

Crowell & Moring Picks Up Ex-Atrium Attys In San Francisco

By **Xiumei Dong**

Law360 (April 6, 2020, 8:04 PM EDT) -- Crowell & Moring LLP has picked up four of the last remaining attorneys at the now-defunct legal services company Atrium, adding their emerging companies and venture capital capabilities to its growing San Francisco office.

The move comes a month after Atrium founder Justin Kan announced the shutdown of its legal tech business, laying off roughly 100 employees. Joining Crowell & Moring from Atrium are co-managing partners Michel Narganes and Matthew Melville, founding attorney and former head of Atrium's venture capital financing team Jon O'Connell, and counsel Matt Pelnar.

"With the legitimacy that they established through their work with Atrium and their work with Justin Kahn, we really believe that they will continue to not only hold the clients they've got to build a client base that will mature with the many ways that our firm can continue to help advance corporate clients," Crowell & Moring chair Philip Inglima told Law360.

The Washington, D.C.-based law firm launched its San Francisco office over 10 years ago after acquiring a 29-lawyer group from litigation boutique Folger Levin & Kahn. According to Inglima, the firm has for years been working to "diversify and deepen" its San Francisco team, and the expansion is aligned with the firm's plan to grow its corporate practice in the Bay Area.

"The alignment was not only with our desire for corporate growth, ... but it was also very much aligned with our plans for the San Francisco office, and the footprint that we put down in the digital transformation space, and our work with more and more tech companies," Inglima said.

The addition brings Crowell's San Francisco corporate team to a total of five attorneys, including four partners, according to Inglima. Its first corporate partner, Jeffrey Selman, joined from Nixon Peabody LLP in 2011.

As of now, the San Francisco office's entire 30-lawyer team is working remotely as a result of



Matthew Melville



Michel Narganes



Jon O'Connell

coronavirus social distancing measures. Inglima said they were fortunate to have begun discussions with the Atrium attorneys before the crisis escalated and were able to close the deal via videoconference.

"We saw this as a natural extension, even in a time of economic challenge and a time of difficulty for both clients and law firms," Inglima said. "We see this as being a natural extension of where we've been planning to go and want to continue to go."

Along with the Atrium attorneys, Crowell said Steven Ryan has joined its emerging companies practice in the firm's Washington, D.C., office as counsel.

Before joining Atrium in January to help the hybrid company run its law firm side, Melville practiced at Pearl Cohen, a New York firm that represents startup companies and investors, while Narganes worked in-house at a San Francisco-based software company.

"A big attraction at Crowell is ... that they don't have a large emerging companies practice. That enables us ... to put a stamp on what this group's practice will look like," Melville said.

O'Connell joined Atrium in 2015 as the company's fifth employee. Before that, he was an associate at Morrison & Foerster LLP and WilmerHale. Prior to joining Atrium as counsel in 2017, Pelnar was an associate at Ropes & Gray LLP.

"Crowell represented the opportunity to continue to be entrepreneurial," O'Connell said. "We all joined Atrium because we're entrepreneurial-minded attorneys, and joining Crowell allowed us to continue to do that to be part of building something, versus plugging into a large machine."

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, the team is also facing some unique challenges as businesses respond to the pandemic. O'Connell said he has seen an uptick of inquiries from startup clients about the CARES Act, a \$2 trillion stimulus package approved by Congress and the president last month to support companies hit by the coronavirus crisis.

"It's great being at Crowell because we have experts in this space that are able to help our clients," O'Connell said.

And since the team has extensive experience with legal technology, Narganes said they are looking forward to bringing the lessons they learned at Atrium to Crowell and testing new ideas with the firm.

"We have encouraged Michel and Matt and Jon, and their whole team, to be inventive," Inglima said. "We're hoping that here we can work with them to identify what's the right balance, what is the right mix between what are more mainstream technological opportunities for support, and what we might want to help them develop uniquely to their client needs."

--Editing by Breda Lund.