



The ACC Value Index: Key Insights

About the ACC Value Index

Launched in September of 2009, the ACC Value Index, more commonly referred to as the AVI, was developed as a tool to measure client satisfaction and help ACC members share meaningful information about the value they received from their outside counsel. It was a component of the larger ACC Value Challenge initiative, which seeks to reconnect the cost of legal service to the value provided.

Using the ACC Value Index, ACC members were able to rate outside counsel using a 5-point scale (1=Poor, 5=Excellent) on the following criteria:

- Understands Objectives/Expectations
- Legal Expertise
- Efficiency/Process Management
- Responsiveness/Communication
- Predictable Cost/Budgeting Skills
- Results Delivered/Execution

They were also asked a key question that summed up the value: *would you use this firm again?*

Every reviewed law firm was invited to gain access to the client satisfaction information about their firm. Firms were able to see their average scores by criterion, matter type and office location. As reviewers granted permission to share their full reviews with law firms, ACC provided the entire constellation of individual review details, including matter type and office location to which the review pertained, and any comments that were offered about the firm or attorney (anonymously).

At the date of close, the ACC Value Index held 5,303 reviews of 1,378 firms, submitted by 1,907 reviewers, representing 1,520 companies.

Firm Name

Matter Type

Office Location

(city, state/province, country)

Score the firm's performance on the following value criteria

1=Poor 2=Fair 3=Good 4=Very Good 5=Excellent

1 2 3 4 5 Understands objectives/expectations

1 2 3 4 5 Legal expertise

1 2 3 4 5 Efficiency/process management

1 2 3 4 5 Responsiveness/communication

1 2 3 4 5 Predictable cost/budgeting skills

1 2 3 4 5 Results delivered/execution

Good value; would use this firm again? Yes No

Comments (optional)

Please give your evaluation a caption or title

Comments

What is Most Important to In-House Counsel?

The top three things corporate clients want in a law firm are:

1. Value
2. Responsiveness/Communication
3. Legal Expertise

In-house counsel are most dissatisfied with:

1. Value
2. Predictable Cost/Budgeting Skills
3. Responsiveness/Communication

Reviewer Comments

The following pages share some of the key insights gleaned from reviewer comments submitted to the ACC Value Index, and contain quotes from reviewer comments that exemplify typical sentiments expressed by corporate counsel. What follows is a sampling of reviewer comments pertaining to:

- *Value*
- *Understanding the Business*
- *Large Law Firm Experience, Small Law Firm Bill*
- *Challenges with Alternative Fee Arrangements*

Value

Members report that when it comes to important, high-stakes matters, an expensive firm is well worth the cost.

- **High Quality at a High Price**

There was an old saying in business that no one ever got fired for buying IBM. This firm is like that: you are guaranteed superior quality and excellent responsiveness, but at a price. They are the kind of firm you want in your corner when the stakes are high and the outcome is way more important than the outlay. They have a tendency to overstaff and need reminders of appropriate level of staffing on a matter.

- **You Get What You Pay For**

We turn to the firm regularly for transactional work – whether on the equity or debt side, whether dealing with private equity groups or banks, they are insightful, creative and tenacious in doing the deal the way you want. They are also very expensive, but on major transactions, well worth it.

- **Expensive, but Well Worth it for Important Matters**

The firm can mobilize a smart, dedicated team on a moment's notice, and they get oriented very quickly. Very good at harmonizing litigation strategy with business strategies.

- **Solid Big Firm Work**

This is a very talented firm and I can always rely on their work product. They are less flexible than smaller firms and their rates are higher. But for challenging assignments where a big name is helpful, they are an excellent resource.

Value

Others indicate that when the quality of the work is high enough, steep fees are less of an issue as they still feel they are receiving sufficient value for their overall spend.

- **Depth of Experience and Understanding**

The firm "gets it" where nonprofits of all types are concerned. The breadth of their practice in the sector is invaluable. The other areas in the firm compliment the nonprofit expertise so they are able to offer full service to their clients. They are not inexpensive but their expertise allows them to deal with matters very quickly and efficiently -- saving money in the long run.

- *Sometimes further research should have been done. But, overall, work is very good. Good value – have never felt bill was too high for the work performed.*

- **Firm is Great**

This is a wonderful firm. They give practical advice, incredibly efficient, giving a great value for the fees.

Understanding The Business

Members seek outside counsel that take the time to understand their business, and the role of in-house counsel.

- **Excellent Trademark Counsel**

I use the firm for trademark enforcement and oppositions. They are outstanding. They take the time to understand our business. They do not simply explain to me options and risks, but actually step out on the ledge with me and recommend a strategy. They are creative in their solutions and often think outside the box. They are extremely responsive and a pleasure to work with.

- **Understands Your Business**

The lawyers at the firm take the time to really understand your business and provide not only valuable legal advice but strategic business advice.

- *Excellent firm to work with – they have great expertise in a variety of IP practice areas. Great at understanding, appreciating and supporting the role of in-house counsel.*

- **True Business Partner**

I came from a big firm environment. When I came to in-house, I wanted high quality work as well as value from outside counsel. I have been more than satisfied with this firm on both fronts. The firm's attorneys serve as true business partners, providing sound and practical advice and their rates are very reasonable.

Large Law Firm Experience, Small Law Firm Bill

Members appreciate the experience of working with large, international firms, but at the cost of small or mid-size, regional firms.

- **Great Value**
If you cherry pick attorneys from this firm, you can receive big law experience and results at half the cost.
- **Big Bang for the Buck**
You will get Big NY firm results and expertise at middle America prices. Efficient, reliable and spot on delivery.
- **Top Tier Law Firm at Somewhat Lower Rates**
Great to work with. Lean staffing helps keep costs down.
- **Large Firm with Small Firm Responsiveness and Billing Competitiveness**
Excellent skills, responsive time. Very practical in application of legal concepts.

Challenges with Alternative Fee Arrangements

Members report success in working with outside counsel to implement AFA's on smaller matters, but admit that this sometimes leads to difficulties when it comes to larger matters.

- **Alternative Fee**

We have successfully engaged this firm on a complex, alternative fee arrangement. This has created efficiencies but sometimes conflicts with time pressures in more complex cases.

- **Complex Budget is a Challenge**

While we had success with alternative fee arrangements with smaller matters, there has been a struggle for managing larger matters.

Reviewer Comments

From the more than 2,000 reviewer comments submitted to the ACC Value Index, we have extracted illustrative examples of both the favorable and unfavorable. The following is a sampling of reviewer comments pertaining to each of the ACC Value Index criterion:

- *Understands Objectives/Expectations*
- *Legal Expertise*
- *Efficiency/Process Management*
- *Responsiveness/Communication*
- *Predictable Cost/Budgeting Skills*
- *Results Delivered/Execution*

Understands Objectives/Expectations

- **Responsiveness, Customer-Service Oriented, Follows Direction**

The firm as a whole has demonstrated their commitment to customer service by following instructions and meeting my expectations. In addition to getting good results and having tremendous expertise, they communicate well and stick to budgets and follow my instructions for the level of service that I require for any particular project.

- **Excellent Value and Good Staffing of Litigated Matters**

I have used the firm for several matters over the past four years – employment issues being primary. I am always pleased with the responsiveness and mindfulness of client strategic goals. They have also been willing to jump in to smaller matters using their associates in order to assist corporate counsel and build relationships with senior management at our various business locations.

- **Practical IP Advice**

Focused on understanding our business, so that when the patent prosecution process is underway, they are part of the team in every way, not an outsider giving advice. The R&D people think of them as part of their team.

- *Disappointed with lack of communication and understanding of our objectives. Probably good lawyers but the big picture was lost in focus on legal battle.*

- **Responsiveness Has Been an Issue**

Responses take so long and communications, when received, are so brief, that it is unclear the firm understands all our objectives.

- **Overrated Firm; Undereducated Associates**

I found the associates at this firm rather lazy and without an understanding of the business side of the transaction. They repeatedly asked us for the same information, were rude on the phone and had no sense of management of the matter.

Legal Expertise

- **Depth of Experience and Understanding**
The firm "gets it" where nonprofits of all types are concerned. The breadth of their practice in the sector is invaluable. The other areas in the firm compliment the nonprofit expertise so they are able to offer full service to their clients. They are not inexpensive but their expertise allows them to deal with matters very quickly and efficiently -- saving money in the long run.
- **Understands Client Needs and Delivers Results**
Exceptional interaction with client; tremendous business acumen; Driven with a passion to achieve favorable results; Expertise in franchising matters, litigation, transactional work and general commercial disputes. Very reasonable rates delivering immediate value; Highly recommend.
- *Practical, business oriented advice. Cost effective. Top of the game on subject matter expertise. Excellent client management.*

- **Not a Good Experience**
I worked opposite this firm in a matter and was very unimpressed with the 3 attorneys I worked with. They had the wrong expertise for the matter and had a tendency to make personal and unprofessional attacks on the parties. They would also deny receipt of discovery materials that they had received. I understand from other firm clients that the billing was excessive and that they were not happy with the results. New counsel was eventually obtained. I did hear that at least one of the three attorneys left the firm so maybe they realized these individuals were problematic.
- **Will Not Use Again**
This firm attempted to defend a case and had no expertise. They overbilled for education on the issue.
- **High Rates with Low Return**
We find that the rates are high, and while the firm presumably has lawyers with sufficient expertise, they often don't assign those lawyers to work. As a result, the work is sloppy and sometimes the answers are not correct. I would not recommend this firm.

Efficiency/Process Management

- **Very Reasonable and Responsive**

Handled several international matters very efficiently, responsively and cost effectively.

- **Really Liked Their Work: Efficient, Inexpensive, and Thorough**

I can't say enough about this firm. I've had some negative experiences in Poland in the past, so we retained counsel as a "second opinion" of sorts. I didn't regret it. They negotiated great rates with us. And they turned around some complex corporate/tax issues for us on a dime--did it efficiently, gave us the answers we needed in a straightforward manner (in English!) that took 3 times as long and still not as clear as another very large European firm. I would use them for anything corporate or tax related. They are that good. And they communicate well in English too, which is a huge bonus.

- **Efficient Patent Prosecution**

This is a small firm that is very effective at handling patent filings on a tight budget. Because of their small size, they are able to work very efficiently and manage costs quite well. They quickly prepared and filed patents for us and communicated all the key points to us clearly.

- **Deadlines**

It does not appear this firm closely tracks trademark deadlines and notifies clients of impending deadlines.

- **Can't Seem to Stay Within Budget**

Numerous times we discussed budgets for particular components of patent litigation. Every single time they grossly exceeded their own estimates. They had way too many attorneys doing the same work. Very unhappy with their billing practices.

- **Poor Project Management Skills**

Regrettably the lead attorney was retained by the business side without my knowledge. As I became involved later it seemed that the expertise which was originally billed was not there. Process management skills were wanting. Many matters left to the last minute, and some left until after closing, without any prior advice that resources from the client would be required to complete them. Cost was uncontrolled. The only good news is that the second chair was very responsive and eventually the job got done.

Responsiveness/Communication

- **Concise and Cogent Advice**

Very responsive to every question, deep understanding of the issues, and willing to engage in an interactive dialogue rather than try to dictate advice without understanding the real business consequences.

- **Great Value**

My experience with the firm has been positive. My relationship partner is extremely responsive, experienced, and a great value for the dollar. They do not appear to have a deep bench in terms of associates or young partners, however.

- **Most Responsive Attorneys!**

We have worked with several attorneys in two offices on various matters over the years. They are always so responsive, knowledgeable and professional. Excellent firm!

- **Low Responsiveness**

While the firm can handle efficiently long term assignments or projects, they are generally unavailable to process urgent requests (even though they should be able to delegate them to other members of the team). They also tend to focus on individual issues, without showing too much of a strategic/"big picture" thinking.

- **Surprisingly Slow**

For as expensive as they are, one would expect better responsiveness, even if you are a small client. We had engaged them for one matter, and a litigation item came up, and asked if they could handle that too. They started a conflicts check and didn't get back to me, so I contacted them again, and they promised they would respond to me two more times before I went with someone else. In fact they never did respond.

- **Poor Communication with Client**

My experience with this firm was very disappointing, it was very difficult to get regular updates concerning the matter they were handling and language was a big problem. Because of the lack of regular updates I was surprised by several large bills that were not expected.

Predictable Cost/Budgeting Skills

- **Great Value**

I had a couple of bids for the work completed, and the firm came in substantially under, and worked with me to keep costs below the estimated amount.

- **Real Team Player Who Stays on Budget**

They handled a discreet, international matter for us. Timely submitted work and responded to questions, and delivered the work product on the budget they promised. Impressive.

- **Understand the Budget Limitations of a Small Company**

They are willing to work with us on budget restrictions for specific assignments. I am very pleased with their work.

- **Good Advice, But Pricey**

The firm provided excellent counsel, but the bill was unexpectedly high for plan document review and a series of conference calls.

- **Excellent Expertise But Overly Expensive**

This firm is immediately responsive and can provide expertise/ advice on unusual and unique issues and areas of law. However, billing is unpredictable and heavy handed and rates are too high.

- **Good, But Very Expensive**

They will bill for everything, so make sure you know how to manage them properly.

Results Delivered/Execution

- **Good Teaming and Expert Services**

Excellent responsiveness, creative approaches to litigation and delivers results.

- **Great Firm for Employment Law**

My company uses the firm continuously for employment law litigation. The managing partner and team are extremely knowledgeable on the law, very skilled at litigating, and deliver great results for reasonable fees. I highly recommend the firm for employment matters.

- **Excellent, Strategic Thinking Lead to Great Result**

Efficiently handled and prepared for trial. Outstanding result.

- **Poor Client Management – Horrible File Transfer**

If you have difficult executives this is not the firm for you. They were more concerned with keeping executives happy than with providing an objective assessment. When we moved the case to another firm they didn't transfer hundreds of pages of documents we produced.

- **Competent, but Sometimes Inaccurate**

While the attorneys at the firm demonstrate competent knowledge, errors (careless and otherwise) commonly appear in their work.

- **Not Enough Bang for the Buck**

Very expensive with somewhat inconsistent results/advice.