

Dentons Unveils Leadership Transition with a Commitment to Global Growth



Dentons, a legal powerhouse boasting a 5,900-attorney roster, is poised for a leadership transition as its longstanding CEO, Elliott Portnoy, announced that he will resign next November. Portnoy assured stakeholders that the firm's ambitious international growth strategy will persist, ensuring a seamless transition and continuity in operations.

Continuity Amid Leadership Shift

Portnoy's decision not to seek another three-year term adds to the recent leadership changes at Dentons. This legal giant has weathered challenges, including a significant loss of lawyers in a separation from its Chinese branch earlier in the year. Despite this setback, Dentons remains one of the largest law firms globally.

Over the past two years, Dentons witnessed changes in its top-tier leadership, with the replacement of the CEO of its U.S. branch and the retirement of the global chairman role, previously held by former U.S. Democratic National Committee chairman Joe Andrew. Together, Andrew and Portnoy guided Dentons through a period of growth following the international merger of three firms in 2013 that culminated in the formation of Dentons.

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The Search for a Successor

As Dentons prepares for a new era, Portnoy shared that the firm is in the process of engaging an executive search firm to identify potential candidates—both internal and external—who can effectively succeed him. Regardless of the chosen successor, Portnoy emphasized that the individual would be committed to Dentons' growth strategy, characterized by strategic partnerships with local law firms across the globe.

Global Growth Strategy

Dentons, under Portnoy's leadership, has consistently pursued an aggressive growth strategy, combining forces with over 50 law firms worldwide. Utilizing a Swiss Verein business structure, the firm operates internationally with a shared banner while maintaining distinct legal entities in each region.

In March of this year, Dentons announced a collaboration with Philippine law firm PJS Law, securing a foothold in the rapidly expanding Southeast Asian legal market. Portnoy highlighted the importance of a new global CEO fully aligning with Dentons' commitment to globalization, distinguishing the firm from its competitors.

Navigating Challenges

Notably, Dentons faced a significant development earlier in the year when it separated from its Chinese branch due to new national security restrictions imposed by the Chinese government. Dentons has maintained a "preferred firm" relationship with Beijing Dacheng Law Offices despite the separation.

Portnoy expressed optimism about Dentons' growth trajectory, emphasizing the firm's position as the world's largest non-Chinese law firm by lawyer headcount, according to data collected by The American Lawyer.

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U.S. Expansion Plans

Dentons has pursued expansion in the United States by joining forces with several local and regional law firms since 2020, employing a dual partnership model. The latest addition, Alabama-based Sirote & Permutt, in 2021, exemplifies Dentons' commitment to strengthening its presence in key financial centers and new markets in the U.S.

As Dentons prepares for this leadership transition, the firm aims to build upon its historically strong performance in the United States, eyeing additional growth in strategic locations and financial hubs throughout the country.

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