

Fee-based investment firm named most innovative company

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After working on mergers and acquisitions and recapitalization plans for a decade and a half at Unum and Four Bridges Capital Advisors, Frank Williamson recognized that M&A firms and business advisory consultants were generally reluctant to take on smaller or less capitalized businesses with the current commission-based form of compensation for their work.

So three years ago, Williamson decided to try a different approach in working with small- to medium-sized businesses looking for capital or trying to complete mergers and acquisitions. Williamson launched Oaklyn Consulting, named after the tobacco-turned-organic

farm operated by his father in South Carolina, and used a fee-based payment plan for aiding businesses with their financial needs and changes.

"We decided to bill our clients on a fee basis, just as lawyers do, and only do the work that is really needed," Williamson says. "To date, it seems to be going pretty well and it feels like it is complementary to the business communities that we are part of and adds value to our clients."

Since the 2016 start of the firm, Williamson and his three partners at Oaklyn Consulting have aided about 35 businesses, ranging in size from no revenue up to \$40 million in annual sales. The clients have been in a variety of industries with differing capital and ownership transfer needs.

The initial success of Oaklyn Consulting will be recognized on June in New York City when the 17th Annual American Business Awards names Oaklyn Consulting as the 2019 Gold Stevie Winner for the Most Innovative Company of the Year for businesses with under 100 employees.

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Fee-based investment firm named most innovative company, continued

The judges for the prestigious national business honor praised Oaklyn's fee-based model investment banking services in lieu of commissions, which allows Oaklyn to offer objective advice to business owners across the Southeast concerning the wisdom of mergers, acquisitions and other major financial decisions.

More than 3,800 nominations from organizations of all sizes and in virtually every industry were submitted this year for consideration in a wide range of Stevie award categories.

"The nominations submitted to The 2019 American Business Awards were outstanding," says Michael Gallagher, president and founder of the Stevie Awards. "They illustrate the continued vibrancy of innovation and high level of achievement across the American economic landscape."

Williamson said Oaklyn's fee-based compensation "helps our industry serve more businesses and expand access to capital."

Under the commission form of M&A payments, financial firms are not paid unless the deal closes, but as a consequence many smaller or at risk companies, even those who most need new financing or ownership, aren't supported by local advisory firms.

"We believe that our model complements the work of other investment banking firms in our region and is the best way to truly serve business owners' needs when deals are too small, risky or complex for those whose revenue depends on success fees," Williamson says. "This award serves as a wonderful confirmation of that."

Oaklyn Consulting does not work as a broker but as an extension of clients' boards and management teams, charging time-based fees for investment banking advice, Williamson said. The consulting firm that helps investor groups and private businesses, from startup to middle market, with mergers, acquisitions, capital-raising, investor relations, succession and other strategic corporate finance decisions.

Williamson said clients have come from a wide array of industries when they are dealing with life changing decisions, whether to sell a business, find an investor, merge with a competitor, or look for another path for success.

Williamson, a Harvard University graduate who previously served as chief investment officer at Unum and helped double revenues for Four Bridges Capital Advisors as managing partner, heads a four-man team at Oaklyn. Other partners include Seth Faler, a Wharton MBA graduate who previously worked as a corporate development officer and hedge fund analyst; Jack Rainer, a Vanderbilt MBA graduate who worked in the equity capital markets; and Christopher Wright, a University of Chicago MBA who worked with the private equity firm New Capital Partners and founded Foci Cognitive Training.

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