



[Close-Up](#)

## Quality corporate counsel needn't come with a hefty price tag

By **DOROTHY O'DONNELL**, Special to The Daily Transcript  
Friday, April 28, 2006

[Print](#) [E-Mail](#)

Whether it's a startup trying to raise capital to get off the ground or an established business needing help with day-to-day transactions, getting the right kind of legal assistance can be a challenge for many companies. Hiring a full-service law firm doesn't always make sense or -- in the case of small companies -- simply isn't affordable.

But choosing a less expensive attorney or small firm that doesn't have extensive corporate experience is a decision that could come back to haunt a business. Work that's done incorrectly or isn't comprehensive enough may end up having to be re-done or may leave them exposed to costly legal disputes in the future.

Recognizing the need among many companies for the same caliber of corporate legal expertise they would expect from a larger firm at rates that don't break the bank, Patrick Valentino and Mark Sonnenklar formed **Corporate Counsel Group** in 2003.

"We knew there were a lot of clients who need outsourced general counsel, whether they're small, medium or large companies," said Valentino, who, in addition to being a lawyer, also has a background in investment banking. "We're not trying to compete with the big firms -- we refer clients to them when we know they can better serve them in a particular area -- we focus on the areas we're good at and provide the same quality of work and strategic counsel you'd expect from a larger law firm at much lower rates."

Corporate Counsel Group's practice focuses on general corporate counseling, strategic partnering, venture financings, commercial real estate transactions, mergers and acquisitions, intellectual property, technology transactions, employment and executive compensation.

The firm's clients fall into two main categories: real estate and private and public corporations. Its corporate clients include Internet search, marketing and services companies as well as biotech and other technology companies. While a number of Corporate Counsel's clients are startups, a good percentage are also established smaller and midsize companies.

Valentino works with most of the firm's real estate clients while Sonnenklar, who was a business lawyer at **Morrison and Foerster LLP** (MoFo), the largest law firm based in California, before forming Corporate Counsel Group, focuses on corporate clients. Associate Laura Davidov is also part of the firm's San Diego team, which is about to add another attorney. Corporate Counsel also has an office in Los Angeles.

The firm often serves as in-house general counsel for smaller clients, or for clients who already have in-house counsel, it steps in to provide added support as needed. In addition, Corporate Counsel Group helps clients that use larger full-service firms by taking on some of the day-to-day transaction-intensive tasks that it can do more cost-effectively.

"We're there when you need us, and when you don't, we go away, and so does the bill,"

### ADVERTISERS



Can  
you  
afford

Daily Transcript

### FEATURED LINKS

- [Weather](#)  
Get your forecast
- [Movies](#)  
Find Showtimes
- [Travel](#)  
Search, Book, Fly!

said Valentino.

The firm also helps clients save money by reducing paper documents and trying to achieve economies of scale in research work. And because Corporate Counsel Group's attorneys are more experienced, their billing is usually very accurate which can translate into savings for clients.

"Junior-level attorneys at large firms constantly over-bill because they're still trying to figure out how the process works," Valentino explained. "It's very common for a junior attorney to prepare a pre-bill that is astronomical for the services provided, but in some cases, the bill is passed through."

According to Valentino, entrepreneurial or early stage companies face a number of significant challenges as they try to get up and running or to the next level. Figuring out whether to hire an attorney and who to hire are two that top the list.

"Sometimes they end up hiring attorneys who are jacks of all trades who are less expensive but don't have business experience," said Valentino. "That may be okay for a small mom and pop company, but if their goal is to grow, they'll need intelligent business advice from a knowledgeable corporate attorney."

Another potentially costly mistake he sees some companies make is trying to create their own legal documents by cutting and pasting sections from existing documents they download off the Internet.

"They may do a pretty good job, but if they're missing important protections and agreements, it will matter if something goes wrong later on," he explained. "As they grow, their transaction agreements will be more heavily scrutinized and they'll need to make sure that things like licensing, partnership agreements and employee agreements are properly documented."

In addition to getting cost-effective, "A-plus level work" from attorneys with large firm experience, another key advantage Corporate Counsel Group clients enjoy is being able to count on responsive service.

"One of the most common things we hear from clients is how responsive we are," said Valentino. "We had one client that we later had to refer to someone else who told us we'd spoiled them because we always called them back right away. Our clients also tell us that they feel like we really care about what they do. We actually listen to them. Some attorneys think they always know best and say 'this is the way it should be.'"

According to Valentino, that philosophy applies to all clients, regardless of their size or the nature of the work they hire Corporate Counsel to do. For Valentino and his associates, this client-focused approach to business is also what makes being part of Corporate Counsel Group a fun and rewarding experience.

To learn more about Corporate Counsel Group visit [www.corpcounselgroup.com](http://www.corpcounselgroup.com).

---

*O'Donnell is a San Diego-based freelance writer*

Reprint Rights | Subscribe | Sales Leads | Send a Letter to the Editor

---



Open a NEW Business Account Today!  
Make the Connection with Coronado First Bank!

[Company Info](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Acceptable Use Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#)

All contents herein **copyright** San Diego Source | San Diego Daily Transcript 1994-2006

please do not send emails to this account