



Michael Zaken

Partner

Cravath Swaine & Moore

United States of America

How long have you been at your current firm and who has been an important mentor thus far in your career?

I started at Cravath in 2014 after graduating from Columbia Law School and have been here ever since. I have been fortunate to have a number of mentors who have helped me to become the lawyer I am today.

Christine Varney has been a crucial mentor. I first worked with Christine as a senior associate on a matter for Illumina and am extremely fortunate to work alongside her now as a partner. Christine is a brilliant lawyer who brings an unmatched breadth of experience to every deal and case that she works on. She has given me important opportunities and provided me with the confidence to be the competition lawyer that I am today. I learn from her every day.

On the litigation side, I have had the privilege to work with Gary Bornstein. Gary was the first partner I worked with as an associate at Cravath and I have been lucky to work alongside him in a variety of competition matters, including *FTC v Qualcomm* and *Epic v Google*. Gary is an outstanding lawyer and I credit much of my legal writing and oral advocacy skills to his mentorship.

What's the most important competition matter you've worked on during your career to date?

I have had the privilege to work on a number of exciting competition matters during my time at Cravath. Most recently, the *Epic v Google* matter stands out. Myself and a team of talented Cravath lawyers prevailed on all counts after a five-week jury trial relating to Google's app store business. Distilling complex competition and technology issues for presentation to a jury was a challenging and exciting experience.

What are the biggest competition concerns in your jurisdiction(s) and how are you advising clients on those issues?

One of the biggest issues in the US today is the increased risk of merger litigation. Whereas in the past there was a possibility for deals to get through with a divestiture or negotiated remedy, the current world is much more binary – either a deal will get through or it will be litigated. This reality shapes how we advise clients interested in entering into a deal and during the course of a government investigation.

How has competition enforcement risk evolved during your time as a competition lawyer or economist? Do you expect that direction of travel to continue or change?

When I started out as a lawyer, antitrust was a niche, specialist issue. In the past five years, it has become an issue that politicians, the media and everyday people follow. This injects a variety of political and policy considerations and risks into almost every competition case. I don't see that changing anytime soon.

Are new-age technologies such as generative artificial intelligence impacting antitrust enforcement in your jurisdiction(s) and/or your antitrust practice?

We are still in the early days of generative AI. It is certainly a technology that everyone is looking at, but I think the jury is still out on how much of an impact it will have on enforcement. I would keep a close eye on the next few years to see how it all pans out.

What advice would you give to someone at the start of their career as a competition lawyer or economist?

Dive headlong into your cases. Learn every fact about the industry, the parties and the documents on which you work. The most successful junior lawyers are the ones who master the facts. Senior lawyers have more experience with the law and interfacing with regulators, but the wide variety of subject matter encompassed by competition law means that those lawyers won't necessarily be experts in the industry or parties in a given case. Becoming an expert in that area will make you an indispensable resource to the firm and to the client. It will also make the job more enjoyable.

What do you hope to achieve in the next phase of your career?

The great thing about competition law is that there is always room to learn more and to develop. Going forward I'm hoping to continue working on cutting-edge antitrust deals and litigation and developing my skills as an advocate and lawyer.

What are your hobbies outside of work?

I enjoy spending time with my wife and my three daughters, as well as playing guitar and reading ancient Greek poetry.