

An Interview With...



Michael Sweeney

co-founder and shareholder at Duffy & Sweeney

Each month, *Lawyer Monthly* speaks exclusively and in-depth to a legal professional to glean an insider's insight into their practice area, taking a look at the challenges they face, the cases they regularly work on and the legislative developments that affect them and their work. This month, we speak to Michael Sweeney, co-founder and shareholder at Duffy & Sweeney LTD in Rhode Island, USA.

Duffy & Sweeney is a 'boutique' business law firm; can you tell me a little about the work it conducts.

Duffy & Sweeney LTD provides strategic legal counsel and personalized attention to U.S. and international businesses and individuals ranging from start-ups and emerging growth entities to established, private and public companies. Our clients have diverse and complex interests and legal needs spanning business law and litigation, as well as intellectual property and technology law. Our client-focused, team approach to each assignment ensures top-notch service delivered on-time and on-budget.

Can you tell me about your role specifically?

I co-founded the firm in January 1996 and lead our active corporate and transactional practice. With twenty attorneys and paralegals, most of whom come from large national law firms or served as in-house counsel at multi-national companies, we have been recognized for many successive years by Best Lawyers, Best Law Firms, Chambers USA – America's Leading Lawyers For Business, Super Lawyers, and Benchmark Litigation, ... to name a few.

What would you say is your favourite aspect of your work? Why?

I am privileged to work with a very talented, dedicated team and to represent many successful entrepreneurs, business owners and companies. We lend our collective legal and business experience and judgment to these enterprises through various stages of growth and, ultimately, to successful alliances and exits. Working in the mid-market M&A arena on a daily basis allows us to provide critical market intelligence to effectively advise and advocate for our clients, ... while knowing the "market" terms and avoiding wasted efforts.

By choosing to remain small, we carefully control our overhead and deliver exceptional value and service to our clients. Aside from our busy transactional practice – with 13 deals closed in the first 10 months of 2012 – we serve as general outside counsel to numerous

mid-market businesses whose combined global annual revenue exceeds U.S. \$5 billion.

What are the key issues you deal with on a regular basis as well as the business sectors and challenges and complexities of your work?

We serve as "general outside counsel" for numerous clients, handling their everyday needs, from human resources and contracts to IP protection to real estate leases and development. Our corporate team is regularly part of the early stages of succession and exit planning. Our clients involve us in their selection process with investment banks and other advisors. I have handled work for several clients for over 20 years; those long-term relationships are particularly gratifying to me.

In 2011, we had a record year and, in 2012, we successfully closed over 13 mid-market transactions comprising sales, acquisitions and recapitalizations in the first 10 months of the year. I appreciate the trust our clients have placed in us.

While our client base is very diverse - ranging from manufacturing and distribution companies to technology enterprises and service professionals - we remain abreast of our clients' critical business objectives and challenges and the impact of the changing regulatory landscape for financial markets and growth opportunities.

Are there any recent legislative changes that you are particularly interested in or concerned about?

The "fiscal cliff" facing the U.S. is of particular interest to all client constituents at the moment, as are changes in patent and intellectual property law. Once we understand what compromise will be made in Congress as well as the European Union, we will quickly prepare and advise our clients on the new realities facing them in 2013 and beyond.

What has been your biggest achievement in your legal career ... now and the in future?

I am gratified by the achievements of Duffy & Sweeney: we are recognized as a growing

firm with a national reputation and an impressive complement of lawyers and clients. Personally, taking the risk 17 years ago to leave a "big law" partnership and start a boutique firm focused on business clients which would compete with major brand-name firms was, in hindsight, a good "deal"!

Over the years, it has also been rewarding to be part of the achievements of many local non-profits where I have had the chance to serve on boards and in leadership positions. Looking to the future, I hope to guide our firm to the next generation of leadership and growth while maintaining our commitment to exceptional client service work, unsurpassed value delivery, and commitment to community.

Is there anything else you would like to mention that you feel our readers might be interested in?

For most businesses today, small firms can offer a superior level of personal attention, high quality work and real value. This trend is becoming visible to key decision-makers in corporate America. For lawyers, I believe this trend will accelerate as many talented partners and associates see the real quality of life, quality of clients and long-term relationships associated with firms like Duffy & Sweeney. **LM**

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Contact Details

Michael F Sweeney, Esquire
Shareholder
Duffy & Sweeney, LTD.
1800 Financial Plaza
Providence, RI 02903

Tel: (401) 455-0700

Fax: (401) 455-0701

Email: msweeney@duffysweeney.com

Website: www.duffysweeney.com