

**THE 2026 DEALMAKERS
OF THE YEAR**



DANIELLE SCALZO AND LAURA H. ACKER
WILLKIE FARR & GALLAGHER

THE 2026 DEALMAKERS OF THE YEAR

By Sarah Tincher-Numbers

Amid what would become the first major advertising industry deal in well over a decade, Willkie Farr & Gallagher partners Danielle Scalzo and Laura Acker were met with an unexpected twist to navigate for their client, Interpublic Group (IPG), in its acquisition by Omnicom.

“We signed this deal in December of 2024, against the backdrop of an incoming administration that was expected to be more business friendly, and then there ended up being a focus on certain First Amendment issues, namely the perception that players in the advertising industry had taken actions to divert advertising dollars away from conservative platforms,” Scalzo said.

About six months after the deal was signed, in June 2025, the Federal Trade Commission would open an investigation into the deal, asserting that the \$13.5 billion acquisition would violate antitrust laws. The investigation proceeded through September, when the FTC ruled it would allow the deal to move forward, but stipulated that Omnicom, which was represented by Latham & Watkins in the deal, could not “deny advertising dollars to media publishers based on their political or ideological viewpoint.”

Beyond these regulatory challenges, Acker noted that Willkie’s extensive background with its longtime client “was really helpful and allowed us to focus on aspects of their business strategy that were important. We really wanted to position the IPG team for long-term success and focused on key issues to its stakeholders,” she said, including “having meaningful board representation and senior leadership representation in the combined company.”

“We ended up with three IPG directors joining the Omnicom board and the IPG CEO continuing as co-president and co-COO. We focused on employee protections, given that the business is very-talent centric, and we also focused on strong regulatory covenants that maximized deal certainty,” Acker said.

Conveniently situated right next to one another in Willkie’s New York office, Acker and Scalzo, who have worked alongside one another for roughly 15 years, said their proximity became “invaluable” in this deal.

“When we were camped out for signing, we were able to easily bounce between offices. We took the majority of calls together, and were able to be immediately up to speed on the latest and greatest of what was happening,” Acker said, describing the arrangement as having an “older-school pre-COVID vibe, which was great.”

“What started as mentor-mentee relationship has really kind of grown into a true partnership and a really close friendship,” Acker added.

With the help of “dozens” of Willkie lawyers across multiple offices, along with local counsel on regulatory issues, the pair managed to close the deal just ahead of the holidays.

The multi-billion-dollar acquisition created the world’s largest advertising holding company.

“There hasn’t been a deal this size or of this importance in the advertising industry in decades. The last one that came close was when Omnicom and Publicis tried to combine back in 2014, but that deal ultimately fell apart,” Scalzo said.

“The IPG-Omnicom deal reshaped the advertising industry amidst a fundamental shift in the competitive landscape,” she continued. “Traditional advertising companies that were once dominated by ‘Mad Men’-style creative agencies are now contending with new market entrants, like consulting firms and big tech and their clients’ own in-house marketing capabilities.”

This combination of key industry players gives them “the scale that’s now become a prerequisite to compete, and it also combined their technology and data platforms and presented the opportunity for them to really lean into technology investments, including the use of generative AI, both in the production of ad content, but also the placement of personalized advertising,” Scalzo said.