

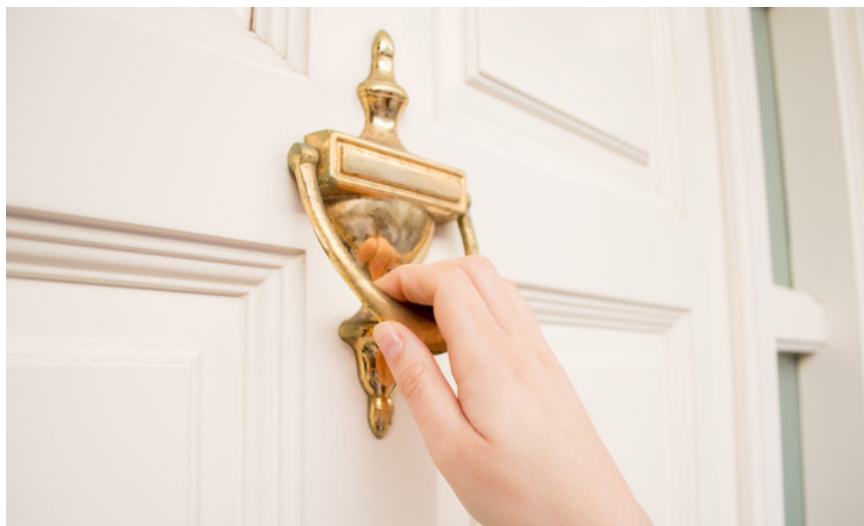
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For Those Knocking on the Door of the Am Law 200, Smaller Stature May Be an Asset


"When you have 1,000 or 2,000 lawyers, it's harder to turn and harder to make changes," says Max Crane, managing partner of Newark, New Jersey-based Sills Cummis & Gross, one of 11 firms on the cusp of the Am Law 200.

By Ben Seal | May 18, 2020



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Being big has its virtues, but in the present moment midsize law firms—many of which occupy the Am Law 200 or compose the group next in line for entry—are finding advantages in their smaller stature.

 What data are you using to stand out in a crowded market? Get the interactive Am Law 200 Data exclusively with Legal Compass. (<https://www.alm.com/intelligence/solutions-we-provide/business-of-law-solutions/surveys-rankings-and-reports/2020-am-law-200-data/>)
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Industry observers and midsize law firm leaders, including two whose firms are among those knocking at the door of the Am Law 200, say that in a time of economic and social upheaval, bigger may not, in fact, be better.

"When you have 1,000 or 2,000 lawyers, it's harder to turn and harder to make changes," says Max Crane, managing partner of Newark, New Jersey-based Sills Cummis & Gross, which last year grew revenue 3.1% to \$93 million. "We're big enough to handle the biggest matters but we're pretty nimble. We can change on a dime. We can make short-term changes *as* needed, and we can make long-term changes *if* needed."


At a time when changes *are* needed at nearly every firm, that could give firms such as Sills Cummis and others like it a leg up on some of the competition ahead of them on the Am Law 200.

Chris Gibson, president of Haddonfield, New Jersey-based Archer & Greiner, which was the last firm on the 2017 Am Law 200 and could rejoin if it manages another year of 7.1% revenue growth, as it did in 2019 to reach \$95.5 million, shares Crane's perspective, even down to the wording.

"One of the differences between an Am Law 100 or 150 firm and those of us floating around the 200, one of the things I have is an opportunity to be a heck of a lot more nimble," Gibson says. "It's one of the few advantages you have of not having all these international offices and leases. ... I have a cost structure that allows me to make modest changes in terms of saving money right now until we see what develops, but also being able to spend money to bring people on when we think it's a good fit and mix with our firm."

Both Crane and Gibson say their firms have made strategic hires even since the coronavirus crisis began, and that they plan to be opportunistic in the coming months.

"I haven't honestly changed our basic plans when it comes to trying to expand in practice areas or trying to expand in geographic areas," Gibson says. "It's just a little more daunting and difficult to achieve these days."

 What data are you leveraging to sell strategy internally? Get the interactive Am Law 200 Data exclusively with Legal Compass. (https://www.alm.com/intelligence/solutions-we-provide/business-of-law-solutions/surveys-rankings-and-reports/2020-am-law-200-data/?utm_source=website&utm_medium=Ad&utm_campaign=AmLaw200&utm_term=inlined2&utm_content=lawcom)

The American Lawyer tracked data for 11 firms that fell between \$101 million in 2019 revenue—the cutoff for the Am Law 200—and \$82.5 million. They range in head count from 202, at Riverside, California-based Best Best & Krieger, which had \$96.5 million in revenue, to the Groom Law Group in Washington, D.C., a benefits, health and retirement firm that brought in \$88.3 million with just 76 attorneys, a \$1.16 million revenue per lawyer figure that was higher than all but 36 firms on the Am Law 100.

Veteran legal consultant Jeff Coburn says there are plenty of midsize firms that try to grow by "doing things that are crazy" and don't last, but those that are focused—"depth over breadth," he argues—can find a good home around the size of firms such as Sills Cummis and Archer & Greiner.

And for those that cater to the sort of midsize company that needs a trusted adviser now more than ever, this is the time to shine as clients come to them with questions about employment issues, government loans, banking, revenue losses and more.

"I think these law firms are going to have growth, frankly," Coburn says. "There are going to be opportunities for them."

KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

Firm	2019 Revenue	2019 Head Count	Revenue Growth
Lane Powell	\$99,713,700	158	6.8%
Nexsen Pruet	\$99,685,732	171	-1.8%
Best Best & Krieger	\$96,600,000	202	5.6%
Jeffer Mangels Butler & Mitchell	\$96,500,000	118	-0.5%
Archer & Greiner	\$95,533,763	177	7.1%
Sills Cummis & Gross	\$93,000,000	137	3.1%
McAfee & Taft	\$91,958,721	184	-0.1%
Nossaman	\$90,043,065	122	-6.2%
Groom Law Group	\$88,300,000	76	n/a
Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp	\$85,800,000	132	4.0%
Howard & Howard	\$82,500,000	163	3.1%

Credit: Roberto Jimenez

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