

## Akerman Debuts Data Center and Digital Infrastructure Practice With Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner Laterals

Akerman added partners James Grice, who led the data center group at BCLP, and Michael McKinley to lead its new industry group from Kansas City.

BY DAN ROE

### What You Need to Know

- Former Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner partners James Grice and Michael McKinley have taken their data center practice to Akerman.

- Their arrival coincides with the formation of a data center and digital infrastructure industry group within the broader real estate practice.

- Real estate chair Eric Rapkin said the hires conclude years of searching for attorneys to build out a dedicated data center group.

Akerman debuted a new data centers and digital infrastructure practice on Thursday with

the hiring of partners Michael McKinley and James Grice from the Kansas City, Missouri, office of Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, where Grice led the same practice.

The partners are members of Akerman's Dallas office, although both are practicing remotely from Kansas City. The data centers practice exists within the firm's larger real estate practice and represents the culmination of years of searching for the right candidates, said real estate chair Eric Rapkin in an interview.

"Our lack of true data center deal experience has been what I perceived as a hole in our real estate group," Rapkin said. "We think there will be others



Michael McKinley

James Grice

in the data center and digital infrastructure space that will look at this hire and say Akerman is supporting this, maybe we should be talking to them."

The practice currently consists of Rapkin, Grice, McKinley and real estate co-deputy chair Lawrence Eiben, but Grice and Rapkin said the deals also rely heavily on practices like energy, M&A, real estate, tax, and more.

"A data center is effectively a large-capacity power consumer that is connected to

the internet,” Grice said in an interview.

Grice and McKinley said Akerman’s high-quality attorneys, culture of flexibility (which allowed them to stay in Kansas City) and commitment to data centers and digital infrastructure lured them to the firm.

“They have a very definitive vision for trying to position themselves to take advantage of the growth in the sector,” Grice said. “In the course of talking to leadership, it became apparent they were ready to commit and support us, which allowed us the opportunity to grow in this space.”

Demand for data center capacity is going nowhere but up, Grice said. That’s driving demand for procurement and development as well as M&A. Data center M&A broke



Courtesy photo

records in 2020 and 2021 with total market value exceeding \$48 billion last year, according to Synergy Research Group, up from \$34 billion in 2020. Deals in the first half of 2022 hit \$24 billion, and Synergy expects another \$18 billion in data center M&A before 2023.

Law firms with existing data center groups include Bryan

Cave, Cooley, Seyfarth Shaw, Hogan Lovells, DLA Piper, Baker McKenzie, Paul Hastings, Snell & Wilmer, Troutman Pepper, Quarles & Brady, McGuire Woods, and Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo.

A spokesperson for Bryan Cave didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday.