BakerHostetler Hires Norton Rose Cyber Chief to Co-Lead New Data Economy Practice

Jeewon Kim Serrato in San Francisco is working with partners in Atlanta and Philadelphia to build the group, as the firm doubles down on its new data focus and aims to help more clients monetize data and IP.

By Dan Packel
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BakerHostetler is expanding its recently launched digital assets and data management practice group with a new unit focused on helping business clients monetize their data and IP, and the firm has hired the former U.S. head of data protection and cybersecurity at Norton Rose Fulbright to help lead the effort.

Jeewon Kim Serrato, who is joining the firm Monday as a partner in San Francisco, will serve as a co-leader of the new digital transformation and data economy practice team, along with Atlanta-based partner Janine Anthony Bowen and Philadelphia-based partner Chad Rutkowski.

The new team, which will launch with 12 attorneys and will draw on the six dozen lawyers in the wider practice group, aims to help clients make sense of new opportunities to use the technology, data and IP they’ve recently acquired.

“Over the past two years, I’ve been representing more and more clients that would consider themselves not to be tech companies, but with the ubiquity of open source software programs, the power behind cloud computing, and the ability to insource software cheaply and effectively, they find themselves creating enterprise solutions that they can roll out to other businesses,” Rutkowski explained.

“The vendors and others they’ve acquired to build this out might become their competitors. Traditional competitors might become their customers,” he said.

Bowen added that she and Rutkowski began thinking about the initiative in 2019, recognizing the opportunities from an interdisciplinary focus on IP, Rutkowski’s specialty; tech, her own focus; and data, Serrato’s key contribution.
“The three of those things sitting at the intersection of helping businesses be successful was something that was very interesting,” Bowen said.

Serrato, who joined Norton Rose Fulbright in May 2018, first dipped into the world of cybersecurity and data privacy as legislative counsel to a U.S. representative at the time of the Patriot Act debate, when the country was first starting to grapple with the balance between national security and privacy. She later served as the senior director of privacy at LexisNexis when that company was pivoting from a publishing company to a data broker and then worked as chief privacy officer at Fannie Mae, which was responsible for two-thirds of all U.S. householders’ data as the bank to mortgage lenders.

“I learned how important data is, how important it is to have the governance and controls, and how important it is for people to be able to speak about it and have accountability for the public in general,” she said.

Serrato said her introduction to the Baker-Hostetler team came through her familiarity with Ted Kobus, the leader of the wider data practice, which became the firm’s sixth core practice group in January. She added that the entire recruiting process was done remotely.

A spokesman for Norton Rose Fulbright said the firm wished Serrato well in her future endeavors.

Serrato contended that the value of the team’s offering is bound to grow in significance with the disruptions to business from the coronavirus crisis.

“The fact that you need to have a very clear view and mission of how to manage technology and data assets is becoming an existential question for our clients,” she said.

She put clients into three separate categories: those that don’t know what data assets they hold, for whom calculating value is uncharted territory; those who are aware of the value of their data and are looking to monetize it; and those who are about to acquire data, and recognize they need to manage it.

Rutkowski drew an analogy to Texas in the early 1900s, when dirt farmers were being approached to sell land they valued at nothing, before realizing a decade later that oil sat underneath the surface.

“A lot of our clients are waking up to the notion that data is a commodity, it’s a valuable asset, and we need to find ways to protect it and control it,” he said.

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