

MVP: Skadden's Richard Witzel Jr.

Law360, New York (December 20, 2017, 3:49 PM EST) -- Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP's Richard C. Witzel Jr. has helped guide almost \$50 billion worth of deals in the last year, including a \$30 billion blockbuster that shook up the aerospace and defense industry and was clinched on Labor Day, earning him a spot on Law360's list of 2017 Mergers & Acquisitions MVPs.

WHY HE'S AN M&A ATTORNEY:

Witzel, a partner at Skadden who has been with the firm for almost two decades, knew from a young age that he wanted to be a lawyer. That confidence in his desired profession can be attributed to the fact that both of his parents are lawyers: His father is a litigator and his mother was an appellate clerk for the Missouri Court of Appeals for 20 years.

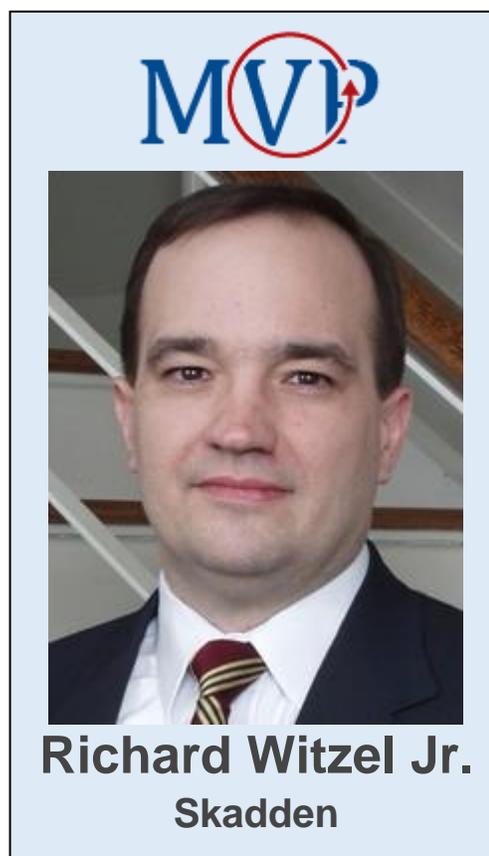
"The decision to become a lawyer was pretty easy for me," he said. "We grew up talking about the law and legal issues. It was an everyday facet of our lives."

One of three children, Witzel, now 46 years old, is the only one who went into law.

"I'm the only one who caught the bug, I guess," he said. "I'm the only one carrying the legal torch."

Initially, Witzel thought he'd follow in his father's footsteps and go into litigation, but over time he realized he was interested in the allure of mergers and acquisitions work, a practice that has allowed him to work on a wide variety of transaction types and legal issues for a clients in a range of industries, be it agriculture, industrials or health care.

According to Witzel, working in M&A has allowed him to gain expertise in an assortment of areas, while



also giving him the satisfaction of helping clients complete complicated transactions.

“Being in a professional service business, the thing that’s most rewarding is having clients that are happy,” he said.

NOTABLE DEALS HE’S WORKED ON THIS YEAR:

For M&A attorneys, any given matter can be seriously time-consuming, and that’s especially true when a transaction is of the megadeal variety. In the last 12 months, Witzel has had his hand in multiple massive agreements that reached into the billions, showcasing his ability to be organized and efficient.

Witzel’s first big-time deal of the year was the \$8.3 billion acquisition of B/E Aerospace by Rockwell Collins Inc. Skadden represented Rockwell Collins in the transformative transaction, which added to the company’s portfolio a business that makes products such as equipment for seating, food and beverage preparation, lighting and oxygen systems and modular galley and lavatory systems for commercial airlines and business jets.

With Witzel’s help, Rockwell Collins was able to secure antitrust approvals for the deal in the U.S., European Union and China. It closed in April.

Three days after that deal closed, Witzel’s second megadeal of the year was announced: He represented Cardinal Health Inc. in its acquisition of the patient care, deep vein thrombosis and nutritional insufficiency business of Irish medical device maker Medtronic PLC.

The Cardinal Health deal, worth \$6.1 billion, also included Medtronic’s dental and animal health, chart paper, wound care, incontinence, electrodes, SharpSafety, thermometry, perinatal protection, blood collection, compression and enteral feeding products.

The complex, cross-border transaction involved asset or stock transfers in about 50 different jurisdictions and required works council consultations in multiple jurisdictions. The deal closed on a Saturday night in July.

According to Witzel, his ability to jump right into the Cardinal Health matter after having just clinched the Rockwell Collins deal has a lot to do with the abundance of talented lawyers Skadden employs.

“A lot of it has to do with putting together the right team to work on a given deal,” he said.

HIS BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS YEAR:

The most involved transaction Witzel worked on this year was worth \$30 billion, and it took place during the summer doldrums, a time in the year that is a historically slow period for M&A.

The agreement, under which Connecticut-based United Technologies Corp. acquired Iowa-based Rockwell Collins, underlines the importance of developing client relationships, as it saw Witzel representing Rockwell Collins in a multibillion-dollar transaction for the second time in a single year.

The companies said the deal, which marks the second largest transaction in 2017, stands to help United Technologies in its push to make airplanes smarter and more connected.

It was signed on Labor Day, meaning that a typically long weekend of relaxation became an intense few days filled with work for Witzel.

“That’s a particularly unusual time because the last two weeks of August tend to be some of the slowest for deals all year,” Witzel said. “The timing constraint is always important. After putting in a lot of effort over the Labor Day weekend, when you get to the announcement on Monday night, that’s a pretty satisfying feeling.”

Working through the Labor Day weekend did not faze Witzel, however. He said that the potential for a megadeal to occur at any given time, and the possibility that he as the attorney might be called upon by a client for an extremely important matter, ensures that Witzel is always ready for whatever might come his way.

“The deal drives the timing,” he said. “Sometimes that means it falls over Labor Day, sometimes other holidays. Each deal has its own unique deadlines, goals and priorities. Figuring out how you’re going to bring all those things together — check all the different boxes — is what keeps it interesting.”

HIS PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENT THIS YEAR:

Steering nearly \$50 billion in combined deals is no easy task, but it isn’t the only significant steering done by Witzel in 2017. He participated in the annual Chicago Yacht Club Race To Mackinac, a 333-mile annual yacht race that begins in Lake Michigan off the coast of Chicago, Illinois, and ends in Lake Huron off Mackinac Island, Michigan.

“I’m an avid sailor,” Witzel told Law360. “Every year I try to do the annual ‘Race To Mackinac.’”

This year, he did more than participate in the race: Witzel’s team came in second place in their class.

“That was my big personal achievement for the year,” he said.

— *As told to Benjamin Horney*

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2017 MVP winners after reviewing more than 1,000 submissions.