

## In The News

### Dallas' Munsch Law Firm Playing Hardt To Get

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Munsch Hardt gets plenty of calls from large national law firms interested in acquiring the firm to gain a foothold or boost their market share in Texas.

But the 125-lawyer Dallas-based firm isn't interested.

"Maybe it's the old Texas pride, but we like having autonomy," Phil Appenzeller, the firm's CEO, told me in an interview. "We like making decisions based on what we feel our clients need in Texas and not what's happening in other parts of the United States."

The firm is bucking the Lone Star State trend. The Texas law market — Dallas in particular — sizzled in 2014 as out-of-state firms positioned to grab a share of the legal work. More than 100 business lawyers in North Texas jumped from Texas-based law firms to work at firms based elsewhere in 2014 or saw their firm merge with or be acquired by an out-of-state suitor.

So far, Munsch's formula is working, judging by the firm's steady growth.

The firm, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, has 80 lawyers in Dallas, with the remaining 45 spread between Houston and Austin. The firm added 15 attorneys in 2014, including seasoned veterans from firms including Norton Rose Fulbright and Haynes and Boone, who were looking for a firm where they could offer clients flexibility on their rates, as well as lawyers from smaller firms looking for a larger platform to offer their clients.

The firm also brought aboard six attorneys straight out of law school in 2014, and it projects to hire a similar number of law school grads in 2015, Appenzeller said.

Staying focused on Texas helps Munsch keep its rates low, Appenzeller said. He said the firm's rates run on average 20 percent lower than the national firms that are coming to town.

Munsch represents a handful of Fortune 500 companies, but Texas-based middle market companies are the firm's bread and butter, Appenzeller said.

"Our clients don't typically clamor for us to have offices in other jurisdictions," he told me. "We practice all over the United States. We've got lawyers who practice in other jurisdictions. We've got a network that we utilize to provide local counsel and so far, that's worked out really well for our clients. We've been able to do that and maintain our autonomy."

By: Bill Hethcock

## Primary Contacts



**Phil Appenzeller**

Dallas

214.855.7542

[pappenzeller@munsch.com](mailto:pappenzeller@munsch.com)