Sunita Bose
Managing Director, DIGI

Lewis Graham, Associate in the Technology Media and Telecommunications (TMT) team at Allens Linklaters, chats with **Sunita Bose,** Managing Director of the Digital Industry Group Inc. (**DIGI**), to discuss her career, Australian technology, media and communications policy, her advice to future digital leaders and International Women's Day. Sunita is the Managing Director of DIGI, a not for profit industry association advocating for the digital industry in Australia. She was previously the Head of Global Policy for the online petition platform Change.org, and before that served in a variety international and Australian advocacy and strategic communications roles at Oxfam and UNICEF.

LEWIS GRAHAM: Sunita, on behalf of our readers, thank you very much for generously providing your time to discuss International Women's Day and your observations regarding the technology, media and communications law and policy landscape. You have had a fascinating career to date. Could you explain your current role and how your career led you to this point?

SUNITA BOSE: I spent my high school years determined to study law and, after the disappointment of receiving a University Admissions Index 0.1 of a percentile lower than the required score at UNSW, I changed track and studied communications and government, and later a Masters in Policy. My career since has always been at the intersection of those areas, but in extremely different ways. The first section of my career was in the international development sector, working in advocacy and communications for UNICEF and Oxfam, advocating for better policies in Australia and internationally in a wide range of areas such as climate change and humanitarian aid.

The turning point was when I moved to San Francisco, and sought to explore the intersection of advocacy and technology, and started working at Change.org -- an open Internet platform that allows anyone to start a petition, so many of which have been hugely successful in advocating for major policy changes. At the same time, my role there, eventually as Head of Global Policy, was to build out all of their policies and systems to protect users' safety, in a wide range of areas such as hate speech, bullying, misinformation and data protection.

I loved that this online platform decentralised advocacy. The experience gave me a firm belief in the democratising power that an open Internet and access to technology can bring to empower people who might not otherwise have a voice, but also practical experience of how we can effectively address challenges that manifest online. After moving back to Australia, the opportunity to lead DIGI was the perfect way to bring that passion and my experience together in one role.

LEWIS: What does a typical day look like for you at DIGI?

SUNITA: DIGI stands for the Digital Industry Group Inc. We're a non-profit industry association that is working towards online safety, privacy, cyber security and a thriving Australian digital economy. We bring global, Australian, large and scale-up companies together behind that mission, and see ourselves as a key partner in Government efforts to address harmful content online, and make Australia a leading digital economy. So a typical day can include supporting our industry code development where we're setting standards for the digital industry at large; deeply understanding our members' approaches to these complex issues; and engaging with proposed regulation, where we advocate for approaches that are both effective in their goals and can practically be implemented by industry.

LEWIS: The past five years has been a dynamic time in Australia in relation to technology, media and communications policy. What recent developments most occupy your thoughts?

SUNITA: One of the questions that I always ask when evaluating proposed regulation is whether the approach is holistic in solving the policy problem for Australians. This question is relevant across the range of policy issues we work across whether in consumer protection, privacy or online safety. DIGI is supportive of smart regulation for the online world, but you'll often see us advocate for effective digital policy alongside economy-wide or systemic approaches. Put another way, we'll often caution against tech-only tunnel vision. For example, DIGI developed and oversees t*he Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation*, that commits major technology companies to safeguards against harmful misinformation and disinformation. We've worked to continually strengthen the code and see it take a significant step forward; but while major technology companies have critically important levers to pull, sustained shifts in the fight against mis- and disinformation rely on a multi-stakeholder approach across digital platforms, media, governments and the community.

LEWIS: Are there any legal reforms that you consider are urgent for the digital sector?

SUNITA: DIGI believes that reform of the *Privacy Act* is needed and the current open consultation is a key moment to level-up Australians' protections economy wide. Applying that holistic approach mentioned earlier, it is important to consider that today every company is digital. Australians should be given a clear expectation of their privacy rights no matter what service they are using. We would like to see stronger consumer rights emerge from this process, including giving people the right to erase their data, and stronger protections for minors online. But privacy reform is not going to be easy. That's because every business is different. How they all use data is different. Every consumer is different. Their privacy preferences are different. One challenge that a wide range of industries will face is that people expect personalisation, and relevant advertising, as well as privacy on the Internet. How we reconcile that complexity in one piece of regulation is going to require extensive consultation to get it right.

LEWIS: Being the Managing Director of DIGI during this era of dynamic change in the digital industry has surely kept you very busy. How do you unplug from work?

SUNITA: Unplugging is hard – and my two beautiful children force me to do that to some extent – but being a working parent is having two jobs around the clock. No matter how busy I am, one thing I force myself to make time for is daily exercise. Even if I have to wake up extremely early for it. When my daughter was a baby and not sleeping, counterintuitively, exercise woke me up to get through the day. Today, I find it gives me the energy and clarity of thought to tackle the huge mental load of each day.

LEWIS: The 2023 International Women's Day campaign theme is #EmbraceEquity. What does this mean to you and how would you suggest this is implemented in our readers' work and personal lives?

SUNITA: Once you're through the door, open it for others. I learnt this many years ago from a former boss at Change.org, Jake Brewer, who became a close friend and mentor, who went on to work at the White House Office of Science, Technology & Policy. Jake is sadly no longer with us, which has made his words and actions leave even more of a lasting impression on me. As I had just moved to the US at the time and had a limited professional network, Jake would often offer me his seat at the table – as in, the opportunities that he was offered as someone more known and established. This helped me both externally establish a network in technology policy, and internally progress to leadership roles.

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

SUNITA: This certainly happens in Australia too, but one thing that struck me when I lived in the US was the extent to which women celebrate other women's achievements and lift each other up. There's no 'tall poppy syndrome' there. Celebrating other women, and surrounding yourself with friends and professional contacts who will do that for you, can cultivate confidence to overcome the imposter syndrome that can often hold us back.