

# Litigation firm carefully limits caseload, staff

## Southfield legal team Young & Susser credits success to nongrowth

By Eric Pope  
*Special to The Detroit News*

**SOUTHFIELD**--At a time when law firm mergers are once again in fashion, trial lawyers Rodger Young and Steven Susser claim they are better off keeping their firm small.

With just six lawyers backed by five paraprofessionals, Young & Susser PC is a boutique firm that only does litigation. It competes against big firms with hundreds of lawyers in high-stakes courtroom battles. Typically two or three lawyers will face a team of five or six lawyers from a big firm.

Young & Susser usually comes out on top in these David vs. Goliath legal contests, and Young's personal record is 41-2 in trial verdicts.

When he represented Virtual Maintenance Inc. in a suit against Prime Computer, Young went up against legal teams from top firms in Detroit and Boston, as well as a former U.S. solicitor general. He won a \$30 million jury verdict and eventually settled the case

after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against his opponents.

According to Susser, a small boutique firm can achieve better results by having its small staff focus on a few cases. "Not growing is the key to success for a law firm," he said. "We don't want to fall into the trap of hiring more lawyers to take on more cases. It's much better to turn down cases and keep our standards high."

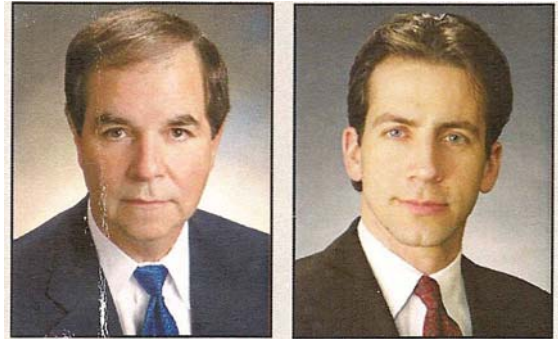
The two partners know what it's like to work at big law firms. Young was head of litigation at a major Detroit firm before going out on his own in 1991. Susser worked with more than 400 lawyers at Davis, Polk & Wardwell in New York City before returning to his hometown to join Young in 1995.

Susser remembers being one of half a dozen young associates assigned to go through mountains of legal files in big cases. "I didn't know how to separate the wheat from the chaff," he said.

Big trial teams often take too many depositions, amass too much research and raise too many legal issues, according to Susser.

"They go for quantity over quality," he said.

Rather than assign associates to do exhaustive research, all six Young &



Rodger Young, left, and Steven Susser head a boutique legal firm of six lawyers and five aides. They say a lean staff handling few cases has an edge over firms with big staffs and workloads.

Susser lawyers review cases together in weekly Saturday morning meetings.

Young said he prefers to be outnumbered in the courtroom. He learned early in his career that a legal team of five or six lawyers usually hinders the lead lawyer.

"The other lawyers want to be helpful and they provide an unrelenting stream of suggestions and thoughts," he said. "They burden the main lawyer with too many points of view."

Young said his small firm also maintains a big edge in trial experience because most litigators at big firms rarely go to court. While his firm prepares each case to go to trial, he has found that often the big firms are aiming for a settlement from the start and want to avoid a trial.

Being prepared to go the

distance enables Young to drive a tougher bargain in settlement talks. "Most lawyers overpay to get out of the courtroom," he said.

Young and Susser said their firm's small size and high winning percentage also allows them to maximize profits by taking around 40 percent of cases on a contingency fee basis, a risk that most firms can't afford. The firm gets nothing if it loses a contingency fee case, but typically gets a third of the judgment if it wins.

Young said he likes to take contingency fee cases to trial because "that links our trial skills directly to the monetary recovery and pays us for every dollar we save."

For more information, visit [www.youngpc.com](http://www.youngpc.com), or contact Mr. Young and Mr. Susser at (248) 353-8620.