

Take your partners

Argentina

M & M Bomchil

Clients who instruct Buenos Aires' M & M Bomchil enjoy an integrated, holistic service powered by flexible communications, imaginative networking and an unparalleled local pedigree

“Of course, I mean no disrespect,” says Marcelo Bombau, permitting himself a slightly mischievous chuckle, “but compared to many other firms, we have very young partners. Their average age is very much nearer 40 than 60. And because it is our company culture for partners to be very involved and active in day-to-day work, the service our clients experience is both authoritative and highly energized.”

For all M & M Bomchil’s youthful drive and impressive recent growth (in the quarter-century since Bombau, partner and leader of the firm’s M&A, media and entertainment and customs and foreign trade departments, joined the firm fresh out of law school, the number of partners has soared from three to 17), at a venerable 85 years old it is the original heavyweight of the Buenos Aires legal scene, which until recently was a largely transient community short on long-lived, proven firms. That M & M Bomchil has established a template for a local legal brand of substance, expanded its remit to prove its specialist credentials in everything from foreign commerce to real estate law, and – as other firms have dreamed up their own formulas for high-quality service based on similarly long-sighted and loyal ethics – continually driven growth while evolving services to guide clients through the very specific challenges of Argentina’s last few decades, speaks volumes about both its consistency of technical excellence across an expanding portfolio and its world-class professional relationship skills.

“Client relations have undergone a radical transformation in recent years,” says managing partner Máximo Bomchil, as he explains how the firm’s delivery has developed in response. Cutting-edge communications technology and the associated human connectivity are now a given; and while every email, call or fax is answered within 48 hours, with associates and partners always available to clients, the firm’s focus is to avoid contact overkill in favour of making prompt interaction as productive as possible, based on a keen understanding of client interests. “More complex, significant and potentially beneficial are the changes in the roles of both clients and lawyers,” Bomchil continues. “Clients now have a much more sophisticated and informed grasp of who and what is available in the legal marketplace. They have a broader overview of how business is done; they want to be much more involved and accordingly can be much more demanding, and in a wider range of ways. We make it our business to maximize the potential benefits of these changes.”

A tailored response to individual needs

Organic, responsive, synergistic and flexible, the Bomchil brand of client care aims for a tailored, individualist response, offering – to quote from the mission statement posted on the wall of all firm meeting rooms – “a service of excellence oriented to... align behind [our clients’] interests”.

“We have become more flexible,” says Bombau, “communicating across departments and sharing knowledge both in-house and out, because where client contact might once have consisted of a letter to a client’s legal department, now you’re more likely to make a call to talk about a certain case and end up discussing other aspects of the client’s business, talking broad strategy or just exchanging information on market trends. All these aspects interact in today’s workplace and the ways we can be helpful extend way beyond the legalities.”

“And yet,” adds partner and financial services and capital markets specialist Tomás M Araya, “even though today we all work in a much faster-moving and more competitive atmosphere, which makes the ability to share information and act swiftly essential, the core of M & M

Argentina



Bomchil's treatment of its clients hasn't changed over decades. It remains as key as ever to our job to build trust eye to eye, to be personally available and to help our client achieve his aims."

Another constant is the knowledge that satisfied customers are still the best publicity. "There are ways in which Argentina is way behind certain other markets," acknowledges Bombau, "for example, in some marketing practices. In Argentina, you never see anybody advertising their legal services in a magazine. Eventually, we may catch up, but right now the legal community here is not too comfortable with that. So in time-honoured tradition, the marketing done by ourselves and other law firms is inspiring people we work for to help make our case to potential new clients by giving them a positive experience to talk about."

Cutting-edge delivery of classic values

Such enduring values, alongside all the latest thinking, are engrained in the firm's signature work culture. "We take care to do things properly," continues Bombau. "All recruits are given training in oratory and writing, which creates a coherence and an orderliness in the way we express the service we offer as a company, the way we present things, the way we conduct ourselves. There is a binder which sets out the firm's 'house style' on how to do all the basics of legal office life – respond on the phone, deliver correspondence – it's a fundamental aspect of our brand, in black and white."

Ticking such boxes goes hand in hand with a policy of creating a nurturing work environment which inspires employees to put down roots and contribute to the easy flow of ideas and experience which enriches the firm's work. New recruits spend their first week learning the company culture. "Each is assigned a mentor," says Bomchil, "someone assigned to lead the new person by the hand. We expect a lot for our employees and we know it is our responsibility to invest a lot of time in them – in an ongoing sense with regular evaluations, but especially, when young people join us, to give them a level playing ground to start from. Our system is very tidy. It works just like a clock."

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"Although there is no mandatory ongoing education for working lawyers in Argentina, we see its value clearly and promote a strong emphasis on the principles of continuing legal education as an aspect of working to the best possible standards as individuals, and, more broadly, for the evolution of the company," adds Bombau. "We also make sure that we are on top of every single innovation, modification and regulation that emerges – so much so that this has become part of our brand image. Beyond that, we make efforts to have our people become well known, both

Opposite page
Far left:
Máximo L Bomchil

Middle left:
Marcelo Bombau

Left:
Nestor Belgrano



in the local legal community and internationally too. Locally, we try to spread our wings at colleges and universities, arranging for associates and partners to give lectures or take classes and courses. Having our people write for publications and committing to pro bono work are other effective ways of getting the word out about who our people are, our company culture, the scope of our work and our people's potential. Young attorneys who we see perhaps as potential partners for the future we may support for a semester or a one or two-year course at university, or working at a foreign law firm; and we are also hosts to rising international lawyers. The benefits of all these measures include – crucially – helping us continue to tailor a world-class client service.”

Learning lessons across platforms

Araya, who serves as professor of corporations, cross-border corporate insolvencies and bankruptcy law on the master's courses of Universidad Austral School of Law, Universidad Di Tella School of Law and Universidad de Palermo School of Law, is a case in point, an illustration of the broad range of interfaces which M & M Bomchil attunes to its exchange of insights. “Behind the scenes, the knowledge and experience we all gather is pooled,” he says, “so that the expertise available to our clients is constantly growing.”

Araya and his colleagues concur that from the client's point of view, what is instantly distinctive about the M & M Bomchil service is how readily this integrated expertise can be tapped through the firm's culture of hands-on partner involvement in day-to-day business. Associates' work on cases is regularly informed and closely supervised by partners, which both ensures the most sophisticated understanding of the circumstances and affords the more junior lawyers a glimpse of the bigger picture.

Says Bombau, “I have had new clients say to me, ‘OK Marcelo, now I've seen the BMW, don't give me the Fiat!’ But only clients working with us for the first time say this. It becomes apparent very quickly to clients that partnership at M & M Bomchil doesn't mean taking a more relaxed role. All of our partners are very active in the field, even when that may mean getting into the mud, and clients really



appreciate that: it helps build that important bond of trust. It's a characteristic of the company that our partners are like hungry young juniors, and that really differentiates us.”

And as the legal profession as a whole, and specifically the culture of client care, becomes ever more sophisticated and globally focused, the benefits of this approach become increasingly far-reaching. A portfolio of international clients – including European companies Peugeot, Credit Agricole, GKN, Renault, Siemens, BMW, Orient Express Hotels and ENDESA, and PepsiCo Inc, Liberty Global Inc, Clear Channel, GeSeaco, Bloomberg, Comerica Bank, Getty Images, Chep and CMS Energy from the United States – has equipped M & M Bomchil with a wealth of experience in brokering productive relationships between sometimes contrasting business cultures.

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A world of experience

“Among our European clients, we find that each nation has its cultural differences,” says Nestor Belgrano, a partner whose specialisms include financial services, telecommunications and construction law. “America has its own style again, and we are used to managing and successfully bringing together these diverse ways of working. For example, American clients generally prefer that lawyers be really proactive and involved in broader business considerations, whereas French clients often prefer the lawyer to play a more traditional role of legal adviser. So we have learned to be flexible.”

And while these skills have long facilitated the work M & M Bomchil undertakes with international clients, the firm’s intuitive understanding of Latin American mores is now playing a more central role in the firm’s success.

“Clients look to us for introductions and the benefits of our experience within this community,” says Belgrano. “We are related with many other firms in Latin America on a non-exclusive basis, allowing us to tailor the best possible connections from our network to any given scenario and make multiple recommendations in case conflicts of interest on the part of clients need to be accommodated. And while international clients who don’t have our natural awareness of firms who can help them do business in new Latin American territories have sought our help and



Left:
Tomás M Araya

guidance for many years, now there is a new element to the situation which is driving some exciting changes.

“Whereas before, all the most important investors came from Europe, the United States or possibly Asia, more and more Latin American companies are now coming to us to take care of their interests – this is for us one of the most significant developments of the last 10 years. The economies are changing, most notably Brazil’s and Chile’s. And this is changing the relationships between Latin American law firms. Once, it was usual for the legal practices of Latin America to make their important international connections north of Mexico or overseas, rather than among ourselves. What we see now is a meaningful network growing up between firms in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Uruguay. Our own region is showing a new confidence and Latin American lawyers right now are awakening to that.”

“Exploring the new possibilities of Latin America is more the fashion now,” agrees Bombau, “but we have always made sure we have a strong network of trusted companies across the region.” Laughing once again, he jokes, “We are like any good Latin parents. We introduce a couple we think are great for each other and of course, we hope they’ll get married!”

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