

Rising Star: Gibson Dunn's Katie Townsend

By David McAfee



Law360, Los Angeles (May 05, 2014, 3:14 PM ET) -- Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP's Katie Townsend has helped secure a number of high-profile victories, including a dismissal for Oprah Winfrey's best friend Gayle King of a breach of contract suit brought by a self-proclaimed "million-dollar matchmaker," making her one of Law360's top media and entertainment attorneys under age 40.

Townsend, a Law360 Rising Star, is a 32-year-old litigation associate in Gibson Dunn's Los Angeles office and a member of the firm's media and entertainment and appellate and constitutional law practice groups. She defended King from a suit brought by Orly Hadida. Hadida, whose website claims that she is listed in the Guinness World Records as "the most expensive matchmaker in the world," alleged that she was hired by King to perform matchmaking services for her in exchange for an appearance on "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

But Townsend and the Gibson Dunn team successfully moved to dismiss the suit in 2012.

"Even after plaintiff amended her complaint, we were able to obtain a dismissal, with prejudice, of all claims, save one minor claim, which was dismissed with leave to amend. Plaintiff, at that point, dropped her suit," Townsend told Law360 in an interview, noting the importance of obtaining a favorable outcome early on. "When you have an individual client, particularly someone in the public eye, there's an added incentive to get claims dismissed as early as possible, so I'm glad we were able to accomplish that here."

In yet another high-profile defense victory, Townsend was a key member of the team that defended Polyvore Inc. — the host of an interactive Web-based fashion community — from a trademark lawsuit brought against it by actress Reese Witherspoon.

"We demurred to plaintiff's complaint, asserting that Polyvore was immune from liability under the Communications Decency Act. Plaintiff — presumably realizing that Polyvore was not a proper defendant — [and she] voluntarily dismissed her claims against our client," Townsend said. "Statutory provisions like the Communications Decency Act are designed to shield Web-based platforms and services from liability for content generated by others. Without those protections, we wouldn't have the

wealth of innovative services that allow users to create and share content on the Internet that we have."

Townsend is also helping to defend Universal City Studios Productions LLLP LP from allegations it cheated producer Glen Larson out of profits from "Magnum, P.I.," "Knight Rider," "The Six Million Dollar Man," "Battlestar Galactica" and other hit shows he developed. That case has been going on since 2011 and is finally approaching trial in 2015, according to Townsend, who said the parties have been engaged in discovery and are gearing up for dispositive motion practice.

"Universal is vigorously defending the profit participation claims brought by producer Glen Larson — and rightfully so. Not only are the claims, which are based on agreements dating back to the 1970s, clearly time-barred, they lack merit," Townsend said. "This is the type of case that really should be resolved by the court well before the trial set for next summer."

Townsend has also worked to settle a number of important matters for her clients. For example, she was part of the team representing Time Warner Inc. subsidiary Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. in an \$80 million "self-dealing" lawsuit brought by two producers and two writers of the television series "Smallville." In January 2013, Warner settled the lawsuit and resolved the claims that it had breached contracts by cutting sweetheart deals with its sister networks instead of licensing the \$1.25 billion show to a bigger network.

That same month, Townsend also played a key role in helping CBS Studios Inc. settle a lawsuit alleging it cheated "NCIS" creator Donald Bellisario out of profits from the show "NCIS: Los Angeles," averting a trial that would have focused on the meaning of the term "spin-off." According to Townsend, whether or not to reach a settlement, and on what terms, is a case-by-case determination.

"Generally speaking, the entertainment industry is in many ways a relationship-driven business, so I think that can create additional incentives — on both sides — to resolve disputes amicably early on. But with respect to specific matters/settlements, it's very tough to generalize," Townsend said. "I've worked on two different matters for two different television studios in the last year or so that ultimately settled. And while both were contract disputes with producers or writers of television series, the factors that played into those settlements were very different."

--Additional reporting by Matthew Heller, Zach Winnick and Ryan Davis. Editing by Stephen Berg.