

# Martin Bowen

General Counsel to  
**dyson**

## A role that never sucks

This month's General Counsel Interview is with Martin Bowen, GC at Dyson, one of the world's leading and innovative technology companies. Here, Martin gives us the lowdown on what his role involves, the challenges GCs face in such a fast paced tech company and the legislative developments that have impacted his work.

### What is a typical day like for you, as general counsel at Dyson?

One day is rarely like another that's what makes Dyson a lot of fun (with the odd challenge thrown in here and there!). However, I will usually be speaking to one of my team member's in the Asia Pacific in the morning. Dyson has lawyers in Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and China. Asia is a real growth region for our business and we aim to focus more resource on assisting it – so we have been actively recruiting for some time. I visit the region at least three times per year. After this, I might catch up with Executive team colleagues or check in with the Information Management or Security teams who also report to me. Lunch is a quick bite from our excellent café before using the early afternoon as time to get work done that needs some quiet thought. By 2.30-3pm our US legal team will be on line and I could be speaking to them or external counsel who maybe assisting us in evaluating investment or acquisition targets in the tech sector. Later in the afternoon, I will deal with administration, billing and team development issues. Late in the day is often a good time to catch up with Sir James. He is very keen on keeping up to date legal issues, having fought numerous legal battles himself early in his life as an inventor. He will often have an interesting angle or view on a problem that can provide a useful perspective – he is also incredibly supportive of what we do. I then dash home to try and catch bath and bed time with my youngest son, Edward who is two. On this, I'm lucky, Dyson is based in the Cotswolds, at Malmesbury and so my commute is a snip at fifteen minutes and through lovely countryside.

### Intellectual Property law must occupy a large proportion of your workload, working for a company such as Dyson. What recent legislative developments within this sphere have affected your work the most over the last twelve months?

It does. I have a great IP team based at our HQ. They are responsible for the crucial task of working with our many hundreds of engineers, capturing and protecting our innovations. The team is also responsible for dealing with contentious issues – it's unfortunate that sometimes others decide to devote their efforts not to innovating themselves but to copying us. We work hard for our innovation and so we also fight hard to protect it. At the moment we are preparing for the introduction of the Unitary Patent and the Unitary Patent Court following probable ratification by the UK later this year or

perhaps early next. This will affect the way we work significantly; we will have to adapt a lot of internal IP protection processes to ensure that we are taking the right decisions on inclusion of an innovation in the UP system at the right time.

### Do you work independently or as part of a team? How are your responsibilities divided?

I am part of two very important teams: The Worldwide Legal team of (including Security and Information Management) and The Dyson Group Executive Team – we are the 10 individuals who report to Max Conze our Chief Executive and who are responsible for running Dyson's operations day to day. I spend about 70% of my time on legal matters and the balance on Executive team issues. I am also Group Company Secretary and attend Board meetings.

### You began your current role in 2009; during that time, what impact do you feel you have had on Dyson as a business?

I hope my impact has been to demonstrate how lawyers can add not only black letter legal advice to a project but also broader commercial counsel – a real business partnership. We, as lawyers, deal with so many parts of the business and in such various circumstances sometimes we underestimate the value of our unique view. Lawyers can use their problem solving skills across the range of issues in a project but this does mean getting out of your desk and talking to the people who are driving the business critical work, not waiting for them to come to you.

### How do you manage the challenge of keeping abreast of legal frameworks from different jurisdictions?

Through my team and some great inputs from external law firms. I also enjoy talking to our Embassies around the world – they can be wonderfully helpful in getting you in touch with the right people.

### Part of your role involves risk assessment; can you tell me a little about this? What challenges does it bring you and how do you navigate them?

Risk evaluation is a key skill for any GC. I think it's always important to have the right framework around it. At Dyson our primary vehicle is a Risk Group that reports to the Board twice per

year. It comprises of the CEO, CFO, COO and me – ably supported by the Internal Audit and Legal functions. We meet monthly to evaluate emerging risks across the business and focus on how risks we have already categorised are being managed. A number of our most critical risks have a heavy legal component e.g. product safety, data protection and competition issues. For me the real challenges come in the compliance aspect of this function – making sure that we have trained our people to evaluate these risks, know how to handle various problem scenarios and keep a good record of our actions. In a global company the use of e learning tools is especially useful and cost effective. We can easily tailor content and language to suit target regions and log participation in the training automatically.

### Are there any legislative developments you would like to see implemented in the near future?

I'd like to see legislation that prevents direct inward investment in a country being removed. A number of countries, Indonesia for example, make it relatively difficult to invest cost effectively, often meaning that business have to use franchise and other structures to clear barriers to entry.

### Where do you see Dyson in five years and how will your work help it get there?

In five years I'd see Dyson as a diversified technology provider focussed on the home and still producing products that solve problems that others have been unable to. The legal function can help drive this by being the guardians of Dyson's innovation, trusted advisors and active enablers of Dyson's goals – this means seeing business problems as our own and working within the project teams in the company to find good solutions fast. We have already started that journey – the best from us and our people is definitely yet to come! **LM**

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