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TOP INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAWYERS 2026

HONORING TOP ATTORNEYS WORKING IN PATENT, TRADEMARK AND COPYRIGHT LAW



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As managing partner of Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP's Silicon Valley office, Joseph Petersen has built a practice around copyright and trademark law — fields he describes as presenting "the myriad conundrums posed by trademark law" and the challenge of

anticipating the reactions of the hypothetical ordinary consumer.

Petersen joined the firm in 2005, where he came under the influence of Joe Beck, then head of the firm's copyright practice and a figure well-regarded in the copyright bar. Beck's method — breaking down complex issues quickly and building a compelling case theme from the outset — left a lasting mark. Petersen carries that discipline into every matter today, developing core themes early and reinforcing them through discovery, court submissions and communications with opposing counsel.

A representation that defined his career came through the Google Books litigation, in which Petersen represented universities that partnered with Google to digitize tens of millions of physical books. The project's goals included enabling search, expanding access for the print-disabled and preserving rare texts. At stake was whether

fair use shielded the universities from copyright infringement claims of enormous scale. The court ultimately sided with the universities — a ruling that "is now often cited by the developers of AI models when confronted with claims of alleged copyright infringement."

That precedent has taken on new relevance. Petersen's practice today is centered on artificial intelligence. He advises clients on the development and deployment of AI models and defends companies facing litigation and threatened litigation over their use of AI. The through line connecting the Google Books matter to his current work is consistent: "convincing judges and juries that a groundbreaking technology involving use of in-copyright material, when developed and deployed correctly, is entirely consistent with the Copyright Act's overarching goal of promoting 'the Progress of Science and useful Arts.'"