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Top 100 Lawyers AND DISTINGUISHED COUNSEL



CHRIS L. PEREZ

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TRANSACTIONS
LOS ANGELES

Chris Perez got a phone call from director Adam Bhala Lough, who wanted to interview Sam Altman about AI's impact on the entertainment industry. Altman never agreed to sit down, so Bhala Lough built a Gen-AI version of Altman instead, formed a bond with it and made a documentary, "Deepfaking Sam Altman," with the bot as co-director. Perez, a partner at Donaldson Callif Perez LLP, advised on the film from the start.

"The biggest challenge was that the law on AI is always changing," Perez said.

Some states had passed deepfake laws with First Amendment exceptions for filmmakers and artists; others were moving similar bills, and a federal law was also under discussion. Perez advised the filmmakers on the law as it stood and the risk of relying on technology that regulators were still catching up to. Because the film served as commentary on AI and human creativity, Perez said it avoided the right of publicity and deepfake statutes. Perez appears in the film, advising Bhala Lough on screen. "Deepfaking Sam Altman" premiered at SXSW in 2025.

Perez also represented writer-director Matt Johnson and the team behind "Nirvana the Band the Show the Movie," which mixes scripted scenes with footage of people on the street and uses copyright- and trademark-protected material without permission, including elements from the "Back to the Future" franchise. Perez said reliance on fair use, parody and First Amendment principles let the filmmakers push the limits. "The filmmakers and I would have long phone conversations gaming out all possible results and whether they were legally entitled to proceed with the shoot under different circumstances," Perez said. "We were ultimately successful, mostly due to brilliant filmmaking, but also due to the fact that the clients were never afraid to reach out for counsel."

The film premiered at SXSW and was distributed theatrically by NEON.

Perez is now working with NEON and A24 on projects under wraps, and is advising on "Undesirable Friends: Part II," a documentary series which debuted at the Venice Film Festival about Russian journalists who fled after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Perez said it raises copyright, privacy and safety issues. He also advised the filmmakers behind "Cookie Queens," about four Girl Scouts vying to be a top-selling "cookie queen," on fair use and rights clearance; the film opened theatrically Aug. 7.

Perez teaches an IP practicum at USC Gould School of Law, his alma mater, where students review documentaries produced at USC's School of Cinematic Arts. He lectures at film and law schools, sits on the Generative AI Initiative Advisory Board at the Archival Producers Alliance, and recently finished eight years on the board of the International Documentary Association.

Perez credits his partners, Michael Donaldson and Lisa Callif, as mentors. "Lisa taught me that no matter how bad things get, everything is fixable," Perez said. Mentoring associates, he said, is his favorite part of firm life, and a chance to pass along what they gave him.