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Leading Commercial Litigators 2026

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Commercial Litigators

The attorneys featured here have built careers on bet-the-company cases — with outcomes that matter for their clients, their industries and the law itself. Honorees were selected based on impact, professional contribution, public service and a commitment to reflecting the diversity of California's legal community.



MICHELE D. JOHNSON

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COSTA MESA

LITIGATION & TRIALS

Michele Johnson has spent her entire career at Latham & Watkins LLP, working out of the same office. The path from junior associate to partner was anything but linear.

“As a junior associate, I was a general litigator, with cases spanning intellectual property, product liability and all manner of commercial disputes,” she said. In her mid-associate years, she joined trial teams on groundwater contamination cases — until a proposed congressional energy bill brought that docket to an abrupt standstill. She pivoted to securities litigation, then to M&A and Delaware deal

cases and eventually returned to her roots as a generalist.

“Most recently, I tried a patent case in Delaware, an international arbitration in Germany and a privacy case in California,” Johnson said.

One of Johnson’s recent high-profile matters was a post-M&A arbitration brought against her client, Lindsay Goldberg, before the German Arbitration Institute. The claimant sought €500 million following the sale of an Austrian packaging manufacturer, and the dispute extended well beyond the hearing room.

“Our client endured years of criminal investigations, discovery proceedings in multiple jurisdictions and hostile media coverage — all before we even reached the merits,” Johnson said.

After a two-week trial, the tribunal dismissed every claim, zeroing out the half-billion euro exposure and awarding Lindsay Goldberg € 37 million in costs – the highest cost award in German arbitration history. Johnson also secured a securities dismissal for Santa Monica-based GoodRx in the Central District of California—the second such dismissal she has obtained for that client.

The lawsuit arose from GoodRx’s announcement that Kroger would no longer accept its discount codes, a development that threatened to reduce revenue by \$30 million in a single quarter. Plaintiffs challenged a range of statements related to pharmacy acceptance, partnerships and financial

results. *Barsuli v. GoodRx Holdings Inc. et al.*, 2:24-cv-03282 (C.D. Cal., filed April 22, 2024).

“We had to persuade the court that a business setback — the loss of Kroger as a partner, with significant revenue impact — did not suggest securities fraud,” Johnson said.

The court dismissed the case, citing GoodRx’s risk disclosures and rejecting plaintiffs’ theory as implausible.

In a data privacy matter, Johnson won dismissal of a class action against Twitter/X, then successfully defended that result on appeal. The case had a procedural history that tested her team’s resolve. After an initial win in federal court, the plaintiff refiled in state court. “We then had to win twice—first on the merits, then on appeal—while exposing plaintiff’s gamesmanship.” The California Court of Appeal affirmed the dismissal with prejudice.

On the legal horizon, Johnson is watching litigation over AI with close attention. More than 80 cases have been filed alleging that the methods tech companies use to build AI violate intellectual property law, and the disputes have spread to Germany, France, Denmark, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. “The new trend is to challenge the act of acquiring training data in the first instance, separate and apart from what the companies then do with it.” Regulatory investigations into AI-related privacy issues are also on the rise, Johnson added.