

Crowell to Merge With Chicago Law Firm, Boosting Tech and IP Practice

The merger is the largest combination in Crowell's 42-year history and makes it the latest Am Law 200 firm to plant roots in the Windy City.

By Andrew Maloney
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What You Need to Know

- Crowell will gain 61 attorneys from the merger with Brinks Gilson & Lione, an IP boutique based in Chicago.
- The combined firm boasts around 625 lawyers across 12 offices.
- Crowell is the latest in a string of firms to plant roots in the Windy City.

Crowell & Moring is merging with 61-attorney IP boutique Brinks Gilson & Lione in Chicago, the firms said, allowing the Washington, D.C.-based firm to enter the Midwest and the opportunity to significantly boost its tech practices.

With the move, effective July 1, Crowell gains immediate offices in Brinks' locations in Chicago and Indianapolis, the firms announced Thursday. Crowell is also seeking regulatory approval for legal services in Shenzhen, China, where Brinks has been operating since 2017. In all, the combined firm will have more than 625 lawyers across 12 offices in the United States, Europe, Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. Firm leaders declined to comment on combined firm revenue.

The merger, which firm leaders said has been in the works for about a year and a half, is the largest combination in Crowell's 42-year history and



Courtesy photos

(L-R) Philip Inglima, chair of Crowell & Moring; Gus Siller, president of Brinks Gilson & Lione; Cheryl Falvey, partner and co-chair, technology and intellectual property department at Crowell & Moring; Laura Lydigsen, member of Brinks Gilson & Lione's executive committee.

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After growing on both coasts—most recently, in a union with 24-lawyer Kibbe & Orbe in New York—Crowell was conspicuously absent from the Midwest, said chairman Philip Inglima, despite boasting clients in the region, particularly in transportation and information services sectors.

He said the firm, ranked No. 77 in the Am Law 100, wanted to enhance its tech offerings and sees Chicago as an “outstanding” financial market that will also support its strengths in dispute and government-facing practices.

“It’s a major market. We know we’re not the only people entering Chicago these days. We

know there are well-established, excellent firms in Chicago. We don't expect them to just invite us to the feast," he said. "We expect them to continue to compete, and that's as it is everywhere."

Brinks' patent protection offerings span multiple industries, including medical devices, manufacturing, electronics, software, pharmaceuticals and consumer goods, among others. The firm has also helped clients develop and protect artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicle, and wireless/5G innovations. Brinks, said Inglima, has thousands of clients.

The firms said the combination with Brinks makes Crowell one of the most active technology protection firms in the U.S., as measured by patent activity tracked by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Cheryl Falvey, a leader in Crowell's tech and IP department, said the "infusion of talent" from Brinks, including those with advanced degrees, will boost the firm across a number of areas, including patent work and trademark protection.

The Brinks boutique, independently operating for more than 100 years, had been looking to move to a bigger platform for a few years, as clients sought more adjacent practice areas, such as cybersecurity and digital transformation, said Gus Siller, president of Brinks.

"We didn't feel that as a boutique firm, we had the capability of providing those adjacent services," said Siller, who will co-chair the firm's technology and intellectual property department with Falvey, a former general counsel of the Consumer Product Safety Commission. "We'd been approached and talked to a number of firms in the past, but there was never any real interest."

Crowell increased revenue by nearly 19% in 2020, bringing in about \$514.4 million. It also boosted revenue per lawyer by 21.4% to \$1.106 million, and profits per partner by 46.6% to \$1.63 million.

Siller declined to name any clients. He said there will be some client conflicts they can't avoid, but it's "certainly our hope" that most clients will stay with the firm after the transition. He said all 61 of its attorneys are coming aboard, including two lawyers in North Carolina who will now be affiliated with Crowell's Washington, D.C., office, but that there would be some staff layoffs due to "redundancies in different departments."

Brinks had opened an office in Shenzhen, China, in 2017—the first non-Chinese firm to open there—Siller said, and the Crowell merger means the government authorization process will have to restart.

"We're hoping it occurs as soon as is feasible," Siller said. "Unfortunately, we don't know how long and don't really have a good prediction of how long that will take."

When asked if Crowell might explore other combinations in other markets this year, Inglima said he'd "never say never," but that the primary focus right now is growing in Chicago, among other offices, and that the firm is evaluating all options for doing that.

"We are already looking at other possibilities there," he said, adding: "We will be hiring entry-level lawyers, but will be aggressively pursuing lateral growth at the partner level as well. We always have a preference for proven teams, whether they be two or six or 12. We've identified some priorities, but we will also be listening to our clients."