

THE BIG INTERVIEW

# L.A. growth story has clients and colleagues at its core

Los Angeles OEP Brenda Dieck explains how the client experience has been key to the office's success.



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## L.A. growth story has clients and colleagues at its core

**A**s our Los Angeles office continues to enjoy a period of dynamic and profitable growth, the *Reporter Quarterly* spoke to office executive partner Brenda Dieck to find out why providing distinctive client and colleague experiences continues to be central to this success.

The past few years have been highly successful for our Los Angeles team as it doubled in size to become the seventh largest office in the Firm.

Last year, it promoted six partners internally and hired two lateral M&A partners with several other partners relocating to L.A. from other White & Case offices.

Revenue has doubled in recent years and L.A. is currently the Firm's second largest office based on revenue generation for the year-to-date having finished fifth in 2021. Such growth has been strategic, with L.A. boasting a growing bottom line, as well as topline despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

OEP Brenda Dieck, who became OEP in July 2021, explains: "When I had the honor of taking on the leadership of the L.A. office, it became evident we had three strategic levers to pull that, if aligned, could take us to the next level of achievement. First, we needed to put clients at the core of everything we do, second, we had to strengthen a high-performing, cohesive team that was greater than the sum of its parts and, third, we needed to create an energized workplace where colleagues are set up to thrive in every way."

The foundation of Brenda's three-point program is an enviable portfolio of clients and the quality of the White & Case experience they treasure.

By following this model, the L.A. office has established itself as a leader in tech and private equity related transactions and broadened its finance, restructuring, commercial litigation, capital markets, international arbitration, white collar, tax and M&A practices.

The team's major clients include CVR Energy, Gerber, Hertz and Meta, the Firm's largest client.


Brenda says: "Our relationship with Meta is led by around 80 lawyers and other professionals based in L.A., supported by more than 875 lawyers and legal professionals across 42 of our 44 offices worldwide."

Meta is a prime example of how providing a distinct client experience and going above and beyond makes such a difference.

"Here is a client whose work is deeply embedded across the network," explains Brenda. "In fact, as a Firm and office, we've built our expertise to meet their needs, rather than just offering what we had."

"Not only has that grown our relationship and made us a trusted advisor, but the personal connections we've established will likely continue with Meta alumnae should they decide to move elsewhere."





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BRENDA DIECK, OEP, LOS ANGELES

## Fully integrated in the wider Firm

Brenda is also proud that the L.A. office often plays a part in some of the Firm’s most high-profile cross-office matters, working across borders, time zones, practice areas and offices in complete synchronicity to provide a seamless experience to the client.

One example is the support the office’s FRI group and Debt Finance team provided on the Hertz bankruptcy exit led by Miami Partner Tom Lauria, which was recently awarded Mega Company Turnaround Transaction of the Year by the Turnaround Management Association.

Brenda explains: “This was arguably the single most complex and successful high-profile restructuring carried out in recent years and it is great to know that the LA team played an important part.”

The LA office’s success in developing high-performing, cohesive teams has certainly reaped rewards.

“Our success has been driven by an energized office culture,” says Brenda. “Our teams are ‘all in’ and there is genuine excitement about the work we’re doing and what we’ve achieved.

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From a people perspective, Brenda wants everyone in the office to feel they are supported in achieving personal success as part of a collaborative and energized team, with every single colleague playing a vital role in doing what we do for our clients.

## A pioneering approach

There is also a cultural willingness to take calculated risks and to innovate. “We’re an office that likes to challenge the possibilities and try the unconventional, retaining what works and quickly identifying what doesn’t,” explains Brenda.

Underlying the strong entrepreneurial and client-centric ethos is a genuine reliance and care for each other.

“We recognize that a work culture that values respect, authenticity, transparency, a sense of community and genuine care builds trust, which is the essential prerequisite that binds a strong team together through success and setback,” Brenda says.

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The crystalline focus on clients’ needs and unleashing the power of a brilliant and diverse team of practitioners would not have achieved optimal momentum had it not been for an equal concentration on the health of the environment and the wellness of the L.A. office team and their families.

During a time of unprecedented disruption and fear as the Covid-19 pandemic struck, minimizing distraction and keeping the team confident, healthy, and resolute was achieved while navigating the transition to hybrid working.

Brenda says: “It’s a source of pride to me. We have such great story to share, whether it be the dynamic and profitable growth or the way we’ve retained our sense of togetherness and collaboration during an unprecedented time.”

When Brenda became OEP in 2021, her initial priority was to ensure people stayed connected and supported as the office embedded hybrid working and helped its people through the pandemic.

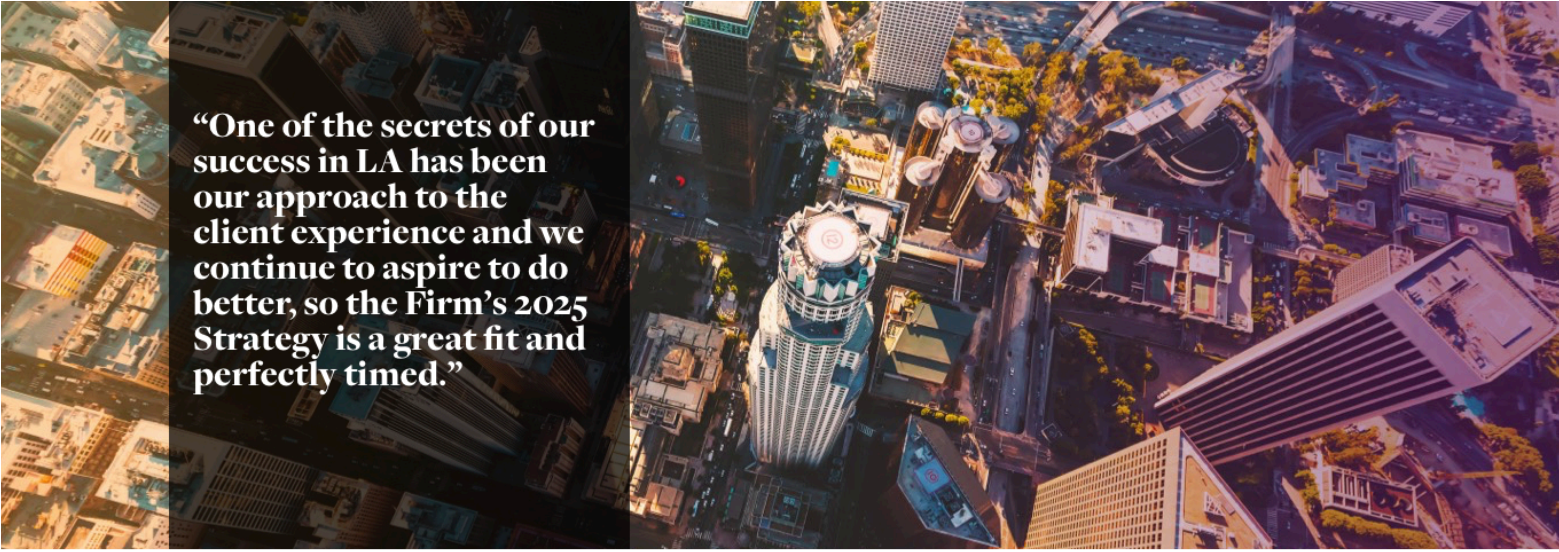
She says: “We had to balance the fact that we were extremely busy while acknowledging some of our people went through incredibly tough times during the pandemic and were at risk of burn-out. So, in my initial months as OEP, I spent a lot of time listening and building transparent and authentic communication lines. I was focused on people, how they were feeling, how we could support them better and how we could keep the community connected.





"Before the pandemic, we added a new floor to make space for our growing team, but by the time we returned to the office, we'd already outgrown it. In fact, one of my first jobs as OEP was to figure out how we could fit everyone in, which we're solving with a further office expansion and a move to more collaborative spaces and hybrid working."

The office's people focus is reflected in its recent decision to introduce office 'hoteling', where team members pre-book their desks in a more open-plan, collaborative working environment. "We'll be converting around half of the office to this model, becoming the first US office to do so." Brenda explains. "It's about embracing hybrid working and creating a more collaborative space. It will also be a more efficient and effective way to ensure we can continue to grow."



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## Client experience is key

Having managed a sweeping transition to the workplace of the future, the focus has switched to building the office's momentum and contributing to the Firm's 2025 Strategy, a central focus for the L.A. office.

Brenda comments: "One of the secrets of our success in L.A. has been our approach to the client experience and we continue to aspire to do better, so the Firm's 2025 Strategy is a great fit and perfectly timed."

"Coming out of the pandemic, we are stronger than ever, so my priority is to execute on a strategy to capitalize on the dynamic growth we've achieved in recent years by seizing untapped opportunities."

"Now that we have the momentum, we want to ensure we make the most of our broadening capabilities and increase awareness in the market. I want to call attention to the fantastic work we're doing and to challenge our perceptions of what's possible, so we aren't afraid to go from good to great."

Brenda is also inspired by the huge potential she sees in the market, across tech and private equity, and by the opportunity to harness the full White & Case global platform to serve client needs.

"I believe there are untapped opportunities on the west coast in the tech sector to work with companies such as Pinterest, Spotify, Twitter and Snap," she says. "On the transactional side, L.A.-based private equity giants such as Ares, Oaktree, Clearlake, and Platinum Equity present substantial growth opportunities for our finance, capital markets, M&A and distressed/restructuring practices. We're also very much a national and cross-border office, both in terms of the work we export and import from the wider Firm, so there are huge opportunities to build on that."

**"It's about listening, adapting, customizing, building personal relationships and establishing ourselves as our clients' trusted advisor."**

## The key to a successful future

According to Brenda, this growth and the continued success of the office will also depend on the office's ability to offer a supreme client experience.

She says: "Being top tier for legal services is only the base requirement – we need to build teams and services around what the client wants and not what we think they want."

"It's about listening, adapting, customizing, building personal relationships and establishing ourselves as our clients' trusted advisor. Personally, I also think that requires looking around the corner for the client, so we anticipate what they need even before they ask for it. And we should never forget that clients rely on us to make their lives easier and make them look good. If we do that, they will keep coming back to us time and time again."

While Brenda and her L.A. Partners are busy hatching plans to continue the office's strategic growth, they are thrilled that the first live post-pandemic Global Partner Meeting will be coming to Palm Springs, California, in February.

Brenda concludes: "The GPM is an exciting opportunity to welcome people from across the Firm and showcase our growth and success. It will be fantastic to see everyone together after such a gap since the last in-person GPM in early 2020. Plus, who wouldn't love being in California in February!"

