

# Annabel Archer

## Vice President, Legal – Streaming APA, Warner Bros. Discovery

**Julie Cheeseman**, Partner at Bird & Bird speaks with **Annabel Archer**, Vice President, Legal – Streaming APAC at Warner Bros. Discovery. Annabel is based in Sydney and supports the streaming business of Warner Bros. Discovery across Asia Pacific. Prior to this role, Annabel was the APAC Regional Counsel for Turner Broadcasting, managing the legal work for Turner's regional business, including television distribution, licensing, consumer products, advertising sales and franchise management.

**JULIE CHEESEMAN:** Annabel, you've worked at executive level for almost 20 years in media organisations, with some of your most recent APAC Legal Leadership roles being in two leading media organisations, HBO, and now multinational media and entertainment conglomerate, Warner Bros Discovery. How did your career path lead you to where you are today?

**ANNABEL ARCHER:** I began my career in law firms, first Ashurst (or Blake Dawson Waldron as it then was) in Sydney and then Linklaters in London, working in the intellectual property and communications groups. In 2001, I took the plunge and moved to an inhouse role at a sports media company, KirchMedia, which held and monetised the broadcasting rights to major sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup and Wimbledon. I was immediately thrown into the high-pressure environment of negotiating the sale of sports broadcasting rights and I loved it. On my return to Australia a few years later, I joined Gilbert+Tobin who sent me on secondment to Hong Kong to work with Turner Broadcasting, the owner of pay TV channels such as CNN and Cartoon Network. Turner was then a division of media conglomerate AOL Time Warner, together with Warner Bros, HBO and Time magazine. 22 years later, 8 of those based in Hong Kong, and after numerous mergers, acquisitions and business transformations, I am still there. In 2022, the company came together with Discovery Inc. to create Warner Bros. Discovery. After so many years working in pay TV, for the last 3 years or so I have been working in part of the company's streaming division, supporting the launch around the world of the video streaming service MAX, as well as other direct-to-consumer streaming products.

**JULIE:** Is there a particular person, experience or event which was instrumental in shaping your career?

**ANNABEL:** I was lucky to be mentored by 2 fabulous women – Louise Sams and Christine Cameron, who were the Global and the International general counsels of Turner Broadcasting for much of my time at the company. They are both incredible role models – smart, tough, decisive and insightful, but still always kind, courteous and great fun. I am thankful to them both every day and try to channel them when faced with tough calls or hard decisions.

**JULIE:** What is the most enjoyable part of your role, and what part is the most challenging?

**ANNABEL:** The most enjoyable part of my current role, working on the company's streaming business, is being part of a global team. So far, we have launched MAX in the US

and (as of 27 Feb) Latin America, with further launches to come in Europe and Asia Pacific. I really love that on a daily basis I could be collaborating with colleagues based in the US, Miami, Singapore and Delhi (to name just a few locations), and advising on issues ranging from Finnish social media campaigns to Indian customer support plans to Vietnamese regulatory matters. While being the most enjoyable part of my role, this is also the most challenging. I am constantly learning and adapting, both to understand the technical aspects of what our team is trying to achieve, but also to identify and manage the legal matters arising under a myriad of local laws and regulations.

**JULIE:** What is the greatest risk you've taken as a professional?

**ANNABEL:** In hindsight, it doesn't seem like a risk at all, but I really agonized over leaving private practice to move inhouse. I loved my time in private practice and had assumed I would work to pursue a very linear career path of Solicitor, Senior Associate and, eventually, Partner. However, when the opportunity arose to join KirchMedia in London, it just sounded like the sort of unique role that I could not ignore. And who would turn down a job that brought with it tickets to the FIFA World Cup finals and the Wimbledon hospitality tents! It felt like a big risk to leave the structure and safety net of a large law firm, but once I started at KirchMedia I loved the thrill of being part of the business and the freedom to create my own team and way of working.

**JULIE:** The 2024 International Women's Day campaign theme is 'Inspire Inclusion'. What does this mean to you and how would you like to see it applied in your industry?

**ANNABEL:** Inspire Inclusion to me means creating an environment that encourages and celebrates diversity – actively seeking out those with different stories and life experiences, and giving them a voice, so that everyone's unique perspective is valued and respected. In our industry, this means fostering a creative culture that promotes inclusion and diversity, both in the community of people working in the industry and through inclusive storytelling.

**JULIE:** What's the best professional advice you've ever received?

**ANNABEL:** Not to be reticent about successes or "wins" that you or your team have achieved. It is more comfortable to remain quiet and assume that people will notice and value your good work. However, that is sadly often not the case. It is important to advocate for yourself and your team by letting others know about your team's achievements and positive impact.



**JULIE:** Is there any advice you'd give to emerging female leaders in our industry?

**ANNABEL:** Speak up – celebrate your victories and express your opinions and perspective. But don't forget to also listen to those around you – there is always something you haven't thought of, a new perspective or a different approach, so remember to take a step back from time to time and reconsider, rather than clinging to the safety of precedents, templates and established ways of working.

**JULIE:** How important is the role of a mentor to young lawyers?

**ANNABEL:** Critical – having someone you trust and admire who is able to offer advice or listen to your concerns, and then provide practical guidance, is worth its weight in gold. It can be really hard for young lawyers to trust their own judgment or to stand their ground. A mentor can act as a sounding board and a cheerleader, advocating for you in a way that helps build your personal brand and establish your credibility, and can also provide a sanity check to help you stop overthinking, worrying or catastrophizing.

**JULIE:** Can you share with us one example of another woman in the industry whom you really admire, and why?

**ANNABEL:** My mentor Christine Cameron, formerly the International General Counsel for Turner Broadcasting, who managed to combine a scary intellect, a razor-sharp sense of humour and the ability to focus in on what was really important when stuck on a problem or bogged down in a negotiation, with a kind heart and a great moral compass. Truly someone I have always tried to emulate. I also greatly admire Lynette Ireland, the General Counsel of Foxtel. She has been one of the cornerstones of the media business in Australia for over 20 years, while building a great team, adapting to the upheavals in the industry and successfully mentoring many female lawyers and business executives.

**JULIE:** If you could only read one book for the rest of your life, what would it be?

**ANNABEL:** Can I say the entire Harry Potter series? Not only are they long, so would keep me going for a while, but they champion the power of diversity and the importance of standing up to bullies and authoritarianism – themes which seem both relevant and important in the world at the moment.

**JULIE:** Thanks Annabel. On behalf of our readers, thanks so much for your wonderful insights. Happy International Women's Day!