

My Benesch My Team – Shearer’s Snacks

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Fritz Kohmann
CFO
Shearer's Snacks

Not every company has an on-site legal team, but the right legal partner can make you feel as if you do. Fritz and the Shearer’s team rely on Benesch to help them handle a wide array of legal matters touching all parts of Shearer’s business - from contract negotiations, M&A deals and IP protection to leases, litigation, employment and more. They know they can count on the Benesch team for a practical, risk-intelligent perspective that cuts through legalese and focuses on the business. It’s the convenience of in-house counsel with the advantage of wide-ranging business experience and deep legal knowledge.

Many people associate Shearer’s with potato chips, but there’s so much more to it.

We are certainly most known in the region for our Shearer’s branded products, but while that’s an important part of our business, it’s a relatively small one. We have about 4,800 employees along with 10 manufacturing facilities around the U.S. and one in Canada. We do a lot of contract manufacturing. We are the largest private label and contract manufacturer of salty snacks in the U.S. and the largest kettle potato chip producer in the world.

How did you get started working with Benesch?

My relationship with Benesch came through [Bob Ross](#) and [Eric Baisden](#), who joined the Benesch team in 2016. Shearer’s has been working with Bob and Eric since I started with the company back in 2002. They have represented us in a wide variety of disciplines. Bob serves as a single point of contact and complements that by bringing in the legal subject matter specialists on Benesch’s team as needed. He’s an effective liaison between the deep, technical legal points and the business points and makes sure we understand situations without having to be legal experts.

What kind of things does Benesch help you with?

Bob has been the lead contact for us on anything that’s not employee related, from contract negotiations to M&A activity to IP matters to leases to litigation-really any type of legal work other than employment. Eric leads all of the employment-related matters. We ship products internationally, and Benesch helps us with that as well in terms of dealing with international customers and suppliers.

Do you have an attorney on staff, or does Benesch serve as your in-house counsel?

I am the point person and all the legal work comes through me. We do not have any full-time legal counsel on staff. Because I “play a lawyer” at work and deal with legal matters so much, I do have a reasonably in-depth understanding of the legal aspects of our business. But when other business people here are engaged in legal situations, Bob and his team do an excellent job of talking through those in an understandable fashion and distilling them into the key decision points. They truly understand where risks lie and take a very even-keeled approach. If there’s a real business risk, they make sure we understand it. But they don’t make more of situations than needed.

Benesch always does a good job of explaining to us what our options are and giving us counsel from a very pragmatic approach. They aim to keep things moving forward and work toward reaching effective agreements in contracts, deals or disputes.

Why have you continued to work with Bob and Eric for so long?

We really value them not only as attorneys but also business partners. Bob and Eric truly understand our business and our business strategy and objectives and apply that across the board to the different legal matters that come up in our day-to-day business. They have an extremely practical approach and help characterize legal matters in a very digestible manner for non-attorneys to understand.

One of the other things I appreciate is that Benesch is always mindful of the legal costs of different matters we’re dealing with. They put our interests first, and look to strike a balance between the right economic outcomes of issues and the potential legal costs. They don’t try to overly litigate things or dig deep into areas that aren’t a meaningful risk for us and would burn through legal costs.

Are you facing any unique challenges to your business?

One of the larger, industry issues we’re dealing with is the packaging labeling requirements-new legislation that is either recently implemented or soon to be implemented. Oftentimes it’s difficult to sort through what it all means in terms of practical execution and what we actually have to do. Benesch has been a good resource for us as we think it through and plan for the changes coming down the road.

Any closing thoughts?

Lawyers go to law school and get paid for a reason; it’s not always simple. Benesch does a good job of helping us understand what the real, critical pieces are that we are dealing with without having to be technical lawyers.

There’s also a reality, too, that they’re good people to be around-we like them. You need to make sure you’re getting the right technical/legal skills and competencies, but you have to enjoy the people you’re working with as well. We like Bob, Eric and their team. Often when you’re calling your lawyer, it’s not a fun topic, but I don’t dread picking up the phone and touching base with them.