

Lawlor in OK! Magazine: Val Kilmer's Controversial AI Resurrection Sparks Hollywood Debate

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PRACTICES Trademark and Advertising, Intellectual Property

As AI-generated performances become more common, the legal landscape is evolving alongside them. Haynes Boone Partner [Joe Lawlor](#) spoke with *OK! Magazine* about Val Kilmer appearing in a new film more than a year after his passing, but through AI rather than traditional acting.

Lawlor breaks down what the law actually says about a celebrity's rights after death, who controls those rights, how their image can be used and why buy-in from families or estates is increasingly important.

Read an excerpt below.

As AI-generated performances become more common, legal frameworks are evolving alongside them. According to Haynes Boone Intellectual Property Litigation Partner Joe Lawlor, the right to use a celebrity's likeness doesn't disappear after death, and it can remain protected for decades.

"States, including California and New York, have laws that permit celebrities to control their publicity rights for several decades after death," Joe explains, allowing their estates to continue monetizing those rights. But celebrities can also license or sell those rights while they're alive, so "any film production that seeks to use a dead actor's likeness must first identify the proper person or entity who has the legal ownership of those rights and the ability to license them — it may not always be the celebrity's heirs."

Joe notes that actors are increasingly placing restrictions on how their likeness can be used posthumously, often outlining those limits in licensing agreements.

"For example, a vocally anti-war actress may permit the AI-generated use of her likeness but prohibit any use in contexts that glorify war," he says.

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"There are serious moral considerations in connection with creating photorealistic AI versions of actors doing and saying things they've never actually done or said," Joe says. Even when rights are secured, studios risk backlash if families or audiences feel a performance crosses a line.

"While an estate or other entity may control the publicity rights, the actor's children, for example, may publicly and vocally disagree with that use and create very negative publicity," he adds. "To avoid this, film studios should seek buy-in from surviving heirs when possible."

Read the full *OK! Magazine* article [here](#).