

## California Powerhouse: Hueston Hennigan

By **Bonnie Eslinger**

*Law360 (September 3, 2025, 4:00 PM EDT)* -- Hueston Hennigan LLP once again showed why it's a go-to firm for high-stakes litigation by securing a defense verdict this year for Disney in a copyright case over the blockbuster film "Moana" and a Ninth Circuit win upholding Monster Energy Co.'s \$311 million false-advertising trial judgment, placing it among Law360's 2025 Regional Powerhouses.

Launched just 10 years ago, the Los Angeles-based firm has 86 attorneys, with 70 in the Golden State and a client roster that includes Amazon, Edison International, Endo Pharmaceuticals, Epic Games, Kaiser, McDonald's, the Navajo Nation, PwC, Shopify, the State Bar of California and Whole Foods. The firm has been named to Law360's Powerhouses list multiple times.

From defeating multibillion-dollar actions to winning what's believed to be the largest Lanham Act award ever, it's been a banner year for Hueston Hennigan.

Founding partner John Hueston told Law360 that he's proud the firm is known as one to call when there's "bet-the-company" litigation.

It's "our ability to take the most complex matters that are likely to go to trial and to bring them to successful and often historic conclusions, either in settlements or in terms of trial verdicts," Hueston said.

Hueston Hennigan was formed with a focus on taking cases to trial, he said.

"Our mission from the get-go when we launched was to create a practice specialty that we didn't really see in the marketplace, and that was a firm of lawyers who specialized in doing complex trial work," Hueston said.

The firm's size and reputation has grown with its successes. And with new hires coming in September, seven of whom will be in California, the firm's attorney count will reach 101, he said.

"We had to earn our way," Hueston said. "By taking some very difficult cases, taking them to trial and winning them."



Among its recent triumphs, Hueston Hennigan prevailed in April at the Ninth Circuit, having persuaded the judges to uphold the firm's \$311 million false-advertising trial judgment and injunction in a case brought by client Monster Energy Co. against the company behind the Bang Energy drink brand and its founder.

"We achieved a \$300 million jury verdict, which was and still stands as the largest Lanham Act trial verdict in U.S. history," Hueston said. "On top of that, we later received additional awards post-trial, including attorneys fees, expenses and prejudgment interest."

Bang Energy was the No. 3 energy drink manufacturer in the U.S. and the fastest-growing, but it had built its product and market share "on a lie," falsely advertising that its product included an ingredient called "super creatine," Hueston said.

But to prove that at trial, Hueston Hennigan had to persuade its client to invest in scientific studies — and then simplify the study results and concepts in a way the jury could understand, Hueston said.

At trial, Hueston Hennigan also staged a "showdown" on the witness stand between the heads of the two companies.

"Those efforts and strategies led to that historic result," Hueston said.

Hueston Hennigan managing partner Moez Kaba said the firm thinks on every case about how it will look to a judge or jury. The firm's lawyers also start developing strong defense themes for cases early on — but with a readiness to change course as the litigation progresses.

"That hunger for getting that victory gives us a lot of that perspective and willingness," Kaba said. "We have to be agile in responding."

Kaba also won a complete defense verdict for his client Disney in March in a high-profile copyright infringement trial over the blockbuster "Moana," with a jury rejecting a claim that the movie ripped off an animation artist's Polynesian adventure story.

"A lot of these copyright cases don't go to trial. A lot of these cases end up settling," Kaba said.

When the animator's suit — which originally sought billions of dollars — got to the trial stage, Disney trusted Hueston Hennigan to take it before a jury to vindicate the team that created "Moana," some of whom had worked on other Disney films, including "Aladdin," "The Little Mermaid" and "The Princess and the Frog." The Disney animators are "giants in the world of animation," Kaba said.

That same month, Hueston Hennigan prevailed at a California state appeals court for McDonald's USA LLC, persuading the court to unanimously affirm the dismissal of a \$100 million fraud suit brought by comedian-turned-media mogul Byron Allen, who alleged the company did not make an actionable business commitment despite a 2021 pledge to spend more on Black-owned media.

In addition, Hueston Hennigan secured a victory in March in the Ninth Circuit in a case that Planet Green Cartridges brought against client Amazon for \$500 million alleging the online retailer was liable for third-party sellers falsely representing ink cartridges as recyclable. The federal appellate court said Amazon is shielded by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, affirming a lower court's dismissal of the case.

Hueston Hennigan also scored a complete victory in December for Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, the country's largest integrated healthcare system, in a multipart California-based arbitration with Dignity Health, the largest hospital chain in California. Dignity had sought nearly \$200 million on allegations that Kaiser breached the parties' contracts and California law by not reimbursing Dignity for emergency medical services provided to Kaiser members.

More big trials are in the queue, including the Federal Trade Commission's case accusing Amazon of tricking users into Prime subscriptions.

Also on the path for trial is client Kelly Toys — maker of the popular Squishmallows product — in litigation against companies allegedly producing copycat products.

"You have to be a risk-taker and frankly have some guts to put yourself out there and try a case," Hueston told Law360. "Nobody wants to lose a case, at trial in particular. It's very, very public. And frankly, I believe that the fear of the public loss engenders the timidity through the bar that creates a reluctance for people to push forward the right cases to trial."

Hueston Hennigan promotes a culture of embracing trial and "appropriate risk," the firm's founder said. That includes giving associates the experience and mentoring they need to gain confidence to be first-year trial lawyers.

"Our partners, when we make them partners, typically have eight to 12 trials under their belt, including a number where they have a leading role," Hueston said. "And that's highly unusual in the marketplace."

Hueston Hennigan started in California, with offices in Los Angeles and nearby Newport Beach, and in 2022, it opened an office in New York.

The firm was founded in 2015 when John Hueston and Brian Hennigan left Irell & Manella LLP with Kaba and about two dozen other attorneys to start the litigation boutique. Hennigan served as the firm's managing partner until 2023, when he was succeeded by Kaba.

The firm rarely hires laterally from other firms, instead hiring young lawyers from top law schools and then training them to be trial-ready, Hueston said. This year, the firm made an exception by bringing on board Hagan Scotten, a former government lawyer who defied a top U.S. Department of Justice official's orders to drop corruption charges against New York City Mayor Eric Adams.

"He's a former U.S. Supreme Court law clerk, graduated first in his class at Harvard and is a war hero with two tours of duty overseas," Hueston said. "Everything about him was attractive to us — his academic prowess, his integrity and his track record in fearlessly taking on and winning some of the most important cases while representing the United States of America."

Looking forward, Hueston said the law firm expects to grow, but that's not its focus.

"Our goal is to keep our unique culture and collaborative nature," the founding partner said. "Although we anticipate continuing to incrementally grow, and we have had many opportunities to grow quickly, to join other firms, we have declined all those opportunities because we want to keep what we think is unique going."

At the end of his interview, Kaba underscored that Hueston Hennigan's achievements are the result of a team effort that also includes the firm's legal assistants, paralegals and trial fellows, along with its lawyers.

"I appreciate that we are a powerhouse," Kaba said. "But if I could use a pun, that power is driven by everyone that is in the house."

--Additional reporting by Tracey Read, Bryan Koenig, Craig Clough and Rachel Scharf. Editing by Michael Watanabe.

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