

## BakerHostetler Leaders On Firm's 20-Person IP Team Addition

By James Mills

*Law360 (April 4, 2022, 1:47 PM EDT)* -- BakerHostetler grabbed headlines in the legal world in mid-March when it announced it was adding an intellectual property team of 20 people to work in its Costa Mesa office in Orange County, California.

The 20-person team consists of five attorneys and three paralegals, plus patent agents, IP specialists, docketing specialists, billing personnel and more.

While it's not unusual for attorneys to jump to new firms, it is rare for them to bring their entire support staff with them. However, renowned IP attorney Mark Itri insisted it was all or nothing.

Itri had just spent three-and-a-half years at Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP where he'd seen many on the support team he'd hired get laid off, and he wanted to ensure his team's happiness.

So, BakerHostetler began talks with Itri and his partners, attorneys Mike Dreznes and Mark Bentley, plus their entire support team. It was a process that took almost eight months from start to finish as each team member had individual demands about work flexibility and compensation packages. The firm was willing to accommodate their demands since none were outrageous.

BakerHostetler began a push to expand its West Coast presence in 2019 and even opened a San Francisco office during the pandemic. Bringing on Itri and his team is another major step in that expansion.

Law360 Pulse caught up with firm chair Paul M. Schmidt and Los Angeles office managing partner Eric Sagerman to find out more about the move to bring on Itri and his team.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

### Why did you want to bring in Mark Itri?

**Sagerman:** Mark is one of the three most well regarded IP attorneys in Southern California. Mike Dreznes is way up there too. So when we had the opportunity to meet him, all I needed to know was



Paul M. Schmidt



Eric Sagerman

when, where and how soon. We are hiring top-notch attorneys as part of our West Coast expansion. Mark just fits the bill and more. He's got Fortune 500 clients, many of which we share. He's a known commodity, an excellent lawyer. It was really a no-brainer.

**Schmidt:** We're just thrilled with Mark and his team. We have focused our growth on the West Coast, really believing that, as part of our desire to take our law firm to the next level, having a strong presence in the major markets on the West Coast and in California in particular would be an essential part of that progress. We've added over 75 lawyers on the West Coast in recent years. Because of the success we've been having in the last couple of years, we were able to get Mark's attention and have the conversation with him, which ultimately led to him joining.

#### **Why did you agree to take on his entire team?**

**Sagerman:** One of the things that I have learned over the years is the old adage not to mess with success. Mark is highly successful because of his team, not in spite of his team. He created the right team for the practice. It wasn't a question of, "Do we have to take them all?" We wanted them all. We know that operation is successful. We also know that Mark and Mike, not only do they need their team, they are extremely loyal to the team, and that says a lot about the quality of the person. That's a good quality to have these days.

**Schmidt:** When you look at a practice like Mark and Mike have, you really want the entire team because they are so deeply involved in providing services to their very important clients. In order for it to be successful, it's important that you don't have service disruption to those clients. What he was doing was very, very similar to the way that we do it, and so we knew that, in order for us to bring him on and not skip a beat, it would be important to get the entire team.

#### **How did you determine this group was going to be a good fit for the firm?**

**Schmidt:** It starts with a cultural fit for us. Every move we make, we start with "Is this going to fit with us culturally?" It's very important that everything fits in terms of the way we're seeing our service delivery evolving over time. Mark and his team clearly fit culturally. We spent a lot of time with him and his team. Our whole team spent time with his team. We flew people out to California to meet with them, making sure that bringing them in made sense, making sure it was a cultural fit, making sure that they would be comfortable joining our firm.

#### **Have you had any issues come up as the team joins?**

**Sagerman:** We have some of the best people when it comes to onboarding. We're not new at it. We had a very successful acquisition of IP boutique firm Woodcock Washburn in 2014. They had offices in Seattle, Philadelphia and Atlanta. Approximately 70 attorneys. They were IP attorneys, so we know how to do this. What we learned there was easily translatable to this 20-person group.

#### **Is the Costa Mesa office, where Mark and his team will be based, considered a branch of the Los Angeles office or its own separate office?**

**Schmidt:** That office is a smaller office than LA, but we don't consider it a branch per se. It has always had its own management, as all of our offices do. We keep it separate for purposes of day-to-day management administration. It has its own P&L.

## How important is tech and IP to BakerHostetler?

**Sagerman:** California has always been the capital of tech. With the prevalence of tech in California and the innovative climate for tech in California, I think there's always going to be a market for practices such as IP. In that sense, adding Itri's king-of-the-crop group is adding a perfect strategic ally. We have a strong IP platform across the nation. This was a matter of extending it to the West Coast. We had this great puzzle with only one missing piece, which was the West Coast. And now we got it.

**With the addition of Itri and his team, some 193 people are now on your firm's IP team, including 108 attorneys. Have IP, data security and technology work all increased in the past year?**

**Schmidt:** IP and data privacy now account for 20% of our total revenue. Electrical, mechanical, computer science patent prosecution work was up 9% last year. IP and tech transaction work was up 39% last year.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.