

Felicity Drexel

Legal Counsel for The Walt Disney Company Australia and New Zealand

Jessica Norgard, Senior Legal Counsel (Communications, IP and Commercial) at nbn sat down with **Felicity Drexel** to discuss her exciting career, taking the road less travelled, helping protect the magic of the Disney brand and her tips for the next generation of female leaders in the media and communications space.

Felicity Drexel is a media, entertainment and intellectual property lawyer with over ten years' experience working with multinationals in the Australian film and television industry. As Legal Counsel for The Walt Disney Company Australia and New Zealand, based in Sydney, Felicity provides legal advice across a range of commercial matters including Disney+, media distribution, production, music, ad sales and marketing. Previous experience includes working as in-house counsel for Viacom International Media Networks, providing advice across the MTV, Nickelodeon and Comedy Central brands, and in-house counsel for Screen Australia in its legal and international co-production teams. Felicity holds Bachelor's degrees in Media and Law from Macquarie University, a Graduate Certificate in Journalism from Charles Sturt University, and a Master's degree in Law and Management from the University of NSW.

JESSICA NORGARD: Working at Disney sounds like every kid's (or big kid's) dream, how did your career path lead you there?

FELICITY DREXEL: I've had anything but a traditional career trajectory, and am a strong advocate for taking the road less travelled to get to your destination. I have always wanted to work in media and entertainment law, and specifically chose my university degree based on that – I went to Macquarie University, which at the time was the only school in Australia offering a combined Media and Law degree. I chose travel over graduate positions, and unintentionally ended up working in the ski industry for about three years after finishing university.

I got the urge to get back on the path to a legal career in 2006,



and was offered a role as office assistant to a small boutique firm that did mostly music and media work, which quickly reignited my passion. From there, I went to the Australian Film Commission to work in their research team for a few months before joining the legal team of the newly forged Screen Australia, where I worked across film development and co-production projects, and cemented my love of production work. After a few years there, I moved on to an in-house role with MTV Australia, later Viacom, and there worked across everything from a local Geordie Shore season to Comedy Central roasts in New Zealand to Nickelodeon's Kids' Choice Awards

and Slimefest. I was there for five years before joining Disney. At the time of joining we had three television channels, and my work largely focused on supporting all of the work that went along with them. Over the nearly six years I've been in this role, the company has changed significantly, as has my work, which is now very focused on our Disney+ SVOD service. I was fortunate to be heavily involved in the launch of the service for Australia and New Zealand, and continue to support it day to day.

I feel very lucky to work for such a beloved brand, and one that has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. There are certainly

times when I get goosebumps, sitting in a screening, or watching a sizzle of the work we've done, when the Disney castle introduction starts. Working for a brand as adored as Disney is very special, however it does carry with it great responsibility. Protecting the brand and the magic that children and families believe it holds is paramount, and means we all work to ensure a high quality of work, while as lawyers we work hard to minimise the risk of damaging that very special reputation.

NORGARD: What would a typical day look like for you?

DREXEL: As most in-house lawyers would know, there's no such thing as a typical day! Even the best laid plans for a productive day can be scuttled by a last-minute crisis or an urgent request from management, and then it's all hands on deck. Ultimately this means that time management is not just a useful skill – it's an essential part of the work we do.

Typically, it's a pretty fast-paced job, but the move to working from home during the last year has allowed me to develop a much more relaxed day to day schedule. Most days start with a walk around my local neighbourhood catching up on podcasts (an eclectic mix of true crime, politics and pop culture), grabbing a coffee, and then logging on to catch up on any business developments overnight – working for an international company means there's always something happening while we're sleeping. My day can then be a mix of Zoom meetings, phone calls and emails, along with various project work that largely involves drafting, advice and clearances, working closely with our team in Melbourne, and often with our teams in Burbank and other offices around the world. The two key business areas I support are content licensing and distribution, and Disney+, so my work predominantly includes providing advice across content sales and acquisitions, marketing, clearances, creative materials, production, music and lots and lots of contract drafting and negotiation.

NORGARD: What developments do you see on the horizon in 2021 for the communications and media legal landscape?

DREXEL: The Federal Government's Media Reform Green Paper has really set the scene for the next big developments in the communications and media sector in Australia. Content quotas in particular are an extremely hot topic, and it will be interesting to see how this matter is dealt with.

The rollout of 5G will also present some interesting opportunities and will likely bring with it significant changes in viewing habits and introduce devices that encourage new ways of watching. COVID has also really changed the way we view content and when and where consumers expect to see it, and it will be something that leaves its fingerprint on the industry for years to come.

I'm also looking forward to a time when we see a more diverse range of faces, voices and abilities on our screens. The representation and inclusion standards set last year by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences are ground-breaking, and it will be interesting to see if these have flow-on effects for our local production industry.

NORGARD: The 2021 IWD campaign theme is #ChooseToChallenge. What does this mean to you and how would you suggest this is implemented in our readers' work and personal lives?

DREXEL: I'm incredibly passionate about diversity and inclusion, and am an active member of our company's Diversity and Inclusion Council. When we #ChooseToChallenge, we should actively look to challenge our own unconscious bias in the workplace, to speak up when we see behaviours that aren't in-keeping with principles of equality and fairness, and to constructively urge changes that make workplaces more diverse and more accessible to everyone (physically, culturally, and in respect of gender). Recreationally, I also think we need to challenge our own habits, and encourage reading widely across a diverse range of

authors, and making a conscious effort to incorporate content into our viewing schedules that includes a cast or crew that reflects a broad spectrum of people and cultures. Consuming diverse content opens our minds to diverse ideas, and diverse ideas help to foster greater empathy and create more inclusive spaces.

NORGARD: What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders in the industry?

DREXEL: Mentor and be mentored. Even in the early stages of your career, there are people who will benefit from hearing about your experiences, and you are also never too old to learn from others, both more and less experienced than you. I've been really fortunate in my career to have come into contact with some incredible women who have been generous enough to give me their time, to provide advice or guidance, and often good networking connections and opportunities. I try to pay that forward whenever I can, and have found that the opportunities I have had to mentor have been very satisfying and I have gotten as much out of those experiences as I have from being mentored myself.

Also, prioritise and normalise making time for exercise and mindfulness. As women we tend to put ourselves last, especially in our early careers, but both of these things are fundamentally important, improve our work output and make us better colleagues, contributors and collaborators.