
ACC DOCKET

INFORMED. INDISPENSABLE. IN-HOUSE.

Committee Spotlight: Sports & Entertainment Law

Interviews and Profiles

Sports and Entertainment





Danielle Van Lier

SENIOR COUNSEL, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY & CONTRACTS,
SAG-AFTRA

Tell us about your background and your law department.

My undergraduate degree is in Japanese language literature and cultural studies from the University of California Santa Barbara. I got my law degree at Washington University in St. Louis — where I got most of the way through a joint master's in East Asian studies before dropping it in my final year. At work, I am responsible for managing all facets of SAG-AFTRA's third party contracts and intellectual property protection. I also have responsibilities relating to data security, privacy, and a range of other efforts aimed at protecting the rights of SAG-AFTRA and its members, including heading up SAG-AFTRA's amicus program. Away from work, I recently decided to return to school to pursue an LLM with a focus on IP and technology through the University of Edinburgh. I also enjoy playing ice hockey on the weekends.

SAG-AFTRA is the nation's largest labor union, representing working media artists with a membership comprised of over 160,000 actors, announcers, journalists, television and radio personalities, recording artists, singers, dancers, stunt performers, and many more.

What interested you in the in-house practice and how did you come to be an attorney at SAG-AFTRA?

I knew when I decided to go to law school that my career path would lead me in-house, and likely in the entertainment business (I grew up around the industry). I think the in-house practice is better suited for my personality, which tends to be more introverted and analytical. I started working as a business representative in the residuals department of the former Screen Actors Guild in 2000. An opportunity presented itself a year later, and I moved up into the legal department — where I initially pursued labor grievances. I would later take on a more specialized role as the union's first corporate transactional attorney, which was a position created specifically for me.

What is the single greatest challenge that your law department is facing today, and how are you dealing with it?

As a labor union, SAG-AFTRA is fairly unique and my job is unique within SAG-AFTRA. In addition to managing grievances on behalf of our members, our lawyers participate in collective bargaining activities, advise internal departments and member committees on our collective bargaining agreements, handle litigation and NLRB matters, and assist our government affairs and public policy team, among other responsibilities. I am the only lawyer in the department who primarily handles corporate transactional work. My biggest challenge is managing our normal contract workflow and ensuring compliance with our policies, while also trying to manage other aspects of my practice. We recently engaged a contract management vendor and built an internal tool that should streamline some of the contract management process, and I am working on some policy documents and cheat sheets to better assist my internal clients.

In October 2016, you were elected as chair of the Sports & Entertainment Law Committee. How did you initially get involved?

I have been very actively involved with the ACC Southern California Chapter for as long as I have been an ACC member. I originally joined ACC at the suggestion of my general counsel, who has encouraged and supported my involvement. David Cohen, the immediate past chair of the committee, is the one who encouraged me to get more involved with the committee leadership.

What are some of the ways that the Sports & Entertainment Committee provides value to its members?

Member service is one of my primary goals, so we are constantly trying to find new ways to serve our members. In addition to our monthly committee calls and legal quick hits, this year we launched a committee newsletter and a series of EMEA and APAC webcasts on topics of interest to our global members. We also co-sponsor an annual conference with the ACC Southern California Chapter. We are working with our committee sponsor, Ogletree Deakins, to establish a series of local networking events, including in spaces outside of our largest markets. And our committee Twitter feed (@ACCSELC) does a good job of tweeting out stories that may be of interest to our members.

What substantive practice issues does your committee address?

Our committee membership is much broader than just entertainment companies and sports teams or leagues, so we try to cover a range of issues — from those unique to our industries to more general issues. And we are trying to develop a more global focus as well. Some of the practice issues we have looked at over the last couple of years include topics such as labor and employment updates, IP issues, data licensing, and more niche topics such as net neutrality and team acquisitions.

How has the Sports & Entertainment Committee helped you in your career?

I joined ACC for the resources and stayed for the people. I actually think the committee has helped me more in a personal and professional development context than in my career. It has introduced me to aspects of the sports and entertainment industry that I wouldn't have been exposed to otherwise.

[Association of Corporate Counsel](#)

