

PROFILE

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

This is one in a series of profiles featuring members of Babst Calland's Emerging Technologies team of attorneys who provide business and legal representation on matters impacting companies developing or investing in new technologies and businesses.

Justine M. Kasznica **Emerging Technologies Attorney**

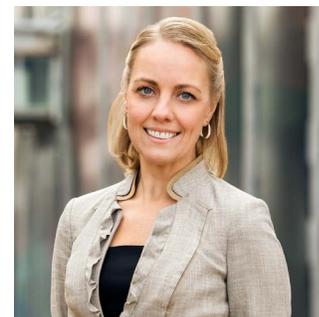
What motivated your desire to help start-ups and emerging technology companies with their legal matters? I was a litigator at a large firm in Philadelphia, fresh out of law school, when I started working with a good friend from undergrad to commercialize a robot designed to work with autistic kids. I was able to bring in my first client, and had the rare opportunity to work with a cross-disciplinary team of colleagues to support the legal needs of my friend's start-up. This was a career turning point for me, as it was the moment when I discovered the rewards of working with start-ups. I saw the critical role that lawyers play in supporting the commercialization of advanced technologies and committed to doing my part in building a responsible future for robotics and artificial intelligence.

As an early adopter of the drone, what was the origin of your drone fascination and expertise? Growing up, my older brother and I spent a lot of time designing, building and flying model rockets, and other favorite aircraft (from balsa/rubber-powered Piper Cubs to radio-controlled Corsairs and B-25 Mitchells). When Jeff Bezos announced (circa 2012) that drones would be delivering all my future Amazon orders to my doorstep, I couldn't resist learning about the regulatory hurdles facing unmanned aircraft systems (UAS, as we call them), and saw a great opportunity to connect my legal work with my interests in aviation and aerospace. Somewhere along this journey, I received my first drone "Quentin" – a DJI Phantom 4 – as a Valentine's Day gift from my husband.

How do you effectively manage so many start-up client relationships at the same time? What's your secret? The truth is, I'm still working on it... There aren't enough hours in a day, and I am fortunate to work with an incredible team of partners and associates who are equally bought into the vision of an emerging technology/start-up legal practice. That certainly helps!

But at the end of the day, it's all about working with amazing clients. An entrepreneur's passion is contagious, and it is as rewarding and exhilarating as it is often difficult to ride alongside a client on the ups and downs of an early-stage company's lifecycle. The key is to find clients with a business vision you believe in, and to build a partnership with them based on trust (and patience!) to be able to effectively execute that vision. It is when lawyers embrace their role as business partners and solutions providers that they become indispensable to clients and reap the rewards of their efforts.

August 13, 2020



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What recurring advice do you find yourself giving to early-stage companies and their pioneers? If there was one silver bullet for success it's that technologists have to make sure there is a willing customer who can benefit from and is willing to incorporate a particular technology to achieve their own business goals. It can be the greatest invention, but without an audience to deploy it, it does not become a sustainable (not to mention fundable) business. Successful pioneers are able to recognize if they have brought a visionary product too early to a nascent market and have the wisdom to pivot or the courage to plow forward and build the market themselves.

When you have downtime what do you do to relax? Actually, I have a ton of hobbies (but little time to do them all) and too many unfinished projects. I draw and paint nature and historic structures and landscapes, and illustrate and write children's books. I am an avid reader. I am inspired by nature, and when I am not working or cooped up inside, I am outdoors – hiking, boating, fishing, reading, gardening, or playing (or trying to play) any outdoor sport.

Do you have ambitions for personal space travel? Is it possible for you? Of course, I would love to travel to space. We may yet have that opportunity in our lifetimes, thanks to those pioneers who are building the transportation capabilities to get us there. But the beauty about working in the space industry is that we can be a part of creating a new chapter in human off-Earth history without ever having to leave Earth.

What's the most surprising thing that's happened to you as an attorney? I never imagined becoming a "space lawyer". When I came to Pittsburgh, I met and ended up marrying a guy who ended up becoming the CEO of a space robotics start-up. We spent the last 13 years building a Pittsburgh company intent on making space exploration and commerce accessible to the world.

What is your favorite meal? Ackee and Salt Fish, or curried goat, both national delicacies of Jamaica.

Favorite vacation spot? There's a place in the Poconos in Northeastern Pennsylvania that has my heart. Our river house on the Allegheny is a close second.

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