strategic ends.

For law firm managers caught in the thick of this debate, it would be wise to first step back and think through the firm's strategic needs before initiating a merger search. Investing some time in a strategic-growth plan can yield significant rewards in greater clarity, sharper focus and less wasted time once the merger search gets underway. Most importantly, this will provide the partnership with a shared vision around key issues such as firm size, breadth vs. depth, practice mix, geographic reach and future investment priorities. Having agreement on these issues will provide the firm with a clearer strategic framework within which to answer the central question: Do we need to grow and, if so, by how much and by what means?

For firms that decide to grow through combination, there are four basic alternatives:

1. Acquire individual attorneys or groups.
2. Acquire smaller whole firms.
3. Be acquired by a larger firm.
4. Merge with a firm of the same size ("merger-of-equals").

A merger-of-equals has become increasingly attractive form of combination to firms that don't want to lose their identity or independence by being acquired — but who also don't believe that growth through lateral recruiting will be sufficient to achieve their long-term goals. For these firms, the merger-of-equals allows them to both grow substantially and still retain control over their destiny.

"In any combination of two law firms, there will always be some degree of inequality between the two parties in terms of size, profitability, practice strength, firm reputation, geographic market potential, balance sheet attractiveness and strength of management."

However, there is no such thing as a true "merger-of-equals." In any combination of two law firms, there will always be some degree of inequality between the two parties in terms of size, profitability, practice strength, firm reputation, geographic market potential, balance sheet attractiveness and strength of management. The fundamental difference between a merger and an acquisition lies in the extent to which the two parties attempt to go halfway in structuring the post-merger firm – e.g. the use of a shared name, the balance of power in the merged firm's governance and the extent to which practice leaders are selected from both firms.

There are a number of benefits to a merger-of-equals over other forms of law firm combination:

- ability to satisfy long-term expansion goals in a single transaction vs. smaller, multiple acquisitions;
- achievement of significant growth without having to forego the firm's basic independence or identity;
- assurance that the two parties will bring their entire revenue base to the transaction — something that is usually not possible with lateral acquisitions;
- less risk of post-merger rejection than historically has been the case with lateral acquisitions in which small groups join with larger ones (To our knowledge, over the past decade there have been no cases of failed mergers-of-equals involving firms with more than 50 attorneys.);
- less expensive in professional advisory costs than combinations involving individual lateral acquisitions, especially if they involve headhunters who charge up to 33 percent of each lateral attorney's compensation package;
- higher visibility and greater press than smaller acquisitions; and
- only realistic option for combining with a firm that, for whatever reason, does not want to be acquired.

Mergers-of-equals are not easy to consummate. As one firm manager said, "Putting two law firms together involves a lot of moving parts." The gestation time for larger mergers has averaged between 12 and 18 months. While no data are available, it is estimated that as many as four mergers-of-equals that are called off for every one that completes the combination.

A previous *Legal Management* issue (May-June 1998) explored the phenomenon of law firm mergers-of-equals (MOEs) and profiled a number of completed MOEs. In that article, the authors predicted that mergers-of-equals would become a preferred consolidation method for a growing number of firms. The purpose of this article is to revisit this hypothesis by examining some of the better known, recent mergers-of-equals.

Cases in Point

Relatively few mergers-of-equals have been carried out involving firms with more than 50 attorneys: 10 have closed during the past three years - more

than were closed over the previous decade — suggesting an acceleration of the MOE trend. Exhibit 1 contains a summary of the largest MOEs that have been consummated since 1996.

Nixon Peabody

In 1999, Nixon, Hargrave, Devans & Doyle, a 280-lawyer firm based in Rochester, New York, joined with Peabody & Brown, a 180-lawyer Boston-based firm, to form the 450-lawyer firm Nixon Peabody.

According to Co-Managing Partner Nestor Nicholas, "The legal industry is consolidating, and the top end of the market is growing at the expense of almost everyone else. Although Peabody & Brown was coming off several years of record growth and profitability, as we looked out over the longer term, we wondered how long the economic boom would last and were concerned about our ability to maintain market position with our current platform."

As the largest New York firm outside New York City, Nixon Hargrave was having difficulty altering its longstanding image as a "Rochester firm," despite the fact that it had developed significant offices in Washington, D.C. and New York City and, by 1999, had less than half its layers in Rochester. By adopting a merger strategy, the firm hoped to gain a presence in a major high-growth market, thereby creating a more balanced geographic platform for the future.

In short, Peabody and Brown's growth strategy sought new practices while Nixon Hargrave's sought new markets. In each other, the two firms found what they were looking for. For Peabody and Brown, Nixon Hargrave offered significant practice strength in public finance (Nixon had one of the largest U.S. bond practices), healthcare (an area Peabody had tried unsuccessfully to grow for years), and patent law. Nixon also had one of the largest trusts-and-estates practices in New York and, within it, had developed a practice in financial planning for corporate executives and entrepreneurs. This positioned the new firm to diversify into the lucrative investment management business, which they recently did with the acquisition of an investment advisory firm.

In addition to being located in Boston, one of the fastest-growing U.S. legal markets, Peabody & Brown offered Nixon Hargrave strengths in syndicated housing (to complement its public finance practice), developer-oriented real estate, and start-up companies.

"Peabody was primarily an entrepreneurial, middle-market firm that wanted to have more of an institutional corporate practice, whereas Nixon was primarily an institutional/corporate firm that wanted to build a more middle-market/entrepreneurial practice," Nicholas explains. "In short, we wanted to be more like each other, and the merger has enabled us to blend our respective strengths."

> ***"In short, Peabody and Brown's growth strategy sought new practices while Nixon Hargrave's sought new markets. In each other, the two firms found what they were looking for."***

Since the firms have been joined, Nixon Peabody has undertaken a number of engagements that neither firm would have been able to handle alone – including serving as lead counsel on two multi-billion-dollar corporate acquisitions and the firm's appointment as bond counsel in the recently announced New England Patriots stadium development project.

The firm also recently consummated a merger with a 17-lawyer intellectual property boutique in northern Virginia, thereby giving it a presence in that fast-growth market and bringing the firm's total patent practice to more than 40 attorneys. "Neither of us could have attracted this firm on our own," Nicholas asserts.

Today, Nixon Peabody has grown to more than 500 attorneys, a net increase of more than 50 attorneys since the merger. "Most of this growth has come from attorneys who came to us because of the merger," Nicholas says. And, although it is only 18-months old, the merger has had a positive impact on the firm's per-partner profitability.

"This has been a great success on many fronts," Nicolas concludes. "We have created a super-regional firm with 11 offices in seven states, and with the bulk of our attorneys in Boston, New York and Washington. This is a major move forward from where both firms were only a few years ago."

Piper Marbury Rudnick & Wolfe

In November 1999, following nearly 18 months of discussions, Piper & Marbury, a 400-lawyer firm based in Baltimore, and Rudnick & Wolfe, a Chicago-based firm with 350 attorneys, signed an agreement to merge their firms into a new entity bearing the combined name of both firms.

"Both firms were doing quite well," says Lee Miller, Co-Managing Partner. "Both had recently gone through a similar strategic examination in which we asked ourselves questions such as: Where's the legal market going over the next five years? Where are we in the market today? And where are we likely to be tomorrow? How well positioned are we to compete effectively in the years to come?"

Co-Managing Partner Frank Burch adds, "From our standpoint at Piper & Marbury, we saw three things that suggested that delibarate, relatively slow growth, which worked well, might not suffice:

- First, we saw continued consolidation within our client base, which made us question if we could continue to adequately serve these larger companies.
- Second, we saw rapid globalization of the economy — this suggests that

EXHIBIT ONE

Putting It Together

Review These Recent Law Firm Mergers-of-Equals

YEAR	FIRM #1	FIRM #2	NEW FIRM
2000	Frost & Jacobs (Cincinnati -180 attorneys)	Brown, Todd & Heyburn (Louisville - 175 attorneys)	Frost Brown Todd
2000	Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro (San Francisco - 350 attorneys)	Winthrop Stimson (N.Y. - 300 attorneys)	Pillsbury Winthrop
2000	Troutman Sanders (Atlanta - 260 attorneys)	Mays & Valentine (Richmond - 130 attorneys)	Troutman Sanders
1999	Nixon Hargrave Devans & Doyle (Rochester, NY - 280 attorneys)	Peabody & Brown (Boston -180 attorneys)	Nixon Peabody
1999	Pipe & Marbury (Baltimore - 400 attorneys)	Rudnick & Wolfe (Chicago - 350 attorneys)	Piper Marbury Rudnick & Wolfe
1998	Reid & Priest (New York - 160 attorneys)	Thelen, Marin, Johnson & Bridges (San Francisco - 195 attorneys)	Thelen, Reid & Priest
1998	Weinberg & Green (Baltimore - 60 attorneys)	Saul, Ewing, Remick & Saul (Philadelphia - 135 attorneys)	Saul, Ewing Weinberg & Green
1998	Blackwell, Sanders, Matheny, Weary & Lombardi (Kansas City - 200 attorneys)	Peper, Martin, Jensen, Maichel & Hetlage (St. Louis - 85 attorneys)	Blackwell Sanders Peper Martin
1998	Locke Purnell Rain Harrell (Dallas - 216 attorneys)	Liddell, Sapp, Zivley, Hill & LaBoon (Houston - 135 attorneys)	Locke Liddell Sapp
1997	Kilpatrick & Cody (Atlanta - 230 attorneys)	Petree Stockton (Winston-Salem, N.C. - 125 attorneys)	Kilpatrick Stockton
1997	Lathrop & Norquist (Kansas City - 85 attorneys)	Gage & Tucker (Kansas City City - 70 attorneys)	Lathrop Gage
1996	Thompson & Mitchell (St. Louis - 187 attorneys)	Coburn & Croft (St. Louis - 85 attorneys)	Thompson Coburn

even the best regional firms may not attract the top work.

- And third, we saw the rapid development of new technologies that would only serve to accelerate the other two trends. We questioned if our current platform was sufficient to meet the challenges of the future from the standpoint of size, depth, capital needs and overall market credibility."

Having been introduced by a third party, the two firms immediately saw a number of potential synergies through combination.

"We were both different and similar," observes Burch. "The similarities were in the firms' cultures, values, management philosophies, market position and future ambitions. The differences lay in the firms' practices, but the differences tended to complement each other."

Rudnick maintained some of the premier U.S. real estate, distribution and franchising practices, while Piper was principally a corporate, securities litigation and regulatory firm. This complementary skill set resulted in significant client synergies, especially in the hospitality and real estate industries. The two firms saw the opportunity to build a more competitive technology practice by joining Piper's expertise with emerging growth companies and venture capital firms with Rudnick's 30-attorney intellectual property group. The firm has nearly 250 lawyers who are involved in its business and technology practice.

"Basically," Miller concludes, "we felt that this combination would move us forward much farther and faster than each firm could do by itself."

This leads to a number of significant new or expanded engagements:

- Lead representation of the Big 3 automobile manufacturers' new joint-venture Internet purchasing company, Covisant. This, in turn, has led to similar business-to-business engagements in the retailing, paper manufacturing and financial services industries.
- Expansion of an existing Piper Marbury client relationship with a

major hotel chain from a single-specialty representation to a more broad-based one. This now includes corporate, real estate and franchising work, resulting in a nearly tenfold increase in the overall client relationship.

- Development of certain aspects of a multi-disciplinary relationship with one of the largest U.S. commercial real estate development companies.
- Representation of a multi-billion dollar telecommunications merger that involved more than 100 attorneys.
- Representation of a major financial exchange in its development of an electronic commerce information and trading network.

At the time of the merger's closing in late 1999, the combined firm had 720 attorneys. Today, it has 860 – an increase of 140 lawyers, many of whom came as a result of lateral defections from other firms.

"All in all, this has been a huge success," Miller concludes. "Frank and I recently interviewed the firm's partners in conjunction with the annual compensation review and we were impressed with the number of partners who said they felt energized and challenged by the merger."

Thelen Reid & Priest

On July 1, 1998, Thelen, Reid & Priest was formed from a 190-lawyer Thelen, Marrin, Johnson & Bridges in San Francisco and 165-atorney Reid & Priest in New York. Thelen, Marrin had a strong project-finance and equipment-leasing practice, but felt that its New York City office was not growing sufficiently. As such, the firm sought a larger New York presence both to protect and expand its East Coast practice and to broaden the scope of services offered to its California clients.

The merger offered a number of attractive synergies between the two firms. Reid & Priest maintained a large energy practice and, with the addition of a West Coast presence, currently represents more than 100 gas and electric utilities nationally. In addition, Reid & Priest had a significant entertainment practice in New York, and having access to Thelen Marrin's Los Angeles office has enabled it to expand its representation of television and media companies on a bi-coastal basis. By combining forces, the two firms also offer a broader platform from which to serve clients in construction law, labor and employment and project finance.

"This has been a terrific thing for both firms. The lawyers have been very successful at cross-selling and are now working on various joint strategic marketing initiatives."

The process leading up to the combination included small merger committees on each side. The firm's Chairman Richard Gary says that an important decision in the merger process was putting off issues that didn't need to be solved right away. These included touchy items like setting partner compensation in the merged entity and completing a capitalization plan. Additionally, a transitional management team was put in place for a 30-month period.

Gary offers some advice: "Make sure you realize the impact such a change of roles and relationships might have on the people involved." As an example, he cited the dramatic change to Thelen's New York attorneys who, prior to the merger, were part of a small satellite office but are now members of an office of equal size and influence to San Francisco.

Both firms completed calendar 1998 with record financial results. One year after the merger, the combined firm registered a revenue increase of nearly 10 percent over the combined gross for both firms the prior year. In addition, in the first year following the merger, the average per-partner profitability for the merged entity was 15 percent higher than the average profitability of the two firms separately.

Gary reports that the new firm has continued to be very successful. "This has been a terrific thing for both firms. The lawyers have been very successful at cross-selling and are now working on various joint strategic marketing initiatives."

The firms' integration is largely complete. By attracting laterals, the firm has grown to from the original 345 to 425 lawyers — growth that, Gary believes, the two firms could not have achieved independently. Revenues and profits are at a record high.

"Thelen, Reid & Priest is now a national firm," he says, "and this has provided the platform for the rapid growth of the firm's energy and infrastructure practice that serves some of the largest utility and energy development companies in the nation." The firm is now looking to expansion internationally. Gary concludes, "The merger was far and away the best strategic move we ever made. We are looking forward to further expansion when we find the right opportunity."

Locke Lidell & Sapp

Providing clients with breadth and depth was a primary impetus to the merger of Locke Purnell Rain Harrell, a Dallas firm with 220 attorneys, and Liddell, Sapp, Zivley, Hill & LaBoon, a 190-attorney Houston firm. On January 1, 1999 they formed Locke Liddell Sapp.

Locke Purnell, itself the result of a merger some years ago, looked at accounting and other service industries and their own clients and discovered, according to Co-Managing Partner Harriet Miers, "Everyone is merging. So, we decided to examine why." Her Dallas-based firm wanted to support clients in Houston, but did not think a small satellite would be the right way to

go. Co-Managing Partner Bruce LaBoon agrees, "This combination was not cost-savings driven, like a bank merger, but was meant to provide the practice areas and bench depth to attract and hold national and international clients."

A partner in the Dallas firm contacted someone at the Houston firm. The two firms' managing partners met. They signed a confidentiality agreement. The ensuing meetings between the management committees were kept confidential from the rest of the partners until they signed a letter of intent. It took two and one-half months up to the point of this signing, and another two-months until the partners voted – by super majority – to approve the merger.

The more the two firms talked, the more they realized how culturally compatible they were. "As partners from both firms looked at each other," explains Miers, "they concluded that those on the other side had the kinds of reputations and credentials they would want lawyers to have in their own firm."

The merger discussions also revealed a great deal of practice area compatibility. The Dallas firm brought expertise in IP and labor & employment, the Houston firm provided banking & finance and real estate, and both firms had strong litigation practices. Even though both firms had sizeable litigation practices, conflicts did not represent a major problem: Clients ended up waiving the few conflicts that did arise. Throughout the process, firm attorneys and staff members developed lists comparing each firm's major policies and procedures. This way, they identified differences and modified them accordingly.

In LaBoon's words, "We've been very pleased. It's going even better than we thought it would. People are getting along well. The lawyers are getting together to attract new clients. The combined systems are working. And so far we've had good financial results. It was a true merger of equals in every respect."

"The most encouraging result has been the reaction of our clients - they're very enthusiastic," Miers adds. "The combination has enabled us to develop new relationships. Our current clients take comfort that we are a larger firm. And a number of prospective clients have stated that size does make a difference."

"The combination has enabled us to develop new relationships. Our current clients take comfort that we are a larger firm. And a number of prospective clients have stated that size does make a difference."

Pillsbury Winthrop

In November 2000, the partners of Pillsbury Madison & Sutro (San Francisco, 550 attorneys) and Winthrop, Stimson, Putnam & Roberts (New York, 265 attorneys) voted to create a new firm, Pillsbury Winthrop, a firm with over 800 attorneys in 14 offices and no single headquarters. Firm managers expect the merger to be completed this year.

The basic rationale behind the merger was to enable both firms to better serve their existing clients, especially in corporate finance, M&A, technology and international business. Pillsbury's practice was 80 percent domestic, with a growing technology practice and offices throughout California. Winthrop's practice was the opposite – 60 percent global with strong presence in Europe and Asia. Both firms had a stable of blue-chip clients (Chevron, BankAmerica, SBC Communications, Bank of New York and Deutschbank), yet both were concerned that their current footprint was not consistent with their client's evolving domestic and overseas needs.

According to Mary Cranston, Chairwoman of the combined firm, "Both firms had done extensive strategic planning beforehand and both were clear about what they wanted in a merger partner before they began looking. In our case, we needed an international presence and Winthrop's offices in London, Hong Kong, Singapore and Tokyo were exactly what we needed." In addition, without a New York office, Pillsbury was referring millions of dollars of business each year to other law firms.

For its part, Winthrop Stimson's needs were almost the mirror image of Pillsbury's. Already 60 percent global, Winthop felt the need to expand its U.S. corporate practice – and Pillsbury, with almost 400 lawyers in California, provided an attractive opportunity. In addition, Winthrop was building a technology practice and saw significant synergies from Pillsbury's thriving 130-lawyer intellectual property practice, which included the former Cushman, Darby & Cushman patent group.

There were numerous other ways in which the two firms complemented each other. Both had a strong corporate finance/M&A capability, and both offered substantial practices in energy, telecommunications and banking. The firms had similar administrative staffs and were within $15,000 of each other in per-partner profitability.

"Most importantly," says Cranston, "we found great similarity in our vision of the future and in our management philosophy. From the first time we sat down together, we were amazed at how much alike we were. It is still too early to know what the concrete benefits from this will be, but even before closing the transaction the low-hanging fruit benefits have been dramatic."

Frost Brown Todd

"Our strategic vision was to create a nationally prominent firm in the region between Chicago and Atlanta," states Ed Glasscock, Managing Partner of the Louisville-based, 205-attorney, Brown, Todd & Heyburn. "And [195-attorney Cincinnati-based firm] Frost & Jacobs shared the same vision." The two firms merged in November 2000 to form Frost Brown Todd, an eight-office law firm in four states.

But geography tells only part of the story. The impetus for the merger came from the firms' pursuit of New Economy business along with other practices that compete on a national basis. First, the merger's planners believed that having the leading intellectual property practice in the region would be a key to long-term success. Additionally, Brown Todd was able to combine its national products-liability and disaster-litigation strengths (the firm represented the manufacturer of the fertilizer used in the Oklahoma City bombing case) with Frost & Jacobs' strengths in commercial litigation. The merger also provides a significant regional capability in the securities and M&A areas. "This really moves us to the next level," states Glasscock.

In addition to strengthening the two firms' Midwest presence, the merger also benefits both firms in the international arena. Brown Todd brought to the merger a substantial international practice that includes the representation of inbound foreign investment along with its representation of U.S. companies venturing abroad. This practice has been combined with Frost & Jacobs' own international practice to form what Glasscock believes is one of the strongest international business practices in the region.

The merger took 10 months from the first meeting until the closing. Based on his experience with this transaction, Glasscock offers some recommendations: "Be flexible and listen carefully to the positions of your merger partner. When you're choosing the best practices for the new firm, remember that your old firm may not have all of them."

Dick Erickson, Managing Partner of the former Frost & Jacobs, especially values the meetings of the practice groups. "Representatives from each major practice area got together to make the business case for merging their areas. Then, after the business case was made for the overall merger, the practice groups got together again to continue their own planning."

Erickson stresses the importance of "getting buy-in from all your partners, because as the merger approaches, people start getting scared and won't believe that the other firm's culture is the same as their own until they start interacting in the practice groups. Once they are in the practice group planning sessions, then partners start to say, 'Gee, those people are just like us,' and that's an important ingredient in the successful creation of the new entity."

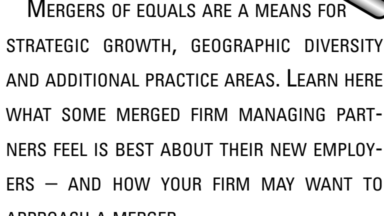
Lessons Learned

Each of the managing partners interviewed for this article offered some words of advice for others contemplating a similar merger-of-equals transaction. Here are some of these observations:

- Pursue a merger-of-equals from a position of strength, not weakness. Firms following a period of record profitability have undertaken most successful MOEs.
- Know why you are seeking a merger and be clear about what you hope to get from it. Most firms that have pursued MOEs did so having first carried out some form of strategic planning within their firm.
- Provide clear and strong leadership. Any type of sizeable combination is viewed as a significant threat to most attorneys, especially if the firm has just come off a record year. As one managing partner observes, "As leaders, you are asking your partners to suspend disbelief. To do that, they must have confidence that you know what you're doing."
- The most difficult aspect of merger is not the merger transaction itself, but rather the process that ensues following the merger to ensure a successful integration of the two firms.
- Take the long view. A merger should be viewed as a continuum rather than a one-time event. Most firms describe their merger as the first in what they expect will be a series of expansion moves through combination.

A merger-of-equals may be the single most important initiative a law firm ever undertakes. By creating a new competitive entity, an MOE can permanently reposition a law firm and raise it to a new competitive level. In the words of one managing partner, "If we hadn't done this, if we had simply rested on our laurels and 'played out the string,' I'm not sure we'd still be in the game five or 10 years from now." ✤

JEFF COBURN AND BRUCE HEINTZ ARE PRINCIPLES WITH WESTBROOK PARTNERS LLC, A FIRM SPECIALIZING IN LAW FIRM COMBINATIONS AND STRATEGIC GROWTH PLANNING. THEY ARE BASED IN THE FIRM'S BOSTON OFFICE AND CAN BE REACHED AT (617) 330-5070 OR VIA E-MAIL AT *(lastname)@wbpartners.com*.



ARTICLE SYNOPSIS

MERGERS OF EQUALS ARE A MEANS FOR STRATEGIC GROWTH, GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY AND ADDITIONAL PRACTICE AREAS. LEARN HERE WHAT SOME MERGED FIRM MANAGING PARTNERS FEEL IS BEST ABOUT THEIR NEW EMPLOYERS — AND HOW YOUR FIRM MAY WANT TO APPROACH A MERGER.

Learn More About It

On the Web

The following online articles offer more insight to law firm mergers and the factors behind them.

- Office.com: Avoiding the Pitfalls in Firm Mergers - *www.office.com/global/1,2724,58-19741,FF.html*
- Costs, clients drive big law firms to merge (from the Kansas City Business Journal) - *www.aaronlaw.com/articles/blackwell.html*

Visit the authors' site at *www.wbpartners.com*.

From ALA

The following title is available through the ALA Products department. To order, call (847) 247-5577. Please leave your name, fax number and the title and catalog numbers of the products that interest you and an order form will be faxed. This book can also be ordered online through the "Products" section of the ALA Web site: *www.alanet.org*.

- *Anatomy of a Law Firm Merger* – Second Edition (updated in 2000): catalog No. ABAALFM; $44.95 – ALA members