

How Much Do Hot Legal Practice Areas Vary from State to State?

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

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Hot practice areas typically differ quite dramatically from state to state. However, there are consistencies which are generally always present in most geographical areas. These consistencies are generally applicable across most time periods in most geographic areas. While this sort of question I would love to "write a book" about, for purposes of brevity I will be brief and highlight only one or two areas that are very busy generally in major geographic areas.

As a general rule, the most in demand practice area at all points in time is always litigation. Litigation is always occurring and this is the case at almost all points in time--regardless of the economy. One way I have always explained this to my candidates is that when the economy is good people have money to hire attorneys and sue and when the economy is bad people sue people to get money they lost when the economy was good. In all my years in this profession I have never seen litigation slow down. Law firms are always seeking litigators at most points in time and the demand is pretty incessant. Litigation is virtually always the busiest and "hottest" practice area in the following markets:

-MOST NON URBAN AREAS OF THE UNITED STATES

-MOST CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES BELOW 2,000,000 PEOPLE

-TEXAS (THE ENTIRE STATE)

-SEATTLE

-PORTLAND

-DETROIT

-CLEVELAND

-NEWARK

-CHICAGO

-WISCONSIN

-SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (LOS ANGELES, ORANGE COUNTY, SAN DIEGO)

-MINNEAPOLIS

There are some small exceptions to these rules: (1) Minneapolis has a very active intellectual property and patent prosecution base and these practice areas are generally quite active there; (2) Chicago has strong intellectual property, real estate and corporate demands but these are quite steady (except for real estate recently); (3) Newark has a very consistent base of corporate work but litigation still dominates.

In fact, in most cities of the United States litigation simply dominates the hiring and is always "hot?" in some

respects because there is always considerable demand for litigators. Beneath litigators in terms of demands is then generally corporate and other departments such as insurance, intellectual property, tax and so forth. For example, despite its reputation as the center of governmental activity in the United States, the most active practice area in the Washington, DC region is most generally not government contracts or some other government sounding practice area. The most active practice area is generally litigation--I mention Washington, DC because it is "litigation with a twist" compared to other markets.

Litigation is an active practice area in the Washington, DC area and is generally very active at most points in time. An important fact to understand about litigation is that attorneys who work in the litigation field can research, write about and interpret a great deal of policy and other information--and not just marching into court as litigators in smaller markets might do.

Below is a discussion of a few areas that continually have a good deal of activity in practice areas other than litigation.

NEW YORK CITY

New York City typically has the majority of work in the financial field due the heavy concentration of banks and other financial institutions in this market. Accordingly, at most points in time the corporate practice area would be considered the "hot" practice area here. While this differs from time to time this is generally consistent.

After the dot com bust and September 11th, for example, there was noticeably less corporate work generally in New York City than previously. The corporate work has subsequently "fallen off the face of the earth" with the recent financial meltdown. Corporate work in New York seems to go in boom and bust cycles.

Notwithstanding, as a proportion of work nationally compared to other practice areas New York stayed very busy. In addition, there is always a lot of corporate work in New York because there is so much financial work there--regardless of the state of the economy. New York City also continually has lots of work in the tax and insurance fields. In terms of hiring the most attorneys the main and largest practice area is always corporate because it interrelates with so many other fields. A law student desiring to work in New York would be best suited pursuing corporate work.

FLORIDA

Real estate has traditionally been the area where there is the most activity in Florida. This has now died as well. Across most points in time there has been a strong demand for talented real estate attorneys in Florida. This is likely due to lots of speculative construction and the fact that seniors and others seem to be moving to this state in great droves. There is also a strong demand for litigators in Florida, however, this demand is always fairly constant and never has reached the fever pitch that the demand for real estate attorneys seems to be consistently at.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Due to its proximity to Silicon Valley, the hottest practice area at all points in time in Northern California tends to be intellectual property litigation and also patent prosecution. As the United States increasingly moves towards an information economy, companies put an increasing emphasis on insuring they are doing everything possible to protect their intellectual property assets. Over the last several years the intellectual property-related practice areas have never really abated in terms of how busy they have been.

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte has been getting a very busy banking and corporate practice

over the past several years and corporate and banking work has become increasingly important in this region. This has also died recently, however, with the implosion in the financial sector. I believe that Charlotte is in trouble.

LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas at one point simply could not hire real estate attorneys fast enough. Despite its desert location this area had been demanding an increasingly

large amount of real estate attorneys for several years. Even with the weakening of the housing market in Las Vegas and unsold condominiums and cancelled projects, the demand for attorneys in Las Vegas in the real estate practice area has been slightly active. It is dying off very fast, however. Expect litigation to continue to pick up.

Conclusions

During the fallout from the dotcom boom in 2001 and in the next ensuing couple of years the importance of practice areas geographically become critically obvious. Because law firms, corporation and other are all businesses, they shed attorneys in practice areas that were nonproductive just as fast as they could and absorbed attorneys in practice areas that made money just as fast as they could.

This same pattern has repeated itself in 2009.

The discussion above highlights practice areas which have stood the test of time consistently in these geographic regions over the past several years. It is extremely important to understand that practice areas that stand the test of time are likely to always have jobs in these regions and those that do not may be part of boom and bust cycles.

Please see this article to find out if litigation is right for you: *Why
Most Attorneys Have No Business
Being Litigators: Fifteen Reasons
Why You Should Not Be a Litigator*