

Practice Leader Insights From Skadden's Deborah Kirk

By **Deborah Kirk** (March 2, 2026)

In this Law360 U.K. Expert Analysis series, practice group leaders share thoughts on keeping the pulse on legal trends, tackling difficult cases and what it takes to make a mark in their area.

In this installment, Deborah Kirk, Skadden's head of intellectual property and technology in London, discusses the challenges of cross-disciplinary collaboration on a transaction, how the proliferation of artificial intelligence is forcing clients to rethink their IP and data strategies, and why flexibility, curiosity and dynamism are key as a lawyer.

The Most Challenging Matter I've Worked On

Helping clients navigate the intricate regulatory landscapes surrounding intellectual property, technology and data issues in mergers and acquisitions, and private equity and technology deals consistently throws up complex challenges.

Being able to collaborate with your team to thoughtfully problem-solve for your client and come up with workable solutions that allow the deal to go ahead is something that still gives me a thrill.

Being part of the team to advise Aker ASA on its joint venture with OpenAI and Nscale Global Holdings Ltd. to create Stargate Norway, Europe's first renewable-powered artificial intelligence gigafactory, was a recent deal that was complex and thrilling all at once.

With partner Denis Klimentchenko leading the corporate elements of the deal, this transaction was a true test of legal innovation and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Not only did we have to resolve novel cross-border regulatory questions, integrate sustainability principles and ensure the contractual model could serve as a benchmark for future large-scale artificial intelligence infrastructure investments in Europe, but we also had to design and negotiate the technology-licensing, data center and customer-capacity frameworks that formed the commercial core of the venture.

Laws and Regulations in Need of Reform

It is a tough ask of the legislature to keep pace with technological change. Legal systems are simply not built with the same agility as technology when it comes to change and advancement, and the law finds itself in constant catch-up mode.

Even when the law does move, the fractious nature of global legal systems means that harmonization, even within Europe, is at odds with the omnipresent nature and global reach of technology.

We need continued, thoughtful reform that ensures law remains a facilitator, rather than a bottleneck to technological and commercial progress, and duly credits and remunerates



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both technological innovators and creatives.

The current patchwork of laws can be overwhelming for businesses, particularly in Europe, with overlapping and sometimes conflicting requirements under regimes, such as the European Union AI Act, Data Act, Digital Services Act and General Data Protection Regulation.

Greater harmonization and clarity are needed, especially around the legality of the usage of personal data and IP-protected datasets for the training of AI models and production of AI-generated content, and the moderation of online content, particularly for minors and the regulation of AI tools.

With varying approaches to these topics across jurisdictions, it can be a struggle to navigate the regulatory maze with the flexibility to support protection without stifling innovation, even with the best compliance intentions.

Important Developments and Trends I'm Tracking

The convergence of technology, IP and regulation, particularly driven by the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence, is fundamentally reshaping the way we live our lives. Every company is, in some way, becoming a tech company and every deal now has a technology or data component.

The proliferation of AI and the emergence of new regulatory regimes in the U.K. and EU are forcing clients to rethink their IP and data strategies from the ground up. We are seeing a surge in demand for advice on AI compliance, data governance, and the structuring of IP rights in joint ventures and mergers and acquisition.

This trend is also driving the need for lawyers who can bridge the gap between legal theory and commercial reality, translating complex regulatory requirements into actionable, business-focused solutions.

The effect is a more dynamic, collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to legal practice, with a premium on practical, forward-looking advice.

A Lawyer I Admire

I practiced at Latham & Watkins LLP for 14 years and was mentored by Andrew Moyle and Gail Crawford, who I consider to be very impressive lawyers, but also incredible people. Gail is a fantastic data practitioner who is grounded in integrity.

The tech practice at Latham was founded and led by Andrew, who has always been very much a strategic thinker. They are both inspirational team builders, and they taught me everything I know about what it means to lead a team and deliver selfless client service.

My Advice to Junior Lawyers

My team has numerous matters on the go at any one time. The nature of what I do requires me to be nimble and able to switch between deals and matters quickly.

For people who come and sit with us as trainees and vacation schemers, I tell them that flexibility, curiosity and dynamism are key to this role, both due to the juggling acts involved, but also constant changes. Integrity and respect are also nonnegotiables.

On the client facing side, always strive to anticipate your client's needs, even before they articulate them. Good lawyers focus on making their clients, rather than themselves, look good and are willing to go out on a limb to provide clear, actionable advice.

Deborah Kirk is a partner at Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP and head of the firm's intellectual property and technology practice in London.

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