

Ogilvy Renault expands its vision



KATHRYN LEGER
STRICTLY LEGAL

Ogilvy Renault LLP has stepped up efforts to make contacts in Asia, the Middle East, India and Brazil in the past year as part of an offensive to capture more legal business.

"We are identifying opportunity and positioning ourselves to take advantage of opportunity, to maximize opportunity," said Jean G. Bertrand, who became managing partner of the Montreal office three weeks ago and assumed additional new responsibility as finance chair of the national firm at the same time.

"We are looking at what is happening with the Canadian economy, and the world economy, and where the growth is and how it is driven, and it is basically resource-driven," Bertrand said.

The objective is to make contacts with people who can open doors for Canadian clients expanding or operating abroad and to solicit interest for deal-making in Quebec and other parts of Canada, particularly in the buoyant energy and resource sector.

Opening an office in Calgary earlier this year fits closely with that strategy, but Bertrand said the firm also wants to exploit new possibilities for mining and energy projects in Quebec.

"There are a lot of new mining projects for northern Quebec, whether it is iron

trend he would like to change - Bertrand said there is much more that can be done to service existing clients.

"The Montreal legal market is fairly flat, so it is a question of maximizing our coverage of existing clients and making sure they are presented with the whole range of services, so that we can increase our level of volume with each of them, maybe adding a service that they don't use up to now or that they entrust to other firms.

"Some clients of the firm in the labour and employment area are not necessarily clients of the litigation group, or don't use our intellectual property services," said Bertrand, noting three of the Montreal office's core practice areas that complement its business law division.

High-end litigation work remains a mainstay of the firm that numbers many blue-chip Quebec companies like Quebecor Media Inc. Bertrand is representing long-time client Bombardier Inc. in litigation concerning the awarding of a tender for a contract to build new metro cars for the Montreal Transit Corp. that could eventually be worth more than \$3 billion. And executive committee chair Pierre Bienvenu is the outside litigation lead for BCE Inc. to obtain a \$1-billion breakup fee after a \$52-billion privatization deal failed.

Bertrand, 51, who previously headed up Ogilvy Renault's national litigation group for six years, often working closely with the business law group, said he is ready for the challenge.

"The focus is going to be on teamwork," he said, referring to the Montreal contingent of 59 business lawyers, 33 employment law lawyers,

House prices seen cooling

'MORE BALANCED MARKET POSSIBLE'

City year-over-year sales off 19% in June

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THE GAZETTE

The cost of buying a Montreal home is still rising, but with year-over-year sales slowing for the second consecutive month, housing prices may soon cool, the head of the city's real-estate board said yesterday.

While prices on single family homes, plexes and condos all rose by eight per cent in June - according to Multiple Listing Service statistics released yesterday - year-over-year sales dropped 19 per cent in the Montreal area.

On the one hand, a drop in year-over-year sales last month isn't surprising as June 2009 was one of the most active on record, noted

Michel Beausejour, CEO of the Greater Montreal Real Estate Board. And for the first half of 2010, sales are up by 16 per cent.

But if sales continue to slow and the number of active listings in the MLS database rise, the city's real-estate market would no longer favour sellers, he said. Property values would still grow, but not at the current rate.

"We may be going back to a more balanced market," Beausejour said. "Price (increases) will be closer to the inflation rate in the future."

As of June 30, the number of active listings is 10 per cent lower, compared with year-earlier period, when there was a flurry of sales as buyers feared an expected rise in interest rates.

Real-estate observers attributed the rising prices to rock-bottom interest rates, which allowed buyers to spend more when buying a home.

"It gave buyers greater purchasing power," said Michael Chetboun, a director of Sequoia gestion immobilière Inc., which manages residential real estate and advises clients on purchasing investment properties.

"But I think some current sellers are being too greedy. People who were trying to sell for a higher price are going to lower their prices or take their properties off the market. I think it's now too late to be selling at a high price."

Still, Beausejour says he doesn't believe prices will drop rapidly, as key indicators like employment and consumer confidence remain positive.

Unlike Canada as a whole, Quebec is actually back to pre-recession employment levels. And unlike other prov-

inces, consumer confidence actually grew slightly in Quebec last month, according to the Conference Board of Canada's monthly index.

"People are not forced to sell," he noted.

In the Montreal area, the decline in sales was most dramatic on the South Shore, which dropped by 26 per cent, and least harsh in suburbs north of Laval, where there was only a 12-per-cent decline.

In June, sales of plexes, which are now in short supply in Montreal, dropped 24 per cent. Year-over-year single-family home sales decreased by 21 per cent while sales of condos dropped by 13 per cent.

Prices, however, are still rising. The median price of a single family home reached \$260,000. The price for condos is \$214,000, and plexes reached \$385,000.

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MERCK About 550 jobs to stay in Kirkland office

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Employees were told of the company's decision in a meeting yesterday morning. The decision was made as Merck undergoes transitions following its \$41-billion purchase last year of Schering-Plough. About 15,000 employees will be laid off during the next two years as a result of the restructuring.

Merck said it also planned to close eight research and eight manufacturing sites worldwide. The company expects to save between \$2.7 billion and \$3.1 billion in 2012.

Kirkland's research facility has developed a number of successful drugs for the company, the most lucrative being the popular Asthma

