

## THE RECORDER



### INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAWYER OF THE YEAR FINALIST: Michael Ng, Kobre & Kim



Courtesy photo

Michael Ng of Kobre & Kim

Michael Ng, partner with Kobre & Kim, is among the finalists for The Recorder's 2025 Intellectual Property Lawyer of the Year Award. Read a Q&A with him below.

**What's your proudest professional achievement of the past year and why?**

My proudest professional achievement was the successful US \$604.9 million jury verdict we won for our client Propel Fuels Inc. after a five-week trial in Alameda Superior Court—the largest trade secret verdict of 2024, and one of the largest in any kind of trial.

Two things stand out for me: First, that the success came on behalf of a smaller startup facing a much larger adversary. Propel had been instrumental in bringing renewable fuels to a larger market, but faced off against one of the largest oil majors, Phillips 66 Company. We were able to build on our client's tenacity to help hold the line during a long discovery and pretrial process, and then an arduous trial against a top litigation team from Latham & Watkins.

Second, we were able to draw from the diversity of our firm's lawyers and analysts, who brought not just unique perspectives but different communication styles and personalities that helped us connect with the jury. We saw that as a strength and were very comfortable giving standup work to more junior lawyers—who, as usual, knew the facts and law tremendously well, and ended up delivering key moments at trial.

**What advice would you give to new attorneys specializing in intellectual property?**

I would advise new IP attorneys to view your mission as being trial advocates first, and intellectual property specialists second.

At the end of the day, technical skill should support persuasive communication to the decision makers on your client's cases, including judges and juries who do not necessarily come to the process with scientific backgrounds. We all geek out sometimes—and we should. Technical rigor and tight analysis are essential, and we do need to present to examiners and judges with specialized skill. But it's important to get out of our comfort zones, work out new muscles, and figure out how to speak convincingly to a range of listeners. When we hire, we look for IP lawyers who enjoy that challenge, and ask even our technical specialists to work on cases outside of intellectual property.

**How is the practice of IP law changing?**

IP law is becoming more important, more international, and more integrated into every aspect of business decision-making. IP law infuses both legacy markets and emerging technologies—the entire shape of our economy may be defined by how IP law structures the rules around artificial intelligence, decentralized computing and the other foundations for our future infrastructure.

This means that we as IP practitioners need to get out of our silos and become core advisers to business leaders. And that includes understanding the cross-border issues at play: We are living in a world that continues to become more interconnected but also watching new walls and regulatory barriers go up at incredible speed. Being effective as an IP practitioner means understanding business needs but also how to navigate the continuing uncertainty.