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Entertainment Specialists

Kleinberg Lange Cuddy & Carlo's work for celebrity clients can have lasting impacts.

By Melanie Brisbon
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — Kenneth Kleinberg and Robert Lange wanted to create a boutique law firm that specialized in entertainment transactions but were unsure whether they would be successful, although they had been entertainment industry executives and worked together at a large law firm.

"I knew the kind of work that I was doing," Kleinberg said. "The question was whether it would be successful in a boutique law firm as distinct from being part of a larger law firm."

Their creation, now known as Kleinberg Lange Cuddy & Carlo LLP, is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Novelist J.K. Rowling, actor Dustin Hoffman, and rockers Mick Jagger and KISS are among the firm's clients, along with many other celebrities such as actors, screenwriters, producers and journalists.

Kleinberg and Lange started their firm with one other attorney and faced immediate challenges.

"We were experienced lawyers, but at the same time we had been out of the law practice and had been executives for a while," Lange said. "What happens when you do that is you send your clients to other lawyers."

"So the challenge was to start up a firm from scratch in a very competitive environment and you have to build up your clientele," he said.

The partners overcame the obstacles with hard work and dedication, Lange said.

"We had some clients who we



Alexander Dreun / Special to the Daily Journal

From left, Robert Lange, Christine Cuddy, Jill Smith and Kenneth Kleinberg of Kleinberg Lange Cuddy & Carlo LLP.

knew from the past who came back to us," Lange said. "The reputation for our work was very good, so we started getting a lot of referrals for other clients."

Kleinberg Lange Cuddy & Carlo now has seven attorneys, including five partners, advising clients on complex deals and cross-border contracts as well as representing top entertainment talent.

Kleinberg advised Rowling in deals for the "Harry Potter" franchise, including agreements for attractions at Universal Studios locations around the world. Kleinberg has advised Rowling in deals with Warner Brothers based on her novel, "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them."

Name partner Christine S. Cuddy, who joined the firm in the mid-1990s, advises George R.R. Martin, whose novels have been transformed into "Game of Thrones" on HBO. She also advised writers Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski in a deal for "The People v. O.J. Simpson:

American Crime Story" miniseries, which premiered last year on FX.

"I was involved when the deal was made just for the writing services," Cuddy said. "Then, you don't have any idea what is going to happen. It was a great script and when a project gets set up in such a way with a great cast and it does well, it's very exciting."

To be an effective entertainment lawyer, said name partner Candace Carlo, "you have to be involved in the business end of it as well."

"It's a fascinating global world at this point," said Carlo, who provides guidance on international deals. "As a lawyer, I think you have to always remain nimble and keep your mind open to all of these fabulous new ideas that keep coming at you all the time."

Carlo does legal work for Hans Zimmer, an Academy Award-winning composer whose recent movie scores include "Interstellar," "Kung Fu Panda 3" and "Hidden Figures."

An attorney is "there to warn of pitfalls, help guide for opportunities and just be aware of the whole business overlay in connection with ... negotiating legal documents and making the deals," Carlo said.

When partner Jill L. Smith joined the firm nearly four years ago, she brought along Hoffman, her longtime client. She is advising the actor in deals for the "The Meyerowitz Stories," an upcoming independent feature film and the Italian series "Medici: Masters of Florence."

Smith and Lange also do work in unscripted television.

"The emergence of unscripted television and the expansion of outlets has changed the dynamics of television and the structure of deals," Smith said. "It's challenging because the financial terms haven't necessarily changed, particularly in the scripted arena, and the restrictions are the same," Smith said. "So, for instance, you have clients who are held up for the same period of exclusivity but are only doing six episodes or 10 episodes versus 22 episodes."

Lange's film and television clients include Billy Bush, a radio and television host. Lange negotiated actor Damon Wayans' TV deal for "Lethal Weapon," which was picked up for a second season on Fox. Lange advised KISS front man, Gene Simmons, in his venture to form Erebus Pictures, a new motion picture financing and production company. Mark Hamill's deal for "Star Wars: Episode VIII" was achieved with Lange's guidance.

"I've learned that you have to be ever vigilant in terms of doing

the work,” Lange said. “You can’t get lazy. We tend to represent individuals and closely held businesses, so we’re representing work that really, really matters to them personally. So we need to be there for them and we have to be dedicated.”

“That doesn’t change no matter how big we get or how many clients we have,” Lange added.

Attorneys at the firm have done work that has had lasting impacts on the entertainment industry.

“I have worked on some things that at the time I didn’t know how long lasting they would be,” Kleinberg said. “I wrote the first contract

for Casey Kasem and American Top 40 and helped him create that show. AT40 is still on the air.”

“I did some of the first cable television licenses for movie channels and I wrote the licensing agreement that’s the basis of the form still used by the American Film Marketing Association,” he added.

Stacy D. Phillips, a partner at Blank Rome LLP who worked alongside Kleinberg on a matter, described him as “a lawyer’s lawyer.”

“He is really easy to work with,” Phillips said. “He was appropriately tough but gracious,

honest, creative.”

Attorneys at Kleinberg Lange Cuddy & Carlo are in the “top ranks of their fellow practitioners,” said Marshall Grossman, a partner at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP. “I have worked closely with the firm’s lawyers for over 20 years. They are well schooled in their clients’ work with a high level of success in getting the desired results and avoiding the time and expense of litigation.”

Stacy Harrison, also a partner at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, said attorneys at Kleinberg Lange Cuddy & Carlo are “professional, creative and thoughtful.”

“They are aggressive in negotiations when they have to be and they know how to feel the room to get the best deal for their clients,” Harrison said.

Growing the firm and possibly expanding the practice areas are possibilities for the future, Kleinberg said.

“I think at some point we’d like to add a technology lawyer ... who really focuses purely and simply on media-related technologies,” Kleinberg said. “If you look back at the entertainment industry, the factor that has propelled it forward so significantly has been the technology.”