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**SPECIAL
ISSUE**



BREAKING AWAY

Start-up shops risk a lot, but say the rewards are worth it.

■ Willenken Wilson Loh & Lieb LLP

ABOUT THE FIRM: Willenken Wilson Loh & Lieb LLP is a 14 lawyer trial firm in Los Angeles, California, focusing exclusively on business litigation. Our clients include Sears Holdings Corporation, BP, Shell Oil, Hilton Hotels, Starbucks, Pacific Gas and Electric, Hyatt Hotels, Fed Ex, Southern California Edison, Starwood Hotels, Sempra Energy, Walgreens, Avis Budget Group, and T-Mobile, just to name a few. The firm and its lawyers have been recognized for their excellence by *The American Lawyer*, *California Daily Journal*, the California Minority Counsel Program, *Law and Politics Magazine*, and *Los Angeles Magazine*.

Our mission statement is a simple one: to be the best value proposition in the legal market for business litigation matters.

To fulfill our mission, we have adopted a straightforward litigation philosophy: figure out what will resolve a case most quickly and execute a plan to reach that resolution. We don't file pleadings motions when answers will do. We don't undertake "scorched earth" discovery just to maximize our billable hours. We think through the details; find the important evidence; win our cases. More often than our competitors, our strategy leads to very favorable settlements early on. Sometimes, we need to take a case to trial. Either way is fine with us. We have settled hundreds of cases through negotiation. We have collectively tried over 100 cases to verdict or judgment, including nine-figure cases.

But, better judgment is only one part of our value proposition. Our rates are much lower than the branded firms we compete against for business litigation. In addition to lower rates, we are willing to share the risk of runaway litigation expenses by offering multiple alternatives to the straight billable hour. Our alternative arrangements include soft caps, hard caps, and success fees. After all, if we're really as good as we say we are, why shouldn't we put our skin in the game?

At the end of the day, the best description of the firm comes from one of its Fortune 500 clients, who described the Willenken firm as "Neiman Marcus lawyers at Target prices."



WILLENKEN WILSON LOH & LIEB LLP

Footnotes

For litigation boutiques, work spans the globe,
and the docket ranges from union-side labor to high-stakes IP.

Illustration By William Rieser

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Start-up shops risk a lot, but
say the rewards are worth it.

LITIGATORS LOVE TO TALK TOUGH. But when it comes to the really tough decisions—like breaking away from a big, established firm to set up your own shop—talk doesn't count for much. Turning the fantasy into reality demands action.

Take **Willenken Wilson Loh & Lieb**, a spin-off launched by lawyers from Quinn Emanuel Urquhart Oliver & Hedges and Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. Established in 2002, the 14-lawyer firm now has an enviable client list that includes major oil companies, hospitality groups, and utilities. Few of these clients, however, came from Willenken lawyers' former firms, says founding partner Paul Loh (right). "We just approached in-house counsel and made pitches to them," says Loh. The firm also sold clients on their creative approach to billing. "Our rates are 15–20 percent lower [than those of big firms]," says Loh, adding that Willenken also sets caps, offers flat fees, and promises clients not to raise rates during the duration of a matter.

Not all boutiques are as gutsy as Willenken. Some are more or less reincarnations of their former firms. For instance, **Spears & Imes** in New York is a spin-off of Richards Kibbe & Orbe, a 70-lawyer firm with a renowned white-collar practice. Linda Imes (above) says that she and four of her partners broke off from Richards Kibbe, which also does corporate work, because "we wanted to be an all-litigation shop." Since Spears & Imes launched in 2006, it has specialized in the same work that David Spears (above) and Linda Imes did at their old firm, representing individuals in grand jury investigations and securities industry investigations, in addition to securities enforcement defense and complex civil litigation.

Another smooth spin-off is **Zeiger, Tigges & Little** in Columbus. John Zeiger, who headed Jones Day's litigation department in Columbus for 15 years, launched the boutique in 1994 when, Zeiger says, he realized that "Jones Day did not have a strategic commitment to Columbus."

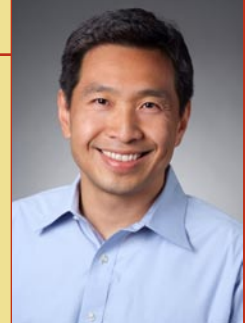
His fidelity to Columbus has paid dividends. Not only did nearly all the Columbus clients he worked with at Jones Day come to his new firm, he's also developed a list of blue-chip clients with local roots. Spinning, in other words, can be downright healthy.

—VIVIA CHEN



CLOSE-UP

PAUL LOH



Mr. Loh is one of the founding members of the Willenken Firm and an experienced trial lawyer. He has tried nearly forty jury trials to verdict, and he has written and taught on the topics of trial tactics and advocacy. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School.

Mr. Loh's practice focuses on complex business and criminal litigation, including class actions, unfair competition, major fraud and corruption, and disputes over intellectual property and trade secrets. Mr. Loh currently represents, or has represented, institutional clients including Avis Budget Group (formerly a division of Cendant Corporation), Pacific Gas and Electric Company, T-Mobile USA, Inc., Sears Holdings Corporation, Southern California Edison, Hon Hai Group (Foxconn), AU Optronics, and BenQ USA Corp.

Mr. Loh is AV-Rated by Martindale-Hubbell and has been named repeatedly as a Super Lawyer in business litigation by *Law and Politics Magazine* for Southern California. He was recently named one of the Top 20 lawyers to watch under the age of 40 by the *Daily Journal*.

Mr. Loh is conversant in Mandarin. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two young daughters.