

# Rebecca Dunn

## IP Partner at Gilbert + Tobin

**Calli Tshipidis**, Legal Counsel, Fox Sports, chats with **Rebecca Dunn**, IP partner at Gilbert + Tobin about International Women's Day.

Rebecca is a partner in Gilbert + Tobin's Intellectual Property group. She is an experienced intellectual property litigator who has worked on some of the leading copyright cases in Australia. In addition to copyright, her focus is on trade mark litigation and Australian Consumer Law litigation. She advises clients across industries including health care, media and entertainment in relation to the multiple legal issues associated with branding. Rebecca has particular expertise in the online space in relation to copyright, consumer law, social media, privacy, data protection and defamation.



**CALLI TSIPIDIS:** Did you always want this job? If not, how did your career path lead you here?

**REBECCA DUNN:** No! When I was young I wanted to be a writer, and then at some stage that morphed into journalism. I was a shy child/teenager and spent a lot of my time inside books and just loved words. I also had an interest in social issues and politics so I thought journalism would combine my love of writing with my interest in the way the world worked. My first degree was a Bachelor of Arts (Communication Studies) with majors in Journalism and English. I enrolled in an LLB at Sydney because I thought of law as another way of looking at society, a set of rules based on morals or values or politics, which were a gateway or a text to analysing societies and cultures. I ended up loving the study of the law, in particular the intellectual challenge and the analytical way of thinking.

I did a clerkship at G + T which was my number 1 choice because of its strength in communications and technology law, and its commitment to pro bono and social justice issues.

I was extremely fortunate to join the IP team at a moment in time when we were running law-testing cases about copyright infringement on the internet. As a very young lawyer I was given amazing opportunities by the partners I worked with (Michael Williams and Siabon Seet). I worked on the Full Court Appeal in *Universal v Cooper*, and later on *Roadshow v iiNet* from inception all the way to the High Court. I loved the chance to assist in applying the classic authorisation laws to the new digital environment – it was creative, an intellectual challenge, and I got to work with (and write with) brilliant thinkers and writers. I loved that stage of my career and was quite settled in it. Only later (after my mini-career break - see below) did I realise that I could aim high, be a partner at this firm and a leader in this space, which I aspire to be.

**TSIPIDIS:** What recent events in the Australian media law landscape most affect your role as an IP Partner at Gilbert + Tobin?

**DUNN:** There are multiple hot button issues in the media law landscape at the moment – as a firm we have done a lot of work consequential to the Digital Platforms report, and

there are other huge developments like the defamation law reforms and the various codes in relation to social media platforms. Stepping sideways into IP, an issue I have an interest in is the way data-based works and AI-generated works are treated under copyright and other IP laws – this is one of the new frontiers for copyright to grapple with and it will play out over the coming years.

**TSIPIDIS:** What's the greatest risk you've taken as a professional?

**DUNN:** I actually resigned from G + T in 2013 with no job to go to – I wasn't sure if I wanted to go in house so didn't want to commit to that course, but I knew I needed a change. I think in retrospect I was really burnt out. I decided to do a Masters in a non-law area that I had always been interested in, which was media and cultural studies. I ended up doing a Masters of Research focusing on the ways social media and traditional media interact and what that means for the public sphere, from a democratic theory perspective. It was so interesting and refreshing and I also had the chance to work with my inspiring supervisor (Catharine Lumby) to develop and

teach a subject in Social Media, Law and Ethics. I learnt then that I loved teaching.

All of that flowed from taking that leap. Mind you, when I tried to resign my boss advised me/ convinced me to take a leave of absence which was a great idea, as after a year of academic study it was so lovely to come back to G + T and be surrounded by this team of people who are brilliant and devoted to excellence every day. For some reason, the break also kind of cut any shackles I had in terms of limiting my ambition. I saw a path to my current role as an IP/media law partner which actually draws together all of these different threads of interest and endeavour from my life and career so far and also gives me the daily gift of managing a team of bright and dedicated young lawyers, which I love doing.

**TSIPIDIS:** How do you unplug from work?

**DUNN:** Reading! (Everything – novels, chick lit, crime, poetry, my book case is a broad church). Spending time with my family including my darling nephews. Trashy TV, good TV. Chilling with my cat Scarlett White Paws. Also NYT crossword before bed and podcasts (true crime or investigation ones are my fave) in transit.

**TSIPIDIS:** The 2021 International Women's Day 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?

**DUNN:** This is such a great theme. It has two meanings to me – the first is about challenging myself. To be brave, to believe in myself (quell the imposter syndrome as best I can), to take risks, do the scary thing. Secondly and more

broadly, particularly in my role as a partner in a law firm and a manager of a team, it's about participating in a values-based way and speaking up for and looking after people.

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

**DUNN:** You are powerful women! I am so inspired by you and can't wait to see what you do. Please know that there are many different ways of being and operating in a workplace, you do not have to fit one "type" or change who you are to be an effective leader. Also, almost every woman I know has imposter syndrome, don't worry, just remind yourself that you have done it before, you can do it, you will do it. And lean on and build up other women. Together we are a mighty force.

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