

Yvette Lamont

CEO, AUSTRALIAN PRESS COUNCIL

Yvette Lamont is the CEO of the Australian Press Council. Yvette was previously the Group General Counsel and Company Secretary of ARN Limited (the parent company of commercial radio stations including KIIS 106.5FM and the iHeartRadio platform). She was a representative on Australia's Right to Know Coalition, formed to address concerns about freedom of speech in Australia. She currently sits on the Law Council of Australia's Media & Communications Committee, is a Non-Executive Director of Radio 2RPH Co-operative Limited and was previously a Non-Executive Director of a significant Indigenous media organisation, CAAMA (Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association), to name a few. **Beril Akbulut**, Lawyer at Marque Lawyers, speaks to Yvette about her career, reflections on International Women's Day and the Australian media and entertainment landscape.



BERIL AKBULUT: Yvette, thank you for speaking with me. In 2021, you became the CEO of the Australian Press Council. Can you tell me about your career path and how it led you to where you are today, from lawyer to CEO?

YVETTE LAMONT: Throughout my career, I have been very fortunate to have been able to combine my interest and passion in the law and media. I also have a profound interest in the crucial function of the Fourth Estate. I have been able to gain deep industry knowledge and transactional experience in the broader media sector and related emerging technologies (both as an external adviser and in-house). I began my career in private practice at the boutique law firm Boyd, House & Partners (which at the time had a significant part of its practice in media law). I later became a Senior Associate at Allens (in the Media & Technology Group).

Over time, my work moved from private practice to executive roles in publicly listed companies. I was General Counsel at Australis Media Limited (Galaxy), one of Australia's first subscription television operators and then Group General Counsel & Company Secretary at HT&E Limited (which was formerly APN News & Media Limited, now ARN Media Limited), a company that had diverse media operations.

HT&E's media operations during my tenure included:

Radio (including KIIS with Kyle & Jackie O, GOLD with Jonesy & Amanda, and iHeartRadio);

Publishing (including *The New Zealand Herald* and Australian and New Zealand regional newspapers);

Out-of-Home (APN Outdoor, Adshel and HK Outdoor); and

Digital (digital media assets relating to the above divisions plus assets including sport, culture and lifestyle technology - *The Roar*, *Techly* and *Lost at E Minor*, a virtual and augmented reality platform (including an NBA mixed-reality mobile 'Missing in Action' application) and esports).

Each position provided me with the opportunity to gain training and insight into the legal and regulatory environment and the businesses.

I appreciate that combining legal and regulatory knowledge with experience in corporate, commercial, governance, company secretarial, dispute/crisis/reputation/litigation management (including high-

profile situations and media personalities), together with the high-level boardroom experience that I was fortunate to receive, broadened my perspective skills.

In addition, being an integral part of significant strategic restructuring and transformation (including acquisitions, disposals, and related debt and equity financing requirements) during a period of major disruption to the industry has broadened my focus to organisational strategy, culture and performance.

It is this combined skill set and experience that I believe my current organisation may have found attractive in appointing me to the position of CEO & Executive Director.

BERIL: You've had a unique journey to your current position. Have any mentors or role models shaped your career journey? Are there any valuable lessons they taught you that you would like to share?

YVETTE: I didn't have formal mentors (that practice wasn't common in my earlier career), however, I was fortunate to have a number of very accomplished role models who organically, and generously, mentored me by sharing their knowledge and wisdom and providing wise counsel. This invaluable support guided, supported, and encouraged me to step up to bigger challenges throughout my career. Their influence has been enduring. I am also very grateful for those who have worked for me. While not mentors as such, the support, collegiality and lessons I have learned from them have also been invaluable. In addition, the knowledge exchange, support and comradeship of role models from CAMLA, the Media & Communications Committee of the Law Council of Australia, Women in Media and Allens Alumni have been immeasurable.

Very early on in my career, I learned the importance of understanding the commercial drivers of a business. Legal advice is far more valuable if it is commercially literate and aligned with strategy. Some of the other lessons I have learned are that effective leadership is about alignment, building clarity of purpose and creating the conditions for others to do their best work. I also learned, that:

- your reputation is not defined by the easy decisions, but by how you handle the difficult ones;
- remaining grounded and maintaining perspective is paramount;

- sometimes the biggest barriers to good decision-making are ego and blind spots; and
- credibility is cumulative - it builds slowly - but can be lost quickly.

Another lesson was resilience. The media industry has experienced sustained disruption. Leaders who succeed are those who remain steady, forward-looking and adaptable, even when the external environment is volatile.

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

YVETTE: One of the greatest risks was stepping away from a long, established executive career in the publicly listed space into a CEO & Executive role leading a high-profile industry body at a time of significant media disruption and declining public trust.

The Press Council, as with many organisations over time and in a changing landscape, required structural change, financial stabilisation and renewed stakeholder confidence. Leading that transformation involved difficult decisions, but it has also created the opportunity to strengthen the institution and its relevance and importance in a digital, polarised era.

BERIL: What advice would you give to your younger self and is there anything you'd tell yourself to do differently?

YVETTE: You won't always be the only woman at the executive table (thank goodness). Learn from every experience; it enables you to see, create, and act on opportunities you may not have anticipated.

Many of the most significant growth moments (joining a start-up subscription television operator, navigating a multi-division media restructure and moving into a CEO & Executive Director role) often happen outside your comfort zone. Juggling competing deadlines, priorities and commitments is not easy, however, understanding that having work/life balance makes for both a better individual and professional.

It's also good to have a sense of humour (and to work with people who do) as it makes work lighter (and laughing and humour can

increase creativity, innovation, and idea generation). Last but not least, trusting your instincts based on your training and experience is not as perilous as a younger version of myself may have thought!

BERIL: What shifts have you seen over time in the Australian media and entertainment law landscape? How has that affected you?

YVETTE: The most significant shift has been the rise and predominance of global digital platforms (with the impact on more traditional media commercial models and the emergence and ubiquity of social media). Convergence is one of the developments that has underpinned this emergence and predominance.

In some ways this has resulted in the democratisation of the media, with digital only media and blogs (of varying quality). However, traditional commercial media models have been significantly impacted as a result (including print advertising revenue models which have been severely challenged), as has the nature of transactions between the provider and the consumer (including subscription models, streaming, podcasts and gaming).

There have been developments in defamation and privacy law reform, and we've also seen the growing tension between freedom of expression, AI, privacy, misinformation/disinformation, platform accountability and social cohesion.

Professionally, this has meant working within evolving legal frameworks and navigating more complex issues that are not just legal. They are commercial, technological, cultural, geopolitical and reputational. This has required commercial dexterity, insight, foresight and the ability to oversee, influence and negotiate across all aspects of legal, operational and strategic requirements, including with highly sophisticated counterparties.

BERIL: In a highly polarised, algorithm-driven world, how do you incentivise open discourse between different views and sides of the political spectrum? What do you think is the best way forward to ensure access to a diverse media landscape where social media becomes the main source of information?

YVETTE: A key challenge is the algorithmic amplification of emotionally charged and potentially polarising content, and the blurring of lines between professional journalism and user-generated content. Algorithms reward engagement, and engagement often favours outrage. More traditional media organisations operate on different incentives: verification, editorial and industry standards (including fairness and balance), and accountability.

A way to incentivise open discourse is to reinforce those standards (including for social media) to ensure debate is conducted within a framework of responsibility. Another important factor is media literacy for consumers to critically assess sources and recognise how algorithms shape what they see. Responsible platform governance, including transparency around algorithmic amplification is also important. Sustained support and recognition of public interest journalism is crucial.

BERIL: Lastly Yvette, lack of trust in the media is propelled by populist politics, particularly with the emergence of platforms such as Truth Social and X. How do you think the press and the law can address this?

YVETTE: Trust in institutions, including media, has been challenged globally. Trust is strengthened when institutions are fair, independent and committed to the public interest.

To my mind, this reinforces the importance of clear, strong, principles-based media standards and guidelines (including for social media) covering matters such as accuracy and clarity, fairness and balance, privacy, avoidance of harm, and integrity and transparency. It is also important that media is held accountable by effective independent complaints handling.

This underscores the value of bodies like the Australian Press Council in maintaining public confidence in responsible journalism. It plays an important role in demonstrating that press freedom and accountability are not mutually exclusive by promoting freedom of speech through responsible and independent print and digital media, and adherence to high journalistic and editorial standards.

In relation to the law, there remains an imbalance in the way that more traditional media is regulated in Australia compared to the platforms. This issue has become critical for Australian media organisations. The consolidation of power of global organisations needs to be addressed by regulatory settings that preserve the Australian media industry while also fostering competition and innovation.

BERIL: Thank you Yvette for sharing your insights and words of wisdom!