



2021 TOP INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAWYERS

Melanie J. Howard

Howard said she has been excited to see the crossover during the last couple of years between two of her niche intellectual property specialties: luxury fashion and esports.

“Seeing the crossover between those two industries has been something that’s been really exciting and engaging for me ... as luxury fashion brands are doing releases for avatars in games and gamers are being given deals to be brand ambassadors,” Howard said.

“Being able to take those two niche areas, which originally started out very separate and distinct, and bringing them together has been very exciting for me,” she added.

Howard, who specializes in protecting and monetizing intellectual property assets, has been at the forefront of these types of groundbreaking deals representing Tyler “Ninja” Blevins, a professional gamer and social media influencer.

Blevins struck an apparel deal with Adidas Originals in 2019, making him the first esports gamer to be signed by the brand.

Howard also represented Blevins in his deal with Red Bull GmbH and his multiyear deal with livestreaming platform Twitch last year.

Much of Howard’s work is confidential because of the high-profile nature of her clients, though one of her public clients is Gap

Inc., which she advised on its first multibrand, exclusive licensing partnership with IMG, an event and talent management company.

The deal was announced in May 2020. She also guided Gap in a multiyear partnership with a global music artist’s clothing brand.

Last month, she closed a landmark deal on behalf of Saks Fifth Avenue LLC, which pivoted its digital strategy and split off its e-commerce business under a stand-alone company, Saks.

“I like the creativity of finding the path forward with the client,” she said. “I think, sometimes as lawyers, we may tend to be more risk-averse personally, but my goal is always to adopt the risk profile of the client, of course within ethical boundaries, and to challenge myself to drive toward the solution that meets their risk objectives and their business objectives in a way that is creative from a legal standpoint.”

In addition to her intellectual property work, she has an active pro bono practice that has included projects with The Bail Project, Dress For Success and Saving Innocence, where she serves as secretary and board member.

Saving Innocence is a nonprofit helping children and young adults escape sex trafficking.

— Kamila Knautt



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