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## Hybrid Law Firm Works Creatively

By Emily Green



*S. Todd Rogers / Daily Journal*

Michael Benjamin Moradzadeh and Yaacov P. Silberman

Robin J. Powers described her decision to leave Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP for Rimon Law Group as a "big leap of faith."

Sutherland is a prominent, Atlanta-based firm, while Rimon has been around just three years.

But Rimon had a lot going for it. It provided office space, but didn't demand that she work from there. It offered 24-hour technical and administrative support. It had two young, tech-savvy co-founders. And most importantly for Powers, it operated as a cohesive business where lawyers regularly interact.

"Last spring, I knew I wanted to make a change, and I wasn't sure what it was going to be," said Powers. Rimon "added a new paradigm in terms of the choices."

Co-founded in March 2008 by Michael Benjamin Moradzadeh and Yaacov P. Silberman, Rimon is a "cloud-based hybrid." It operates as a blend of virtual and traditional firms, where lawyers' and clients' documents can be accessed online.

Despite having offices in San Francisco, Silicon Valley, New York, Tel Aviv and Washington D.C., most of its lawyers work from home. Ten are in Tel Aviv, 10 in San Francisco and the others smattered across the U.S. All of them are partners - there is no hierarchical structure at Rimon.

Moradzadeh, 31, and Silberman, 30, are younger than any of the other lawyers at the firm because they don't hire attorneys with less than ten years' experience. So they don't even qualify to practice law there. And they don't. Both former lawyers at Ropes & Gray LLP, they stopped practicing to focus on managing Rimon. They see their role as providing support for the lawyers.

"We've used technology to take it to the next level," said Moradzadeh. "If the lawyers want to have more of a virtual practice, they can. If they want to have more of a traditional one, they can."

The model seems to be working. In an economic climate in which many law firms have collapsed, Rimon has thrived. In the past three years, it has jumped from three lawyers to 29. And the firm's revenue grows by nine percent every month, Moradzadeh said.

"I think our youth is an advantage because we grew up in the tech world, and it allowed us to think outside the box," he said.

That includes contracting secretarial and design work to an agency in Minnesota. For example, if a lawyer needs graphics for a document, he or she can e-mail instructions to the agency, which operates 24 hours a day, and receive the finished product within a day.

Rimon also rents space at Regis Office Suites for lawyers to meet with clients if they don't happen to be near a Rimon office. Its San Francisco base is small, modern and efficient - Moradzadeh and Silberman share an office that consists of a table with a desktop computer and two laptops.

They both have deep roots in the tech world. At 17, Moradzadeh created a Web-based shopping company called EzWebMall. He stopped working on it to focus on college and later law school. The idea, meanwhile, took off. At 19, in 1999, Silberman started a small business called Freedom Internet Services. It involved developing and placing kiosks at public locations, such as malls, where people could pay to access the Internet. At 20, he served as the associate director of Web content for Law.com, an early-stage legal information company.

That sort of entrepreneurial mindset pervades Rimon. When Powers asked for an online file sharing site where she and her clients could access case-related documents - a resource similar to the one her old firm uses - Silberman was eager to help.

"He said, 'If you need it, we will figure it out, and two weeks later, he came back with a solution,'" she said. "It was truly amazing."

Yet Rimon isn't for everyone. Lawyers must have an existing client base, which means that many of the lawyers come from big law firms and bring their clients with them. While some spillover work exists, it's not enough to sustain a practice.

The lawyers at Rimon specialize in a range of practices related to corporate transactions, from international securities to intellectual property and Internet law.

And while lawyers can make as much money at Rimon as at a traditional law firm, they must be more self-reliant. Unlike traditional law firms, Rimon doesn't provide a salary. Lawyers make what they bill, and Rimon keeps a percentage of the profit.

"A couple of years ago, I would have said a downside of working here is there isn't as much security as at a traditional law firm," Powers said. "I do think in the current environment, there is no security anywhere."

Ronald E. Baldwin, formerly general counsel at Risk Management Solutions, Inc., joined Rimon in 2010.

"It's an appealing alternative to the traditional law firm," he said. Rimon's founders recognized "the opportunity that's out there."