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LAW FIRM BUSINESS

New boutique represents actors

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LOS ANGELES — One of the newest arrivals to Tinseltown's entertainment litigation scene was founded by a group of lawyers who consider themselves "fixers."

"There is no problem we can't fix," said Jeffrey I. Abrams, one of three co-founders of Century City-based Harder Mirell & Abrams LLP.

Just three and a half months old, the firm tackles First Amendment issues, right of publicity, and trademark and copyright infringement, among other types of cases. Its clients have included such marquee names as Hulk Hogan, Bradley Cooper and the estate of late actor Marlon Brando.

Firm co-founders Abrams, Douglas E. Mirell and Charles J. Harder said they wanted to strike out on their own to have more freedom over what kind of cases to take, to provide flexible billing rates and to maintain a closer sense of collaboration among a smaller staff.

"I try to win and do so in a way that's cost effective for a client," Harder said, "so they don't lose when they're winning."

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— Jeffrey I. Abrams

In the firm's most recent notable victory, Harder secured an injunction on behalf of semi-retired professional wrestler Hulk Hogan. Hogan was filmed while engaged in private, intimate activities, Harder said, and six years later, a tape of the encounter was posted to the Web.

The matter spanned two different cases against separate sets of defendants in two different



Alexander Drecun/ Special to the Daily Journal

Charles J. Harder, Jeffrey I. Abrams, and Douglas E. Mirell, from left, co-founded a small boutique that represents entertainers.

courts, and the lawyers initially expected one set of defendants to settle. "It didn't, and so we couldn't sustain two litigations on parallel tracks, and we consolidated them," he said. The case is now pending in front of the judge who ordered the injunction. *Bollea v. Heather Clem, Gawker Media LLC, et al.*, 12012447-CI-011 (6th Judicial Cir., Pinellas County, Fla., filed October 15, 2012)

The firm also represents actors Bradley Cooper and Liam Neeson against Vutec Corp., a manufacturer of video projection screen technology for home usage, which Harder said was wrongly using the actors' images. The case was recently removed to federal court and discovery will commence shortly, Mirell said.

It also dabbles in the celebrity estate arena. Abrams plays the role of "legacy manager" for the late actor Marlon Brando's estate and has played a role in next year's planned opening of an eco-resort on an atoll Brando owned in Tahiti. Abrams also is responsible for maintaining the late actor's archives and protecting against

infringement.

Abrams said the firm's early success stems in large part from the different strengths and skill sets each partner brings to the table.

"It's the attitude of the three of us and our staff, and then in terms of the substance, the three of our skills are very unique and very different," said Abrams, a dispute resolution professional.

The first priority of the firm is to "enjoy ourselves," added Harder. The first question he asks a stressed out fellow attorney, he said, is "Are you having fun?"

The firm remains small, home to seven licensed attorneys, staff and one lawyer who is waiting to be sworn in to the New York Bar. But to make sure the team is on the same page, the firm holds weekly partner meetings and staff meetings.

All three firm founders spent years at their previous firms, Wolf, Rifkin, Shapiro, Schulman & Rabkin LLP and Loeb & Loeb LLP, but wanted to work for themselves for a change and cultivate their relationships with one another.

"We decided we had more to gain than we did to lose," Harder said.

The nature of the entertainment practice has changed significantly over the course of their careers, the lawyers said, in large part due to advances in technology. The firm, for example, will regularly patrol social media sites to ensure there aren't any imposters posing as their clients or selling their clients' products. The lawyers also keep an eye out for possible copyright and trademark infringements.

"There are an enormously great number of opportunities out there for people to engage in infringing conduct via the Internet," Mirell said. "What people choose to do and say on websites and on blogs provides a real road map for tracking down and policing the market place."

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The firm has had luck attracting both in- and out-of-state clients, and new matters pop up almost every week, firm founders said. The partners are also exploring the possibility of opening a New York office because the firm does legal work there, according to Abrams.

Mirell said the firm's airy, 4,000-square foot office space allows the lawyers to work collaboratively — something he appreciates. The firm's inclusive nature can be seen in its business cards, which have the firm name set against three concentric circles.

"We all work together," Mirell said, "not in silos."