

# MAKING A SPLASH

WHO ARE THE FASTEST GROWING FIRMS IN THE MARKET? ONCE AGAIN, ALB ANALYSES THE FIGURES AND BRINGS YOU OUR ANNUAL FAST 10 SHOWCASE. REPORT: **RENU PRASAD**

**T**he toughest market in recent memory. That is how many corporate lawyers have described FY2013 and, try as we might, it has been difficult to build a solid case that the first half of FY2014 has been a substantial improvement. Time will tell.

The Fast 10, however, is about the year that has come and gone. Once the dust has settled at the end of each financial year, we pick through the results to identify the firms that have exhibited particularly promising growth and present our top ten in this annual showcase.

Some common themes have emerged each year. Even during difficult years, we have always been able to identify some bright spots; some rising stars of the industry. While this year has been no exception, it must be said that the field of candidates has shrunk considerably. Many former Fast 10 firms are struggling to stay on the right side of zero growth; some have slid into negative territory. Some firms who

were previously willing to disclose their revenues did not do so this year. Some firms who have been regular inclusions in the Fast 10 over the years were unfortunately not in the ballpark in 2013. All the more reason, then, to acknowledge the firms who have made the cut.

As always, the question of methodology must be addressed. A list of the fastest growing firms would, in an ideal world, be based purely on organic revenue growth. This objective, however, is complicated by the multiplicity of lateral hires and mergers occurring in the market. Growth through acquisition is becoming the norm, not the exception. There are some firms still growing organically, but these are generally the smaller firms with revenues under A\$10 million.

We have therefore opted to continue last year's methodology of making a subjective assessment of each firm's growth. The factors taken into account are the size of the firm's revenue growth; the size

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## ALB FAST 10 – ALB'S PICK OF THE FASTEST GROWING FIRMS

The following list is ALB's pick of the fastest growing firms, taking into account revenue growth, the base from which that growth was achieved and consistency of growth. Please refer to article text for more information on methodology.

	FIRM	2012 REVENUE (A\$ million)	2011 REVENUE (A\$ million)	GROWTH
10	Marque Lawyers	\$6m	\$7m	22%
9	Gilbert + Tobin	\$155m	\$162m	5%
8	HWL Ebsworth	\$140m	\$151m	8%
7	Lander & Rogers	\$75m	\$81m	8%
6	AdventBalance	\$14m-17m	\$18-21m	25%
5	Slater & Gordon	\$215m	\$298m	37%
4	Colin Biggers & Paisley	\$40m	\$50m	26%
3	Curwoods	\$19m	\$29m	53%
2	Moray & Agnew	\$75m	\$88m	17%
1	Mills Oakley	\$49m	\$58m	20%

### RAW REVENUE FIGURES – 2013 (A\$ million)

The following is a ranked list of the fastest growing firms without embellishment by ALB. For an explanation of why this list was not used as a basis for the 2012 Fast 10, please refer to the article text.

	FIRM	FY2012 REVENUE	FY2013 REVENUE	% CHANGE
1	Curwoods Lawyers	19	29	53%
2	Slater & Gordon	215	298	37%
3	Colin Biggers & Paisley	40	50	26%
4	AdventBalance	14-17	18-21	25%
5	Marque Lawyers	6	7	22%
6	Mills Oakley Lawyers	49	58	20%
7	Moray & Agnew Lawyers	75	88	17%
8	People & Culture Strategies	4	4	14%
9	ILH Group Limited	32	36	12%
10	Webb Henderson	undisclosed	undisclosed	12%
11	M+K Lawyers	52	58	11%
12	Piper Alderman	58	63	9%
13	Kelly & Co	24	26	8%
14	Lander & Rogers	75	81	8%
15	HWL Ebsworth	140	151	8%
16	Sparke Helmore	105	113	7%
17	Jackson McDonald	undisclosed	undisclosed	7%
18	Hopgood Ganim	39	41	6%
19	Aiken Partners	undisclosed	undisclosed	5%
20	Gilbert + Tobin	155	162	5%

of the revenue base in FY2012, whether the firm has engaged in any mergers which may have impacted its 2013 results and the firm's performance in previous Fast 10 surveys.

It must be said that different minds may well reach different conclusions in this process. Once again, we have provided an alternative Fast 10: a list of firms ranked by revenue growth alone. We encourage you to examine both tables and draw your own conclusions as to who is the fastest growing firm in the market. Ultimately, there is no definitive answer to this question which can account for all of the factors underlying sustainable growth. This process is by necessity a joint enterprise of mathematics and subjective judgment.

### HONORARY MENTIONS

We would like to make particular mention of two firms which deserved to be included in the 10 but narrowly missed out. The first of these is the 2013 ALB Insurance Specialist Firm of the Year, Sparke Helmore – one of the very few firms with A\$100 million + revenues which had substantial growth. Meanwhile, People & Culture Strategies continues to grow solidly (the figures you see in the table are rounded up) and would normally take its place in the 10, but for our policy of including representatives of the larger firms in recognition of their larger revenue base. There are several other firms which would not have been out of place in the 10, but these two firms lead the list.

## ALB'S PICK: THE TOP 10 GROWING FIRMS

# 10

### MARQUE LAWYERS

**FY2013 Revenue: A\$6.8 million (22 percent increase)**

**Partners: 8 (0 percent increase)**

**Lawyers: 27 (eight percent increase)**

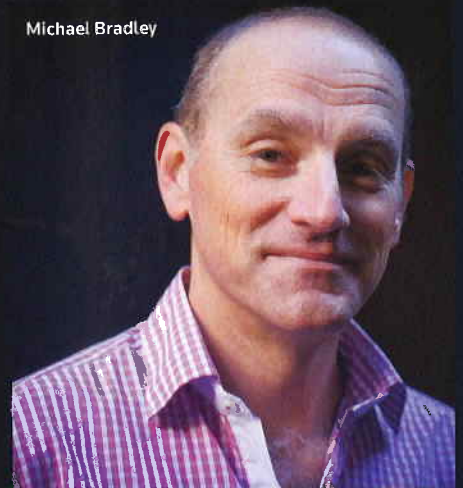
Marque Lawyers had 17 percent revenue growth in 2012 and has followed up with 22 percent growth in 2013, a consistently positive result for the firm. The firm has won new panel spots this year, but managing partner Michael Bradley says that these were too recent to be reflected in the FY2013 results. Instead, he attributes the growth to the firm taking market share.

"The pricing question continues to resonate," he says. "Clients are getting more and more interested in alternatives to time billing and less attracted to the traditional approach...our brand has consolidated, we've been around five years now and the profile of the firm has lifted progressively and we're pretty well known and seen as a less risky option than we used to."

It's interesting to hear Bradley use the adjective "risky" to describe the firm's recent past. Is he referring to the fact that the firm was a newcomer, or is he referring to the firm's reputation as the humorous maverick of the market? "A bit of both," he laughs. "But incumbency has an advantage. When clients choose providers, there's a safety in longevity and reputation. If you stand apart from the mainstream, you are going to be to some extent seen as a brave alternative."

Bradley is also the author of a series of stylish opinion pieces in the Australian Financial Review, many of which dwell on the depressed state of the legal services market. We can't resist asking the question: does he ever receive feedback of the 'shoot the messenger' variety? "I get feedback but I don't hear from people who don't like me," says Bradley. "I'm sure a lot of people disagree but I don't hear directly from them." Perhaps potential critics have been silenced by the power of Bradley's exposition? "I'm not quite that arrogant!" says Bradley. "I'm just expressing an opinion. I think the debate is good to have and if people have other opinions I'd encourage them to express them."

Michael Bradley



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