

WINNER

Eversheds

DAVID GRAY, MANAGING PARTNER; KEITH JAMES, CHAIRMAN; ALAN JENKINS, CHAIRMAN ELECT

It may not have Freshfields' profitability or a talismanic Nigel Knowles character at the top, but Eversheds, finally, has carved an identity of its own: quality through cohesiveness and teamwork. People like to work there, and clients can tell.

From being a regional law firm made up of various disparate offices, the progress made by the Eversheds partnership, which has come together over the last few years to form a single unified force, is stunning. (All the more so when implemented, as it has been, retrospectively.)

Moreover, it's not just about the partners. Eversheds stands out among the country's large commercial law firms for the breadth and depth of its commitment to all of its staff, from career development to inclusivity in all aspects of improving business performance. This combines effectively with a heavy investment in a cutting-edge approach to client relationship management, which is now paying dividends.

It was in 2003 that Eversheds realised its potential in the UK.

The firm's new managing partner, David Gray, has been a unifying force across the firm. Gray, whose style is consultative rather than dictatorial, has every reason to be proud of his colleagues and the achievements of everyone in the firm; Eversheds can now fully flex its commercial muscle.

In a tough year for most law firms, Eversheds' turnover, profits, and staff levels have risen; new offices are opening; and morale is high. And 2003 was the year that Eversheds realised its potential in the UK and set the wheels in motion for a truly effective international presence.



Eversheds managing partner David Gray (centre), flanked by the editor and deputy editor of *Legal Business*, accepts the award for Law Firm of the Year from Andreas Prinz of Bentley Motors

Peter Kent, vice-president and general counsel of Invensys Plc, power systems division, is one of an increasingly vocal client list who can spot critical differences among major law firms. 'When I call upon outside counsel, I expect sound legal advice, tempered with practicality, delivered on time and at a sensible cost. Eversheds consistently exceeds that expectation,' he says.

STAR PERFORMERS

BERWIN LEIGHTON PAISNER
Neville Eisenberg, managing partner

Berwin Leighton could have merged into mediocrity with Paisner & Co – at a time when mid-sized law firms' obituaries were being written with morbid zeal. No one thought Neville Eisenberg and his team would exceed the challenge so defiantly. He has fulfilled all his key aims – principally developing corporate and finance – with aplomb.

LINKLATERS

Tony Angel, managing partner, Anthony Cann, senior partner

For the early part of 2003, Linklaters rarely escaped the pages of the legal press, as the management implemented controversial changes, mainly affecting the autonomy of individual partners. It caused no little strain. Fast forward a few months,

and Linklaters' financial performance has directly benefited, while Magic Circle rivals are starting to look rattled. Brave managerial decisions mean rewards are starting to flow.

LOVELLS

Lesley MacDonagh, managing partner; Andrew Walker, senior partner; John Young, senior partner elect

As Andrew Walker's career draws to a dignified conclusion, the likes of the indomitable Lesley MacDonagh and new senior partner John Young are set to carry on his legacy and take the firm to new heights. In corporate, litigation and finance, the firm has a hand in many of the largest cases and transactions, while its innovations in real estate set it apart from the crowd.

MACFARLANES

Robert Sutton, senior partner

Among the richest partnerships in Europe, Macfarlanes proved in 2003 that it is also prepared to invest in its future. Two hugely impressive lateral hires – Tom Speechley from Norton Rose and Bronwen Jones from Kirkland & Ellis – surprised a market so used to seeing Macfarlanes rely on its own. But when Robert Sutton is casting his eyes around to make sure he has the right partners on board, many a larger firm has cause to be perturbed.

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