

Law firm of the year

WINNER

Kennedys

**Guy Stobart, chief executive;
Nick Thomas, senior partner**

Standout performer in an economic crisis

Counter-cyclical firm extraordinaire, Kennedys is now the fastest-growing UK player in the market. The insurance powerhouse added a peerless 31% to its top line this year, resulting in a 13-place sprint up the *LB100* rankings, and a turnover figure of £67.3m. The firm continues to benefit from the upturn in litigation work and is a perfect example of sticking to what you know best, with a staggering 108 of the firm's 115 partners specialising in dispute resolution.

Kennedys hasn't rested on its laurels either. While other insurance names have sat still and reaped the benefits of a contentious upswing with little or no repositioning, Kennedys chose to strengthen the business. The firm launched in Taunton in 2008 and followed that with a Davies Lavery tie up, a move that awarded the firm offices in Birmingham and Maidstone.

However, the major statement came in 2009, when the firm underlined the scale of its ambition by hiring as chief executive Guy Stobart, widely respected for his three terms as managing partner at Burges Salmon. Under his tenure, the Bristol-based firm's turnover dramatically swelled from less than £13m to £64.2m.

In short, a firm at the peak of its powers and planting roots for further success.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

FRESHFIELDS BRUCKHAUS DERINGER

Ted Burke, chief executive; Guy Morton and Konstantin Mettenheimer, co-senior partners

Another simply phenomenal set of results for Freshfields: the Magic Circle stalwart's unrivalled knack for churning out stellar financials year after year still

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has the ability to stun the market. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the firm's trailblazing restructuring, taken two years before many of its peers attempted the same, has given it a first-mover advantage that could prove impossible for its rivals to wrestle back.

HOLMAN FENWICK WILLAN

Greg Gray, managing partner

It was a seminal year for Holman Fenwick as it broke into the top 30 of the *LB100* for the first time on the back of a 27% revenue hike to £98.7m. The firm – which celebrated its 125th anniversary last year – has defied the economic gloom to strengthen its business significantly; 40% of its turnover is now derived from outside London and it converted to LLP on schedule during 2009.



(L-R) Kennedys' Guy Stobart, Legal Business's Claire Coe Smith and James Tsolakis of The Royal Bank of Scotland

NORTON ROSE

Peter Martyr, chief executive

The year 2008/09 stood out as a pivotal one for Norton Rose as it bravely embarked on ambitious expansion plans despite harsh economic conditions. The headline move was its potentially name-making merger with Deacons Australia but it also opened new offices in Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and Tokyo. The implementation of a much-imitated flexible working scheme also drew admiring glances.

STEPHENSON HARWOOD

Sharon White, chief executive

This firm's revival continues apace and it now has the fastest-growing profitability of any UK firm over the past five years. This year's figures have held up well, thanks in part to a massive partner recruitment drive, and the firm has recently signed terms on a new headquarters in the City so that it can better implement its ambitious expansion strategy.

WATSON, FARLEY & WILLIAMS

Michael Greville, managing partner

One of the few leading UK firms to increase revenue and profitability, Watson Farley has gone from strength to strength. The firm opened in Madrid this year, following on from launches in Munich and Milan during the past 18 months. The impressive growth strategy paid off, translating into a 23% rise in turnover to £72.5m.

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