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**FROM THE UPCOMING ISSUE**

## A small immigration firm thinks globally

Sheri Qualters/Staff reporter

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How can a small, Memphis, Tenn.-based immigration law firm think globally?

Greg Siskind's answer: Form an international alliance.

The 19-attorney Siskind Susser Bland announced its Visalaw International alliance in late November, after two years of discussions with other firms.

The alliance's affiliated offices are in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Macau, Mexico, Mongolia, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

Like other alliances, Visalaw International is based on a formal agreement for the firms to refer work to each other and share knowledge.

When one of Siskind Susser's American clients has immigration issues in Italy, for example, Siskind would use the affiliated firm or put the client in touch with the Italian firm. Siskind Susser will also get inbound referrals when multinational companies that are headquartered overseas need to hire workers in the United States.

Siskind hopes the alliance will be a more effective way to help clients facing immigration issues when sending workers overseas.

"As the U.S. economy becomes more globalized, and the rest of world becomes more globalized, the transfer of executives is more and more of a challenge for companies," Siskind said.

Siskind client International Paper Co. of Memphis, for example, is moving employees to 27 countries. Canadian Visalaw International member Karas & Associates has gained new clients through the alliance, said Sergio Karas, whose Toronto-based firm is one of the alliance's founding members.

"This is when you start developing a relationship with a corporate client and acting on a regular basis on their behalf," Karas said.

Many firms are involved with alliances or more informal networks, which are primarily tools for firms to tout their connections in diverse geographic markets, said legal consultant William Johnston of Somerset, N.J.'s Hildebrandt International. Although Hildebrandt has not tracked formal alliances in recent years, it has identified 39 active law firm networks, Johnston said.

"It can be a useful tool," Johnston said.

### 'Quid pro quo'

Consultant Charles Maddock, a principal at Altman Weil Inc. in Newtown Square, Pa., said that firms can reap referrals from alliances and networks if they're willing to help other members by referring legal work and sharing knowledge.

"It's quid pro quo," Maddock said. "If you sit back and wait for something to happen, it usually won't."

In the United States, the federal nature of immigration work helped Siskind build a practice with national and international clients after leaving Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis in Nashville, Tenn., in 1994 to start a practice in Memphis. The firm's other offices are in Atlanta, Las Vegas, Nashville, New York and Toronto.

Clients include auto parts chain AutoZone Inc. of Memphis, London-based British Broadcasting Corp., Montreal-based Cirque de Soleil Inc. and Hilton Hotels Corp. of Beverly Hills, Calif.

Siskind Susser's reputation tipped the scales for New York immigration attorney Eric Bland, who said immigration and nonimmigration firms tried "for years" to acquire his boutique practice. Bland and two other lawyers joined the Siskind Susser fold in August.

The alliance was also a major pull for Bland, whose entertainment and fashion clients include Ford Models Inc. of New York. Bland frequently found himself scouting for immigration firms each time a client wanted to send an employee to a different country.

Companies hiring actors or models working on projects outside their native countries need visas for those workers, such as a "model from Estonia, based in New York and working in Argentina," Bland said.