

## Media & Entertainment Group Of The Year: Covington

By Nadia Dreid

*Law360 (January 29, 2025, 4:03 PM EST)* -- Covington & Burling LLP aided Meta in beating back claims accusing the social media behemoth of designing its platforms to be addictive and also helped various professional sporting organizations ink nearly \$80 billion in licensing deals last year, earning the firm a spot among the 2024 Law360 Media & Entertainment Groups of the Year.

Though it may not be the biggest practice group at the more than 1,200 attorney-strong firm, media and entertainment is big business at Covington — and has been for a while. Right now, there are about 100 lawyers who work on matters tied to media and entertainment across "all different kinds of practices — litigation, regulatory, transactions," Covington partner and practice group co-chair Robyn Polashuk told Law360.

"Really running the gamut of our office," Polashuk said of the attorneys she works with. Covington, she said, has "been in the media and entertainment space for over 100 years, starting with the early age of the regulatory and media industry."

That growing media footprint is part of the reason that the firm set out West, Polashuk said. Originally based in Washington, D.C., Covington opened the doors to its Los Angeles office almost a decade ago. Now the firm has experts in various aspects of the industry flung across the country and the world.

That means that the practice group has been doing a lot of "really organic" growth, according to Covington partner and media and entertainment co-chair Neema Sahni. Attorneys fresh out of law school often end up at Covington because they're interested in being in the media space, and they know the firm's reputation for handling that kind of work, Sahni said.

Plus, there's no one who "cuts across corporate litigation and regulatory at the level we do," partner and practice group co-chair Matt DelNero said.

"Both the media industry and the political landscape we face are undergoing pretty significant changes — combining a deep understanding of Washington with top-notch litigators in Los Angeles and New York really matters a lot," he said.

One of the things those "top-notch litigators" have accomplished over the last year was on behalf of



Covington's client Meta Platforms, which, alongside other massive social media companies Snap and YouTube, has been accused of designing its websites and applications to be addictive.

The litigation is a massive, multidistrict, consolidated beast, but the claims that Covington fended off were brought by four school districts who argued that the addictive qualities of these platforms was particularly harmful to children and that the school districts had been harmed as a result.

This summer, the California state judge overseeing the case rejected claims from school districts in Rhode Island, California, Florida and Washington, as well as their argument that they should be repaid for the disruption to their work that the sites caused. The states' common law doctrines don't allow the liability of negligence to stretch that far, the court said. Direct victims of a negligent action can definitely be compensated, but it doesn't reach beyond that to others affected indirectly, according to the ruling.

The partners were pretty tight-lipped about most of the cases they'd worked on this year, but Sahni did say that this win "really reflects our ability to face off against the government in high-stakes litigation."

Covington attorneys also advised on billions and billions of dollars worth of sports licensing deals, the biggest of which was inked by the National Basketball Association. It was a 12-year, \$76 billion deal between the NBA and Disney, Amazon and NBCUniversal to air the professional sports league's games.

In addition to many local Major League Baseball carriage agreements, there was also a \$2 billion deal between the U.S. Tennis Association and ESPN, which gave the sports network the rights to show the U.S. Open in the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean for the next 12 years.

"It's a privilege, frankly, to get to work on a lot of these matters that are so prominent, pushing these deals into the next generation," Sahni said.

It's fun to work on matters that affect the lives of almost everyone, Polashuk said.

"We all watch TV or listen to music on our phones," she said. "We're very lucky we get to work with exciting clients on exciting matters in an arena in which we all live."

--Editing by Dave Trumbore.