



We start a new series on the “best-of-breed” boutique law firms with Kalbian Hagerty LLP: experts on the Persian Gulf, the FCPA and more

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Throughout our coverage of the Georgetown University Law Center’s conference on “Law firm evolution” ([click here](#)), the hot topic of conversation was the recent development of entrepreneurial law firms. As discussed by Richard Susskind in his book ‘The End of Lawyers?’ and our interview with him during the conference ([click here](#)), innovation is the driving force behind today’s global economy. Successful law firms advise clients on their legal options but they also have the experience and resources to assist clients with coordinating and managing a wide range of service providers such as project managers, deal brokers, accountants, linguists, strategy and management consultants, market experts and valuation experts to name a few.

No firm personifies this more than the Washington, D.C. law firm, [Kalbian Hagerty LLP](#). Headquartered in the nation’s capital, Kalbian Hagerty LLP has an office in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, and a strategic alliance with a prominent law firm in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

With decades of international experience and a global perspective, the attorneys at Kalbian Hagerty provide diversified legal services to its clients in practice areas such as banking, defense, engineering, construction, health care and securities law. The Firm’s expertise in the Middle East has made Kalbian Hagerty *the* go-to law firm for legal work in the Persian Gulf.

This Wednesday, April 28th, Kalbian Hagerty managing partner, James R. Hagerty, is the lead presenter at the highly prestigious Army and Navy Club series breakfast, this one entitled “Doing Business in the Gulf”. We caught up with Jim at his D.C. offices:

Project Counsel (PC): Jim, our thanks in providing us time to chat with you. We know your travel schedule is hectic.

James Hagerty (Hagerty): Greg, it's a pleasure. ProjectCounsel.com and ThePosseList.com are both on my reading list so I am happy to sit down with you and discuss trends in the industry and developments in the practice areas our firm is involved with, especially our Middle East practice.

PC: Jim, to start, please give us an overview of your firm's work.

Hagerty: Kalbian Hagerty is an international general practice law firm with corporate, transactional and litigation/dispute resolution capabilities. Our clients include public and private corporate groups, family offices, government agencies, partnerships and high net worth individuals. Our international team of attorneys regularly collaborate on client matters and also serve as transnational business facilitators, delivering counsel and overseeing transactions that bridge foreign cultures and international legal systems.

PC: And your practice areas are quite diverse, yes?

Hagerty: They are. In the Middle East, our practice includes market entry advice, regulatory advice, contract negotiation, dispute resolution representation, joint venture structuring, international tax planning, and agency issues.

PC: One of factors that made Kalbian Hagerty successful in the Middle East is discussed by author Richard Susskind in his book and it was also emphasized again and again during the Georgetown University conference: value.

Hagerty: Exactly. Quite honestly, being focused and cost-conscious is not new to us. We know that in order to thrive in today's competitive marketplace, we must add value to each client's business. We seek to understand the workings of our client's business and to anticipate our client's needs. And that is what has gone a long way in building our reputation in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere as a competitive and unique law firm. Our competence along with emphasizing value has given us the privilege of advising and representing some of the world's most discerning businesses.

PC: Your take on the "new new" world in the legal market?

Hagerty: I think Susskind makes some valid points. I believe that the niche international law firms of the future, will be superbly schooled and genuinely expert in the related disciplines of law, culture, linguistics and business. Because of this, these firms will be able to deliver value promptly and efficiently to clients. Some lawyers have an image of the adversarial "client warrior" and that concept has dominated historical ideals of the lawyer. But while zealous commitment to client advocacy remains one of the core norms of the U.S. legal model — and our law firm — the punitive cost of litigation (or arbitration) have prompted many clients to emphasize team work and conflict resolution rather than protracted litigation and dispute.

PC: So Kalbian Hagerty has actually been ahead of the curve?

Hagerty: We think we have. Those law firms that are changing or streamlining their business now are probably the most forward-thinking firms. Experience is essential to becoming a successful entrepreneurial lawyer. But I would say that the landscape of the future for most lawyers in the United States is going to be extremely different.

PC: Tell us a bit about working in the Persian Gulf.

Hagerty: My partner, Haig Kalbian, has been working in the Gulf since 1984 when he graduated from Notre Dame Law School. Many of our lawyers have lived and worked in the Middle East for decades. Kalbian Hagerty opened its office in Abu Dhabi in 2003 when not many were aware of Abu Dhabi, Dubai or the United Arab Emirates. We also work in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait.

PC: Have you noticed growth in the number of US law firms opening offices in the UAE and the Middle East?

Hagerty: Yes. The number of international offices has grown exponentially the last two years especially. The economic downturn has forced many US businesses to look overseas for work. This is especially pronounced in the real estate, construction and related professions such as civil engineering and architecture. Asia continues to attract U.S. firms and new offices continue to open in Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai, China, and other major hubs.

PC: And more competitive.

Hagerty: [laughing] Yes, the pool is a lot more crowded than when we started. But that's the key. We have been present in the Gulf for decades and our strength in that region rests on our unique capability to fully navigate and bridge international legal systems and understand the cultural and legal dimensions of diverse business transactions. This enables us to provide both our Middle East and international clients with unusually comprehensive solutions to their global business challenges. There has been phenomenal growth in the region but we have grown with it.

PC : And the overall environment in the region?

Hagerty: The situation varies by country and in the UAE by Emirate. Dubai's economy, which is largely dependent on the property sector, is in very tough shape. It will take years for it to fully recover from the downturn in the property market which apparently has not yet bottomed out. Abu Dhabi, because of its oil wealth and more diversified economy has slowed down but is still developing quite quickly. The Abu Dhabi real estate market has stabilized. The UAE government has stepped in and is pursuing a number of infrastructure and public works contracts including airport expansion, road construction and a huge nuclear power program. Saudi Arabia's economy has weathered the financial crisis well and its fast growing economy and large population presents a significant opportunity for US exporters. Bahrain is a financial services powerhouse and Qatar, while small is growing quickly and presents attractive opportunities.

PC: How about direct government work?

Hagerty: We assist our clients with public tender processes which are now mandatory in most cases, similar to our system of public contracts. In many of the open tender processes are these days divided into independent and smaller sub-projects which enables even small to medium sized companies to compete in them. Finally, local companies and authorities are keen on buying western technologies and solutions. We assist in all those endeavors.

PC: I noticed on your website that you have the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) in Arabic. Your firm actually reviewed and provided input to the U.S. Commerce about that, yes?

Hagerty: Yes, we worked closely with the U.S. Commerce Department to translate the FCPA into Arabic and then we had to gain approval from the U.S. State Department of our translation before we could post it to our web site.

PC: Your view on FCPA issues in the Persian Gulf?

Hagerty: The Department of Justice and the Security and Exchange Commission are investigating and prosecuting alleged violations of the FCPA more aggressively than any time since its enactment in the mid-1970s. The increased competition caused by the worldwide recession will put more pressure on US businesses seeking to win contracts overseas to so anything they can to win the business. Businesses in the energy and medical equipment areas and those who contract with foreign governments should be particularly sensitive to FCPA and anti-boycott laws.

PC: Jim, many thanks for your time.

Hagerty: Greg, always a pleasure seeing you. If you or your readers have any follow-up questions, please send them to me at jhagerty@kalbianhagerty.com.

For information about the Army and Navy Club breakfast series (see website by [clicking here](#)) contact Michelle Morse, Manager – Membership Services, at 202.355.0505 or mmorse@armynavyclub.org.

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