



## Amber Heard v Johnny Depp: Experts weigh in after actress ditches PR firm days ahead of her testimony

By Lauryn Overhultz

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Amber Heard is expected to take the stand in the ongoing defamation trial involving Johnny Depp on Wednesday, just days after she ditched her original PR team.

Depp sued ex-wife Heard for \$50 million alleging she defamed him when she wrote an op-ed in the Washington Post back in 2018. In the article, Heard claimed she was a victim of domestic violence and described experiences she had in 2016 -- the year she got divorced from Depp.

The "Aquaman" actress has reportedly been upset by the continuous "bad headlines" she's gotten in the media during and after Depp's four-day deposition.



MAY 5, 2022: Johnny Depp, Amber Heard in Fairfax, VA court. (REUTERS/Elizabeth Frantz/Pool)

After ditching Precision Strategies, Heard hired Shane Communications to take over the job, Fox News Digital confirmed. CEO David Shane and his team will handle all of Heard's communications and media strategy.

The communications firm previously worked with LA litigators and The Management Group after the business management company sued Depp back in 2017.

The case ended in a settlement.

However, brand and legal experts aren't so sure hiring a new firm in the middle of the trial was the best move.

**AMBER HEARD DITCHES PR TEAM AMID ONGOING JOHNNY DEPP DEFAMATION TRIAL**



Amber Heard is expected to take the stand in the ongoing defamation trial involving Johnny Depp on Wednesday, just days after she ditched her original PR team. (Getty Images)

#### **'BIT OF IRONY'**

Multiple brand experts noted that although her intentions for switching publicists ahead of her testimony was likely done to start gaining good press coverage, the move itself seemingly created "somewhat negative PR," in their estimation.

"While the PR firm might have some advice for how Amber will present herself on the witness stand, and while this guidance may differ from whatever her previous PR firm may have suggested, generally speaking, lawyers don't like to have PR firms interfere with testimony prep, so I have to wonder how much influence the Shane folks will even have upon Amber's testimony or demeanor," brand expert Howard Breuer, CEO of Newsroom PR, told Fox News Digital.

"Also, there is a bit of irony in that the very act of switching PR teams on the eve of one's testimony can create its own, somewhat negative PR," he added. "That already seems to be happening."

Evan Nierman, CEO of international crisis PR firm Red Banyan, told Fox News Digital that Heard's decision "was not a good one" and noted it produced "predictable blowback" within the media.

"The decision to fire her PR firm in the middle of the trial was not a good one," he said. "I'm sure that Heard's former agency would have advised against this, not just in order to keep their client but also to help her avoid the predictable blowback it produced in the press."

California-based criminal defense attorney Lara Yeretsian told Fox News Digital the change in PR team "... can hurt [Heard's] image even more."

"At the end of the day, regardless of what this jury decides, this trial seems to have restored Johnny Depp's image and has done the opposite for Heard," Yeretsian added.



Actress Amber Heard looks over at her attorneys Elaine Bredehoft, left and Ben Rottenborn, right, during a break in the courtroom at the Fairfax County Circuit Court in Fairfax, Virginia on April 18, 2022. (Photo by STEVE HELBER/POOL/AFP via Getty Images)

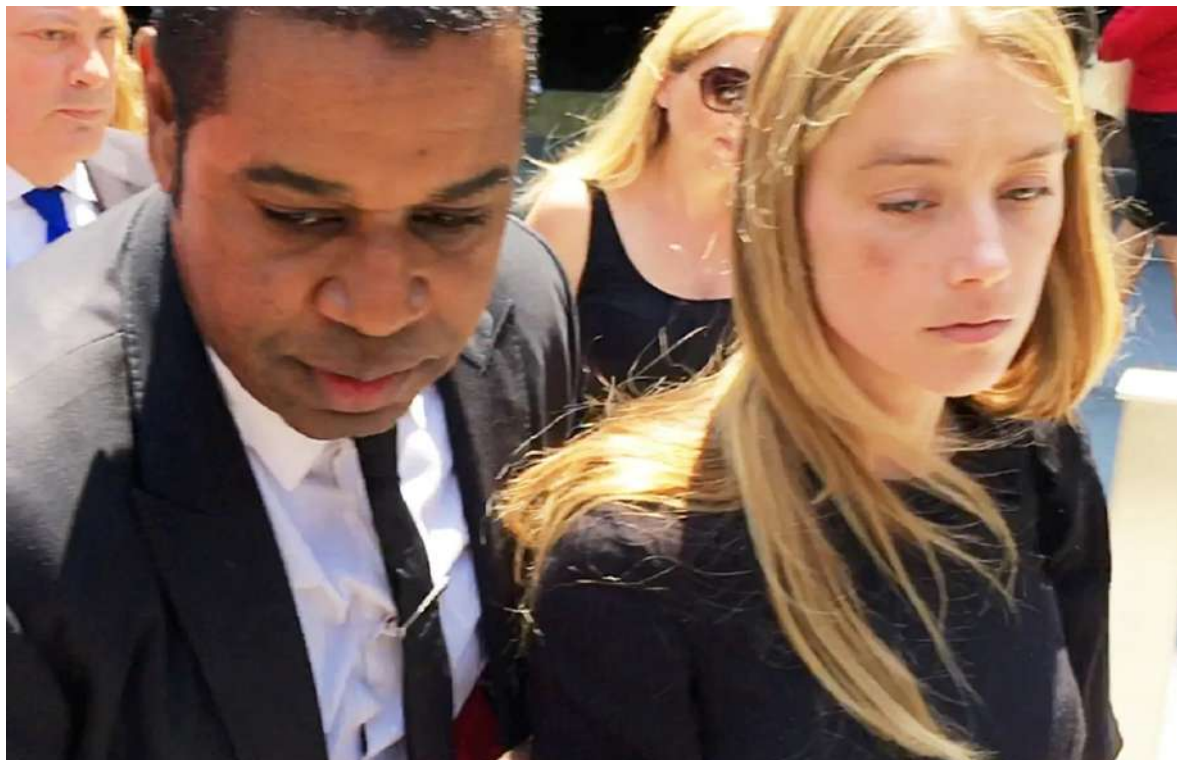
#### 'PUBLIC SPECTACLE'

Depp fought to have the defamation trial televised. However, Heard's lawyers pushed back, wanting there to be no recordings of the trial released to the public.

In one expert's opinion, Heard likely didn't want this to be a "public spectacle."

"She didn't want this to be a public spectacle," former U.S. attorney Neama Rahmani suggested to Fox News Digital. "And it has been. I understand why you don't want to air dirty laundry in a public way, but trials in this country are public, and they're going to be televised. So if you know this is going to happen, you got to get out ahead of it. And now she's way behind."

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Heard claimed she was a victim of physical abuse during the years she was married to Depp. The two would finally settle their divorce in 2017. (Reuters)

#### **'STEER THE NARRATIVE'**

According to experts, Depp has been somewhat in control of the narrative, since he was the first person to testify in the trial. As the plaintiff, Depp's team bears the burden of proof.

Depp spent four days on the stand and videos of the actor testifying have since gone viral on TikTok. During his testimony, the actor spoke about different alleged incidents -- including the time he found s--t in his bed.

Despite hiring a new team, brand experts think it might be hard for Heard to "steer the narrative" towards something more positive for herself and her reputation.

"The role of a crisis PR firm in a trial of this magnitude is to steer the narrative in the press, but it is unrealistic to expect that the agency will somehow totally quash negative headlines when days have been spent highlighting sensational testimony from the other party to the suit. Even the best crisis PR agency would be hard-pressed to keep Heard or Depp from coming off as above reproach," Nierman told Fox News Digital.

"The bad behavior displayed by both of them, much of which has been documented in video, audio files and images shared in court, prevents either party from coming off as blameless or fully in the right," he added.



Heard arrives for her ex-husband Depp's defamation trial against her. (REUTERS)

#### **'FEAR AND PANIC'**

Breuer noted that it could help Heard if she'd stop participating in behavior that implied "fear and panic."

"It might help Amber if her team pushes her to chill and not do anything else that might suggest fear and panic, and reminds her that she might lose some battles but win the war," Breuer explained.

"I do think that, while Depp has presented some evidence that works in his favor, it's very plausible that the jury concludes that his team did not meet the legal burden of proving defamation so, Amber might prevail."



In this Nov. 3, 2011 file photo, U.S. actors Johnny Depp, left, and Amber Heard arrive for the European premiere of their film, "The Rum Diary," in London. (AP, File)

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**'COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION'**

The civil trial, which began on April 11, is expected to last six weeks and is about halfway over – and Breuer advised it might be time for Heard to start thinking ahead.

"Remember that, at the end of the day, both sides of this battle are way more interested in what happens outside the courtroom and inside the court of public opinion. Amber's latest move makes that super clear."

Lauryn Overhultz is an entertainment writer for Fox News Digital.

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