

## **Value Practice Profile: Strategies to Create Competitive Advantages at Greenberg Traurig LLP**

**Cesar L. Alvarez**  
*Interviewed while Chief Executive Officer*

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Greenberg Traurig, LLP (GT) is one of the largest full service law firms in the world, with more than 1,800 attorneys and government professionals in 35 locations in the U.S., Europe and Asia.

### **Creating a Different Kind of Firm -- Strategies to Create Competitive Advantages**

**Mission.** Greenberg Traurig is “in the business of helping clients resolve problems and take advantage of opportunities” many of which involve legal issues. GT places a premium on hiring lawyers whose experience includes personal involvement with a business. This might include having owned or managed a business, being in a family that owned a business, working in finance and accounting, or earning a business degree.

- *Firm culture is focused on helping clients achieve business objectives.* The point is to help the client “get out of the courtroom” on favorable terms so they can get back to their business.
- *Lawyers are encouraged to do all they can to learn about a client’s business.* This involves reading all that one can about the business, including government filings, what is published on the internet and all the company’s publications. It includes attending company meetings when possible, and using the company’s products, as well. It also includes monitoring the lawsuits filed against competitors to identify problems about which the firm should be proactively advising the client.
- *Senior members of the firm meet with each client on a regular basis to get candid views about the quality of services provided by the firm.* The GT contacts who meet with clients for feedback are not part of the firm’s attorney team working regularly with the client. This approach to performance evaluation is seen as “less political” than internal rating systems which can fall victim to favoritism.

**Be Global And Local.** GT develops its offices by recruiting a local lawyer whose leadership, local relationships and legal expertise will create the foundation for a very successful local practice. Other lawyers are then recruited from the local area to fill out the office with what the firm describes as ‘high performing and talented people whose relationships with the local business community and with the judiciary are very good.’

- The firm’s rates are a reflection of the local marketplace and cost of living.
- The firm doesn’t acquire or merge with other firms, preferring instead to develop offices within its own culture.
- GT is committed to finding the right leader in a geographic region to start an office. For one recent office opening, the firm waited 15 years to find the right local person in whom it would have full confidence. The firm would not start an office by bringing in a new leader from

another city – it believes the secret is to build around local stars and if necessary, to wait until one can be identified.

**Embrace Change; No Committees.** GT says it is “built for change.” The firm places a premium on recruiting staff who embrace change and feel excited by the opportunities to do things better and more efficiently. In addition, rather than put committees in charge of key areas, the firm appoints specific people as lead executives in charge of these areas. Committees are seen by the firm as “the best way to slow things down” and stifle the firm’s ability to embrace change quickly.

**Foster Collaboration.** The firm places a priority on hiring staff who enjoy working on teams and it provides coaching on ways to improve collaboration skills. The firm’s culture fosters collaboration throughout the organization.

**Create Efficiencies.** With so many cost pressures now apparent in the marketplace, the firm believes that the only real opportunity to increase the profitability of the business and reduce pressure on fee increases is by eliminating costs that are not adding value for the firm or for clients. The firm is constantly looking for ways to reduce expenses. Examples:

- **Office of the Future.** GT is building a new 150,000 square foot headquarters in Miami that puts the emphasis on practical utility rather than the traditional “attorney showcase” office of the past. Individual offices are smaller but better equipped workspaces and there are conference rooms available for working with clients. There are flexible spaces for staff who work from home most of the time and only visit headquarters when necessary for meetings. WIFI and other state of the art computer resources are optimized.
- **Support Staff manage non-legal aspects of projects.** In consideration of how computers have radically changed needs for support staff, the firm is refocusing support staff on roles and responsibilities to help manage the non-legal aspects of projects so lawyers can concentrate on high value substantive work instead of project administration.

**Alternative Fee Arrangements.** The firm states that it will consider any type of fee arrangement that a client would like to propose. The firm’s finance department is described as having a great deal of experience in working with alternatives to hourly fees.

**Diversity:** Diversity is described as a core concept of the firm’s culture. CEO Cesar Alvarez leads GT’s diversity efforts. GT says that it is currently the only Am Law 100 Top 20 firm with a Hispanic or African American CEO. The firm describes its approach as a ‘hands-on approach to overcoming diversity hurdles within the profession that focuses on having minority/diverse shareholders individually engaged to achieve results.’

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