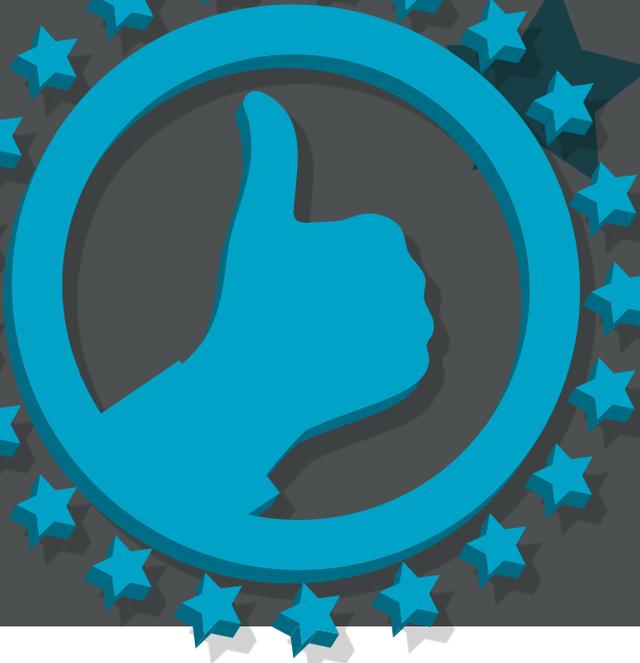


HOT CANADIAN Lawyer COMPETITION

There are strong rivalries in *CANADIAN LAWYER'S* TOP 10 personal injury boutiques and arbitration chambers. By Michael McKiernan



Long before they get to court, personal injury boutiques face a foe every bit as tough as the stingiest of insurers: each other. “It’s very competitive, and it’s going to become even more so,” says Alan Farrer, managing partner of Thomson Rogers in Toronto. His firm recently teamed up with fellow boutiques Oatley Vigmond Personal Injury Lawyers LLP and McLeish Orlando LLP to form the Personal Injury Alliance.

The group’s series of slick television and radio ads bucked the industry trend, and have helped all three firms — each of which make our list — stand out from an increasing crowd ready to represent Canadians injured in accidents. “I don’t think it’s a bad thing for consumers, especially in a climate like today, where insurers are lobbying well-financed campaigns with regulators to cut back on what people can get,” adds Farrer. “We use our resources, our size, and our experience to fight those efforts and get the type of recovery they need.”

At Slater Vecchio LLP in Vancouver, co-founder Michael Slater steers clear of advertising in favour of word-of-mouth and referrals. “We don’t advertise. It’s not about getting the maximum number of people coming in the door, but about how you deal with people and how you look at the world,” he says. “The best referral sources are previous clients. We’re fortunate that we’ve been doing it for a long time, so the client base continues to expand.”

Canadian Lawyer got its own taste of the competition as our online survey attracted unprecedented interest levels. A spectacular turnout saw thousands of voters giving their views in what one managing partner described as a “feeding frenzy.”

How we did it

Canadian Lawyer’s editorial team began the process of selecting Canada’s top 10 personal injury boutiques and top 10 arbitration chambers by creating a long list of the most notable players in their respective fields. We ran an online survey, alongside confidential interviews with the lawyers who refer work to, and deal regularly with, the firms and chambers on the long list. The editorial team then combined that input to compile the following results, listed in alphabetical order.

And it’s not just fellow boutiques our winners have to compete with. Some larger firms with more diversified practices have significant personal injury sections, and may even handle a larger volume of files than some of our final selections. However, for the purposes of our lists, we consider only firms that devote at least 80 per cent of their total work to a particular area. In order to stick with that definition, we were forced to discount a number of full-service firms whose PI practitioners were highly recommended.

According to Roger Oatley, a founder of Oatley Vigmond, the singular focus of the firm is key to its success. “We all used to think that tax law was the most complicated area, but I’d venture it’s now personal injury litigation, particularly where auto insurance issues are involved. It’s so highly complex that to do it well, a law firm has to restrict its practice to that one area.”

In the relatively new arbitration field, where half our winners didn’t even exist three years ago, competition is just heating up.

Kim Neeson, who founded Neeson Arbitration Chambers in 2010, says a wave of senior lawyers leaving large law firms to act full-time as arbitrators has catalyzed the rise of the arbitration chamber. She says the broad client bases of the Bay Street giants is more likely to be a hindrance than a help to someone transitioning into an arbitration practice. “It was becoming apparent to arbitrators who were previously working in law firms that conflicts were coming up, whether or not they were real or perceived, simply because of where they had their office,” she says.

NAC started with three members, including William Horton and Edward Saunders, but pretty soon, Neeson was getting more calls from prospective members. Now they’re up to eight. “In law, we like to be around other law people,” says Neeson. “Sharing a space that’s synergistic allows you to come in and be around like-minded individuals doing similar things.”

Arbitration Place CEO Kimberley Stewart wants to capitalize on the growth in ADR by putting her year-old centre at the heart of a push to get major international arbitrations into Canada. “I sent members of my team to virtually every other major centre of arbitration, including Singapore and London, so we were able to incorporate all their best features. The vision is to put Canada on the map as an excellent seat of arbitration internationally.”

Top 10 Personal Injury boutiques



Wagners (Halifax)
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WAGNERS
A SERIOUS INJURY LAW FIRM

Wagners is an established leader in Plaintiff personal injury litigation. We represent the Plaintiff client exclusively in medical malpractice; individual, institutional or government negligence; auto accidents; defective products; hospital errors; misdiagnosis; birth trauma and other incidents. We have also developed an extensive practice in class action and mass tort litigation. With headquarters located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, we serve clients throughout the Maritime Provinces and beyond.

Wagners handles the most complicated cases of negligence and injury, with referrals from many firms throughout the Maritime Provinces and beyond due to our experience and success. Our lawyers have over 90 years of experience in the area of personal injury law and are active in advocacy for the protection of access to justice, patient and civil rights, and we are watchful of changes in legislation that may harm or restrict the rights of our clients.



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Formed as Wagner & Associates in May 1988 by Raymond Wagner, this six-lawyer firm bills itself as the first boutique personal injury law firm in the Maritimes. Its practice extends beyond the boundaries of Nova Scotia into both New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Initially a general personal injury firm, it has developed a focus on clients seriously injured in catastrophic motor vehicle accident cases and medical negligence, especially birth trauma. Clients also include Westray mine disaster victim families, survivors of abuse at the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children, and residents of the Sydney Tar Ponds. "Entrepreneurial, pragmatic, committed, and prepared to take matters to trial," said one voter who ranked the firm top.

