

BLUE RIDGE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Serving Roanoke Valley/Lynchburg/New River Valley

VOL. 19, NO. 17, AUGUST 27, 2007

bizjournal.com

50 cents

TRENDS

Law on the Internet: The next big step

James Creekmore finally had all he wanted of big firm law and he has turned to the 'Net for relief in a new Adventure in Law

By Becky Hepler

If there can be Internet banking, why not a virtual law firm?

Ten years ago, James Creekmore, founder of The Creekmore Law Firm in Daleville, had a chance to see the potential of the Internet.

One of his clients at the large Roanoke law firm where he worked was reselling clothes on eBay and ran into trademark infringement issues.

Even as he was working on ways to solve the problem, he couldn't help thinking, "What a great idea—working from home on a computer."

Creekmore persevered several more years in



Becky Hepler

James Creekmore: 'You don't have to have a big law firm to provide big law firm services'

the large firm environment, gaining more experience in business, computer, intellectual property and patent law, but he couldn't forget that idea of the Internet as a place to do busi-

ness.

And, yes, the hours were killing him.

"In a large firm, you have to spend a large amount of human capital, a lot of time that won't be billed, though

you have to do the billable hours, as well," he says. "I was working seven days a week, 10 hours a day. I had to ask myself, 'Why am I help-

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ing other people work the way I want to?”

Last year, Creekmore started his own firm. There is an actual office in Daleville, but mostly it holds the server that allows Creekmore, fellow lawyer Brian Wheeler and paralegal Jamie Hatfield to work out of their home offices.

“We have very few local clients and all of our work is on the server so everyone has access to it, anywhere, anytime,” says Creekmore. “There’s really no need for people to come into an office.”

Just recently, Creekmore told of a typical day with the paralegal in Idaho, the associate in Blacksburg, he in Philadelphia and serving clients in Tulsa and Pittsburgh, with e-mail and telephones. “It’s all about using the technology,” he says.

More important, Creekmore wanted the law firm to be a place that was good to the workers and provided for their needs, as well as for the clients. “My two employees are very happy with their work environment,” he says. “Mostly, everyone works

at home, but if we need to be in the office together, my paralegal can bring her kids, because we have a room where they can play while she works. She’s definitely happier, which makes her a better employee.”

As befits a virtual firm, Creekmore specializes in business issues, especially as they relate to computers. “If you’re doing business on the Internet, you’re not a local company, so you have to be careful to set it up to reflect that you’re working on a regional, national or even international level.”

For example, just the very basic process of creating a name for the company demands care, so the firm will do the research to check to be sure the name doesn’t infringe on another business or is too confusing. If the name is the same or close to one already in use, the firm will help the business select another name and then trademark that one.

“It’s a proactive approach,” Creekmore says. “Our goal is to keep our clients out of court. But if the matter does go to litigation, we’re there to do battle.”

‘IP light cavalry’

What makes The Creekmore Law Firm PC

unique is its affiliation with the XDL Group, which calls itself “your IP (intellectual property) light cavalry” on its website at <http://www.xdlgroup.com>. The XDL Group is a consortium of lawyers and IP professionals from five different firms across the nation that specializes in copyright and trademark protection and patent and intellectual property litigation.

Creekmore says that the race to bring inventions to the marketplace is often compromised by piracy or two companies working on similar items, so it’s important to protect the inventor’s intellectual property in that final push.

“What this group brings to the process is not just nine lawyers,” he says.

“Each lawyer has a deep network of expert resources that can provide the information that makes a successful case. We don’t have to go find them, they’re here already.”

Even more critical is the flexibility that the XDL Group offers. “Being smaller and more flexible, we can react quicker to issues that arise, and speed is a very big factor in how well you do in patent cases,” Creekmore says. “We can give more personal

attention.” Having lawyers from all over allows the group to have several different jurisdictions from which to choose for filing purposes, which enhances speed and flexibility.

The group was started by former three-term Virginia General Assembly member Wyatt Durette Jr. and includes lawyers from Texas, South Carolina, New York and Virginia.

Durette says in an article published this month in The Law Marketing Portal, “The advantages are that we present the equivalent of a major firm’s intellectual assets in IP litigation and their geographic diversity, but with the overhead of a small firm, coupled with enormous flexibility to move quickly, avoid conflicts and raise no fears about ‘stealing’ a client from a referring firm.”

Creekmore echoes this sentiment. “You don’t have to have a big law firm to provide big law firm services,” he says.

“It just requires the right mix of talent and ability to work quickly and efficiently because that’s all people want: quick, good service.”

(Becky Hepler is a Newport-based freelance writer.)