Expert Witness

When Russ Rosenzweig and several friends from Northwestern University formed Round Table Group in 1994, little did they realize they were creating a $150 million industry.

Nor did they realize that their recession-resistant business model of connecting lawyers with experts would initiate today's gig economy.

Round Table Group is a critical resource for law firms and attorneys: when a law firm needs an expert witness for a case, the firm can try to find one themselves, which is often a time-consuming, inefficient and haphazard process, or Round Table Group will find the witness the firm needs from their pool of experts covering every imaginable topic … *combined with rigorous research methods.*

"We monetize the expertise of people who have expertise," Rosenzweig says.

The idea first came to him and his friends during their senior year at Northwestern, where Rosenzweig studied mathematical methods in the social sciences and economics. It was the recession of the early 90s, and facing a bleak job market, Rosenzweig and his cohorts felt they needed a Plan B in case they couldn't find work.



Russ Rosenzweig

Russ Rosenzweig and his partners were the pioneering architects of the expert witness search and referral industry 25 years ago, creating an elite organization of professors, department chairs and other specialized experts.

Their idea was to create an organization consisting entirely of professors from prestigious universities. They saw that other consulting firms were using young consultants, sometimes just out of college, who lacked the expertise of a university professor, department chair or a Nobel laureate.

Rosenzweig and his team spent the next several years gathering professors into their consortium. In 1994, before email was widely used except for within academic circles, they were emailing professors from across the country, then flying to campuses to pitch their idea to packed lecture halls of professors.

"Our pitch to them was that rock stars and movie stars always had agents and managers handling their commercial activity," Rosenzweig explains. *"And you're a rock star in your field."*

Most of the professors Rosenzweig encountered were not fond of marketing themselves and their expertise, yet they were delighted to complement their research and teaching with expert witness work if it came directly to them from Round Table Group.

"The faculty members were drawn to our message of having a highly-professional team of business

managers who would do all this work for them," Rosenzweig says.

Within two years, over 10,000 leading professors had joined Rosenzweig's pool of experts.

When Daniel Diermeier, Chancellor of Vanderbilt University, wsas a professor at Northwestern University acclaimed Kellogg School of Management, he "witnessed first-hand how the Round Table Group helped faculty members develop a second vocation as expert witnesses, which often complemented their teaching and research."

When Rosenzweig was an MBA student at the University of Chicago, "I witnessed the formation and growth of Round Table Group." says Harry L. Davis, a professor at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business. "It was rare in my experience to see a student give birth to a new industry, grow a company, get acquired, and then buy it back. Business students will be studying RTG's innovative model for years to come."

It took Round Table Group -- which did not have any venture capital or private equity -- several years before it had a reliable flow of revenue. The breakthrough came when Winston & Strawn called about an urgent need for specialized experts for a complex litigation; it was explained that the testifying experts would make or break the trial outcome.

"That first law firm engagement gave birth to a brand-new industry: expert witness search and referral," Rosenzweig says. "It's time consuming and inefficient for lawyers to locate, vet and assess expert witnesses, and yet you can lose a trial if you hire the wrong expert. We solved this challenge by creating a thorough and rigorous process for lawyers to find great experts, and we immediately expanded our professorial network to include the best practitioners and non-academic experts in all fields."

Word began to spread within the upper echelons of the legal community, and RTG's expert witness services began to grow exponentially. Round Table Group was named to Inc. Magazine's list of fastest-growing companies six times in a row, and by 2010 it was working with virtually every one of the AM Law 200 law firms.

Stanford University wrote a case study about RTG; in it, the university noted that RTG was not only pioneering a brand-new industry, but also was paving the way for the spread of the "gig economy" with thousands of otherwise-busy experts moonlighting as expert witnesses.

This growth led to Round Table Group being acquired by Thomson Reuters in 2010. The company name changed to Thomson Reuters Expert Witness Services.

"It was really breathtaking to see how a world-class Fortune 500 company would handle our baby," Rosenzweig says. "Everything that was good at our company became great under Thomson Reuters."

Rosenzweig decided to leave the company to pursue other projects, but in 2019 Thomson Reuters asked him and his team if "we wanted our company back," Rosenzweig says. "We got the old band back together and re-acquired the company with the original founding team."

So now, the Thomson Reuters expert witness service is once again Round Table Group. "It is such a rare privilege to have been able to start a company, pioneer a brand new industry, sell the company, and then re-acquire it," says Rosenzweig, who also holds an MBA from the University of Chicago, where he serves as an advisor and coach to the University's Department Chairs and frequently lectures business students, entrepreneurs and executives.

Round Table Group plans to be "*the innovator"* a second time within the industry, creating an indispensable set of tools for litigators to engage with prospective expert witnesses using artificial intelligence and other cutting-edge techniques.

[Editor's Note: On the COVID-19 pandemic: "With so many people panicking, and with so much fear and stress — and we know about fear and stress — we have a duty as leaders to have an extra level of compassion and a desire to go from being blessed to being the blessing," Rosenzweig says. "We are making significant donations to the Pandemic Response Fund established by the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health in honor of our clients. Also, while others are cutting expenses and laying people off, we are dramatically increasing our investment in our clients, our people, and our company."] — By Joshua Rosen, California Business Journal.

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