

MVP: Covington's Gerry Waldron

By **Nadia Dreid**

Law360 (October 28, 2024, 12:30 PM EDT) -- Gerry Waldron of Covington & Burling LLP helped usher radio into the 21st century by convincing the Federal Communications Commission to greenlight technology that will allow stations to deliver geotargeted content, earning him a spot among the 2024 Law360 Telecommunications MVPs.

His biggest win this year:

In the century since the proliferation of radio, Waldron said, the technology hasn't changed much.

"They put up a big stick and they send the same signal out to everyone in a 50-mile radius," he said.

That is essentially how it still works. But in April, after a four-plus-year struggle, the FCC adopted rules to allow for hyperlocal targeting of radio broadcast content, which Waldron had been pushing for on behalf of a client that makes the technology.

Now, listeners in New Jersey won't have to listen to advertisements about car dealerships in Long Island that they will never visit and will be able to receive brief, localized weather and traffic updates, the attorney said.

"I live in Virginia and, with all due respect to people in Maryland, I don't care about traffic in Maryland," Waldron said. "The TV industry got the authority to do it five years ago — even the Washington Post and magazines have regional versions, but radio was the only media industry that had this undifferentiated, one piece of content for everyone."

Minority-owned stations were excited about the change, saying the technology could help them compete against bigger rivals. Stations are already working to put the tech in place, Waldron said, including one station with plans to broadcast to parts of the Navajo Nation in the Navajo language.

His proudest moment:



Telecom cases take a long time. There are quick turnarounds, of course, Waldron said, referring to projects that can be wrapped up in six to nine months. But more often, the attorney said, he finds himself digging in for the long haul and working on the same project for years.

That was the case with the technology for geotargeting radio signals, he said. And that time frame can make the eventual win even better, he said. It took over four years to convince the FCC to allow radios to use the technology, according to Waldron, but now it's been approved and stations will start rolling it out soon.

"Dealing with issues over a long time — that's what makes these wins for your clients all the more satisfying," Waldron said, "because the client invested a lot of time, effort, money in the endeavor and it took us a long time to get here and we got there."

Why he chose telecom:

The short answer is Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass.

The longer answer is that fresh out of college, Waldron started as an intern in Markey's office, years before he became a senator. At the time, Markey was a U.S. representative from Massachusetts and a member of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, and he had a penchant for telecommunications issues, the attorney said.

That meant Waldron found himself working on them quite often, and once he went to law school and emerged as an attorney, he once again found himself drawn back to Congress and telecommunications issues. He spent a "good chunk of the '90s" working on the subcommittee as senior counsel.

"I was extremely fortunate to work for a great boss at a great time and had a fabulous sort of start in telecom as an intern in Ed Markey's office," Waldron said.

His advice for junior attorneys:

The best tip that Waldron says he has for attorneys just getting into the game is to be curious.

"You don't need to be an engineer," he said, but added that one of the best compliments he had ever received was when someone asked if he was one. "I can't even fake one on TV ... but be curious about technology."

Learning how things work is not only interesting but makes you better at your job, Waldron said.

"Don't be intimidated, and have fun doing it," he added.

--As told to Nadia Dreid. Editing by Vaqas Asghar.

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