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## Wilson Petty looks to expand reach through national alliance

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By women-owned law firm standards, **Wilson Petty Kosmo & Turner** is big. The biggest of its kind in San Diego, in fact. But the 19-member firm would like to expand its reach beyond Southern California.

Its latest venture may do just that.

Wilson Petty has joined a unique national alliance designed to help minority-owned firms represent businesses on a national scale.

Known as the National Minority Law Group, the coalition is comprised of 18 firms in 15 cities throughout the United States and is the brainchild of Florida attorney Hank Adorno.

"He wanted to address the interests that many companies had for expanding their utilization of minority attorneys and minority-owned firms," said Regina Petty, a partner with Wilson Petty. "They often need regional or national representation. Right now, there's not a national minority-owned law firm."

Last year, according to Petty, many Fortune 500 companies signed an agreement calling for their legal departments to make a commitment to the diversity of their outside counsel.

Adorno, who's firm **Adorno & Yoss** has offices in eight states and the District of Columbia, initially wanted to merge with several minority firms. But the small firms balked, wanting to retain their own identity and individual control.

An association became the ideal solution.

"We tend to be entrepreneurial minded," Petty said of her firm's reluctance to any acquisition. "We value our individuality. We enjoy the opportunity to manage our own business. We didn't want to give that up."

Of Wilson Petty's eight partners, six are women. Other firms in the alliance are owned by Hispanics, Asians or blacks.

Each member of NMLG must be devoted primarily to corporate representation, have technology that corporations require and hold an "AV" rating -- which represents the height of professional excellence -- through Martindale-Hubbell's peer review.

The group includes two other California firms -- **Atkins & Evans** in Los Angeles and **Lafayette & Kumagai** in San Francisco -- as well as firms in most major metropolitan areas.

The participating firms employ sophisticated business practices both in litigation and transaction. They're well positioned to handle large corporate clients but have struggled to get noticed because of their size.

"The (NMLG) eases the opportunities to expand the geographic reach," Petty said. "I see many companies in the midst of reducing the outside firms they use because they prefer more regional or national relationships. This gives us an opportunity to be a player in that market."

The coalition has a Web site and a registry to make it easier for corporations to find the firm with the appropriate skills.

"By bringing these firms together under this umbrella, corporate counsel of major corporations can then come to one database and have at their fingertips law firms that have already been pre-checked and pre-approved by the admissions process into the group," Petty said.

Being a member of the alliance won't guarantee big-name clients, however, Petty admitted. It only will get you on the list for consideration. Since the NMLG is still in its infancy, Wilson Petty has yet to pick up a client through it, but the partners are optimistic.

"This, over time, will be good for our business both locally and throughout the California region," Petty said. "It's a good marketing tool to add to what we're already doing as a law firm and it's also been very beneficial in meeting a lot of lawyers that I didn't know before the process started. That synergy will result in business growth for all of the participants."