



“If we all became vegetablists, the world would smell of halitosis”
Jeremy Clarkson

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October 23, 2007

In the City: October 23

Edward Fennell

Super size me

News last week that Baker & McKenzie was doing so well that it was ramping up its global ambitions and adding staff worldwide coincided with the revelation that a new species of dinosaur – four buses long and four storeys high – had been discovered in a “lost world” graveyard in South America.

Ruminations set in about how long Baker & McKenzie – and indeed all the other superlarge firms – would continue to grow before a cataclysm in the business environment would send them crashing into oblivion (thoughts that are also occurring to Richard Susskind, I notice).

For a decade or more the presumption has been that the biggest law firms would continue to grow into global mammoths. And it is easy to be swept along by the hype and glitter of it all. But history – and, even more, prehistory – shows that nothing lasts for ever. At some point in the future (ten years? thirty years?) a completely different model will be required by clients – maybe smaller, more agile, more personal. Futalognkosaurus dukei could not avoid its fate in the giant dinosaur graveyard. Will Baker & McKenzie?

Legal profession is on the brink of fundamental change

In the first of a six-part series on the future of legal services, Richard Susskind lays down a challenge to all lawyers

Hip hop

Just as one starts pondering the possibilities of fresh legal species emerging from the undergrowth, up pops the head of AA Legal Services. Yes, it certainly surprised me last week when I received press comment from this new-style lawyer – especially as it wasn't even connected with anything “auto-mobilistic”. Instead, by a curious evolutionary leap, AA Legal Services was sounding a warning note on “Tories’ pledge to scrap home information packs”.

Comments on legal developments are not that uncommon from law firms but specific advocacy linked to a political party has no precedent that I can recall. Either this is a refreshing innovation – or it is a sign of alarm from an emerging species that suddenly realises the future may not be quite so bright after all?

Industrial waste?

As if to underline the speeding pace of evolution my eye was caught by an observation from Bradford W. Hildebrandt, chairman of Hildebrandt Inc, “a leading consultant to the legal industry”, about last week’s merger between Reed Smith and Richards Butler Hong Kong. Law used to be a profession, then it became a business now, it is an industry – and all in the space of two decades. In total, Reed Smith will have more than 1,500 lawyers worldwide and revenue exceeding \$1 billion – and it’s on its way towards becoming an industrial giant. Evidence from traditional industry, however, suggests that the biggest beasts end up subcontracting and franchising in order to cut out the waste. So enjoy it while you can, guys.

Legal development

It is easy to become jaded by idealistic sermonising but there was genuine weight behind statements last week by the chairman of the Bar, the vice-president of the Law Society and the vice-president of Ilex at the Stand Up event in Lincoln’s Inn Fields on the importance of assisting developing countries in governance, legal training and the application of the rule of law.

If you are interested in doing something positive in this area then take a look at the work of Projects Abroad that is recruiting volunteers for the Africa office of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in Accra, Ghana. Go to www.projects-abroad.net.

edward.fennell@yahoo.co.uk

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Edward Fennell

Edward Fennell is *The Times* City columnist. He writes a weekly diary, *In the City*, in the Tuesday Law supplement

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