

Interview: Marina Mitrevski

Isabella Street, Legal and Business Affairs at Sony Music Entertainment, chats with **Marina Mitrevski**, Executive, General Counsel & Company Secretary at THE ICONIC.

Isabella Street: You've had such an interesting career both here and abroad with some fantastic experience particularly through Axiom, which led to your first role in the fashion industry at ASOS.com. How has your experience both here and overseas prepared you for your current role as Executive, General Counsel & Company Secretary of Australia's best online fashion store, THE ICONIC?

Marina Mitrevski: Thank you - I love being an in-house lawyer and have worked predominantly in-house my entire career in Australia, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates and Sweden. Whilst there is no real single moment that stands out above others, I'd have to say that a pivotal moment in my career was when I joined Axiom in London who are the MEGA-disruptors and trailblazers of NewLaw turning the business of law on its head! As a 6 year ppe lawyer I decided to make "the move" to London and joined Axiom where over the course of the following 6 years, I was provided with unparalleled opportunities to work for some of the world's most incredible organisations and clients - such as the likes of ASOS.com through to a Middle East sovereign office too. I was fortunate to be placed on long-term secondments where I was fully integrated into client sites within the respective Legal teams and was responsible for leading and delivering the full suite of legal advisory services, and also a few legal transformation projects too. Throughout my time at Axiom, I was exposed to a new value proposition for both lawyers and clients alike which allowed me to think laterally, challenge the status quo, and explore all facets of delivering best-in-class in-house legal services. This experience cemented for me that lawyers are more than strategic legal and

business advisors, they are also business enablers, who can help guide and transform a business. I'm now in the unique and privileged position to have one of the best legal roles in Australia and New Zealand as General Counsel & Company Secretary at THE ICONIC - a dynamic intersection where my love for law, business, fashion and technology collide!

IS: What does an average day in the GC's shoes involve at THE ICONIC?

MM: At THE ICONIC, I am responsible for leading a team charged with advising on, and delivering, a range of Legal, Governance, Risk and Compliance initiatives across all areas of the organisation. Together with my team, we are committed to providing best-in-class legal services for all ICONITES by partnering and collaborating cross-functionally with all business units. Our Legal team has been on a journey to challenge and set the benchmark for in-house legal services aligned to THE ICONIC's vision of "LIBERATION". They embody core ICONIC values by delivering key value across all business areas including by demonstrating: "We Are True to Our Customers", "People Are Our Greatest Asset", "Stronger Together", "We Get Things Done", "We Dream Big", "Growth Is Our Mindset" and "We All Make A Difference".

In terms of what my day looks like - for me, literally no two days are ever the same! The only time I am ever a creature of habit is how I start my day! I often start each morning with a walk or else with a tea or mocha over what I call 'set-up' time. This non-negotiable "quiet" time is diarised each morning so I can set myself up for the day - I scroll through emails (check to see what's

come in overnight from brands abroad or our parent company Global Fashion Group in London) and I plan for the day ahead. Due to the fast paced nature of our business, this time allows me to prioritise and re-prioritise work for the remainder of the day, and also allow myself to check in with my team. After this I'm generally in a variety of Executive team meetings and Project meetings we have on-the-go across all areas of THE ICONIC spanning Category Management, Operations, Tech, Marketing, Finance, Growth & Development and People & Culture.

I'm also often working with my team on initiatives we can adopt to ensure that we are able to provide seamless and inspiring experiences, not only for our customers, but also for our colleagues. We are often exploring how technology can make the lives of our employees better, and we're constantly innovating and implementing new processes through the use of technology e.g. the set-up of online legal learning, drop-in clinics, electronic signatures, workflow management and contract management systems. By improving the productivity of our Legal team, we enable the business to continue to grow and move at pace, which is what THE ICONIC is all about #wegetthingsdone!

IS: What sort of legal issues do you deal with?

MM: As General Counsel & Company Secretary, I deal with a whole host of strategic contracts with a focus on commercial contracts negotiations on supplier trading agreements, as well as general advisory on a whole range of e-commerce, privacy, social media, consumer law, competition law, trade marks, litigation, property, risk management, compliance and governance matters. In addition, I

advise on go-to-market strategies for new business models, brand development for private labels we manufacture, marketing campaigns, customer competitions, collaborations and technology development. I am also responsible for leading the compliance, regulatory and secretariat activities of the business.

IS: What do you love most about working in the fashion industry and what do you find the most challenging?

MM: I love fashion and I love tech for so many reasons - although predominantly it is because both offer you the freedom of self-expression, the freedom of discovery and the freedom to choose. At THE ICONIC we are all about LIBERATION and quite honestly, no two days are ever the same which is LIBERATING in itself! Whether I'm negotiating an agreement with local or international supplier/brand/designer; manufacturing agreements for private labels; marketing initiatives for runways and campaigns; engineering agreements for the build or expansion of a site or an automation platform - the work that I do is always so diverse! In terms of what's most challenging? Well I'd have to say logging off at night. When you love what you do, and it starts to feel like a hobby as opposed to work, it's sometimes hard to call it a day!

IS: What recommendations do you have for young lawyers hoping to move into this space? What sort of legal background is useful for a role like yours?

MM: First and foremost, in order to be a successful in-house lawyer it is crucial to have a curious mind! Roll your sleeves up. Immerse yourself in the work and get ready to serve your colleagues and the company. Learn the business from the ground up. Say YES to every opportunity presented your way. Assume nothing! Expect



the unexpected! Constantly approach each matter with a willingness to learn - you might need to unlearn, re-learn but in most cases just learn! Don't be afraid to speak up, have an opinion and share your views. Ask for feedback. Listen to your team and colleagues. Get a coach or a mentor, and don't forget to give back in some way to the world, or else simply by mentoring others too! And most

importantly - choose an area of law, an industry or a business that you have a deep interest in so that your work does not feel like a chore! Have fun. And breathe!

IS: I imagine COVID-19 has upset your supply chains. Can you give us some insight into the types of problems the business has had to face during this difficult time?

MM: THE ICONIC is part of Global Fashion Group and one of our regional counterparts operates in South-East Asia, so we were in a fortunate position to understand the impact that COVID-19 could potentially bring globally and in Australia well ahead of time. As a result, we established our COVID-19 Task Force in February with this cross-functional team tasked with defining how we would approach and manage COVID-19 when it reached Australia. The most important thing for us was protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our people. Although we're an online business and have been fortunate to continue operations during Australia's lockdown period at varying levels, we still had the complexities of managing both our people working from home, and those who continued to work on site. We immediately instilled the highest standards of health and safety for those on site including mandatory temperature checks for any employee and third party entering the site, health declaration forms, increased cleaning measures, protective face masks, hand sanitiser and of course, physical distancing. Additionally, where we work with models for production, our hair and makeup artists and stylists have helped direct our models to complete simple looks themselves at a safe distance ensuring a contactless environment. For our people working from home, we prioritised access to learning and wellbeing resources, increased communication from our Executive team and Leaders through additional Zoom Stand Up meetings, along with engaging our team through group activities such as cooking classes and workouts to name a few.

While we had to make some difficult decisions regarding our brand partners and supply chain in the short-term, we remained in close contact with our partners throughout COVID-19 to manage the impact. During this time, we accelerated a number of initiatives that will see us launch new business

models and new categories to help grow both our business, and our brand partner's business, as we head into the new decade.

IS: I have certainly been indulging in some online shopping since isolation with trackies, jumpers and exercise gear being my main purchases of late. Has the #StayHome selection of products been a success for the business?

MM: During this period where many of us have spent an increased amount of time at home, we have seen a pivot in the style choices of our customers. We've witnessed our ICONIC customers prioritise comfort, with key in-demand categories over past months including loungewear, sleepwear, sportswear, as well as items such as slippers, sweats, performance sneakers and at-home sport equipment being key customer go-tos. To help make it easier for our customers to access a curated at-home assortment we introduced a dedicated #StayHome navigation bar on our homepage. Whether it's sleepwear, puzzles, or workout equipment, this navigation filter has proved incredibly popular with our customers, helping them easily uncover relevant at-home products with ease. Most recently, in line with the latest restriction measures across Victoria, and the wearing of non-medical masks encouraged in other states, we've witnessed booming demand across our assortment of face masks.

IS: I was very pleased to hear THE ICONIC is transitioning its delivery satchels to 100% recycled materials. You started working at THE ICONIC in 2018, the same time THE ICONIC became a signatory to the Australian Packaging Convention. Was this a coincidence or were you a driver behind the company making this decision?

MM: Continued progress towards reducing the environmental impacts of both our internal and external business operations has

always been a key priority value for THE ICONIC. As part of our wider sustainability journey and commitment to more sustainable packaging solutions across the thousands of orders we deliver each year, we're incredibly proud to be the first major ANZ retailer to introduce delivery satchels made from 100% post-consumer recycled content. This means that the plastic for each satchel is sourced mostly from reused LDPE from household collections. We're also proud to have our satchels accredited under the Good Environmental Choice Australia's (GECA) Recycled Products Standard, which means each satchel has been independently assessed to verify its recycled content and ensures that the production process meets strict environmental, human health and ethical impact criteria. We also encourage all customers to recycle their ICONIC satchel (and all other soft plastics from home) by dropping it off to a REDcycle bin, which can be found at major supermarkets.

IS: What impact has this decision had on stakeholders and the internal policies, operations, and marketing of the company?

MM: Introducing our new satchels has had an incredible impact on our people and stakeholders. While the project itself was intensive to ensure we chose the most effective packaging solution, implementing this change is an inherent part of who we are as a business with sustainability key to our inherent values and what we know is the right thing to do. We believe in progress over perfection at THE ICONIC, and although we appreciate that we still have a long way to go on our sustainability journey, this milestone is another important step in making positive progress across our long-term environmental responsibility.

IS: Are there any other self-regulatory standards or commitments, which you deal with on a regular basis?

MM: In terms of self-regulatory standards or commitments, we work incredibly hard to keep up with the targets outlined in our inaugural Annual Progress Report, which we released in November 2019. You can find this on our website.

IS: The fashion industry has received much criticism not only for its detrimental impact on the environment and animal welfare, but also due to the lack of transparency around working conditions and wages. THE ICONIC recently registered 'THE ICONIC Considered' as a trade mark for its self-rated selection of fashion products that meet certain sustainable and ethical credentials. How important is this new initiative for the business and the future of the industry as a whole?

MM: We created THE ICONIC Considered in April 2019 as a way to help customers shop by the values that mean the most to them personally. Sustainability is a personal choice and means different things to different people – our Considered edit highlights products with at least one of 30 defined sustainability credentials, in five categories, allowing you to shop by what's important to you. Concerned about climate change? Shop Eco-Production. Do you prioritise animal welfare? Shop Animal Friendly. Want to have a positive impact on society when you shop? Shop Community Engagement. We have a responsibility as a retailer for better managing our own impact, while helping enable customers to make choices based on their values through accessibility and a wide assortment.

THE ICONIC Considered and our Sustainability and Ethical Sourcing strategy at its core is driven by a recognition of the moral imperative that our industry must urgently take significant action to better manage its social and environmental impacts. This is why in November 2019, we released our inaugural Annual Progress Report, which

details our progress (and our shortfalls), outlining our 2022 targets across Ethical Sourcing, Environment, Community and Diversity, Inclusion and Body-Positivity. We know these topics matter to our customers and it matters to us as humans who work for THE ICONIC. For us we want to drive progress in our own operations and at the same time, encourage our wider industry to reflect and be inspired to make changes in theirs too. You can read more about these targets and our sustainability journey, here.

IS: The fashion industry has also been scrutinised for its lack of diversity, in particular the size, physical ability, gender and race of models used in photo shoots. Have you noticed a shift in representation generally within the industry?

MM: There's a lot that the fashion industry could be doing to make progress across many areas, which is why we at THE ICONIC are so committed to making progress ourselves in order to inspire change. In our business, we are 'all about the people', so diversity, inclusion and celebrating body-positivity is an innate part of our DNA, and core to our purpose of 'Liberation'. For the past three years this has manifested most prominently at our annual Summer Show, where we celebrate the first day of summer with an incredibly uplifting show featuring a diverse representation of models across shapes, sizes, backgrounds, ages and orientations. We're so proud of this production each year, which has been dubbed by key media outlets as 'the world's most body-positive runway'. This representation is further reflected across the models that appear day-to-day in our ecommerce catalogue, to our diverse and inclusive internal team, made up of almost 1,000 people from 43 nationalities. We know there's still a huge amount of work we can do in this space and we're excited for a number of initiatives we have in the pipeline to continue building on this progress to date.

IS: As a GC, you are seen as a strategic advisor who has to balance business, legal and ethical considerations. I imagine this is a difficult juggling act! How do you manage this role and what tips would you give other GCs or aspiring GCs?

MM: It certainly is a juggling act, however, having a strong ethical and moral compass is integral to wading through various scenarios that lawyers from all industries across the world often encounter on a daily basis. Ask yourself the simple questions: Will this decision headline the news tomorrow? Is there a universal rule that applies here, or another way to approach this? Will the proposed course of action yield a good result? What would happen if everybody did this? How will this affect the reputation of my organisation, and my character as a lawyer?

In terms of tips for aspiring GCs, I'd encourage you to go back to basics and revisit the foundations of your team and organisation. Do you have adequate and appropriate policies, procedures, processes and protocols in place? Are they up to date? Do you set specific timelines for reporting of various matters? Do you have mechanisms in place to allow reporting to occur across all levels of employees?

Perhaps the most important tool of all is building good relationships, being approachable, continuously training and educating your colleagues, getting support from other Executives and also as a team role-modelling and displaying ethics and integrity every single day.