Dollars and sense

Peer pressure and the push for green credentials in legal practice

Sustainability may conjure images of alternative lifestyles but it “doesn’t have to be about tree-hugging, it’s actually a sound business decision,” Australian Legal Sector Alliance (AusLSA) general manager, Emily Wilson tells Meredith Tucker.

“There are some people who get involved in sustainability because it’s the ‘right thing’ to do but the bottom line is that if you’re using less electricity, if you’re using less paper you’re saving money. Sustainability is about efficiency and inefficiency is always good business practice because businesses,” says Emily Wilson, AusLSA general manager.

Speaking with LSJ before a site tour of Wotton + Kearney’s new 6-star Green Star rated Sydney headquarters, Wotton + Kearney’s managing partner in Sydney, Carlton Castle, said that the firm’s office forms part of the larger Western Sydney development and uses a system of solar lights (attuned to the availability of natural light), automated blinds (that respond to seasonal variations in sunlight) and active chilled beams (grids of cooled water run through a beam integrated into the ceiling) to lower the temperature of the surrounding air) to deliver a 50 per cent gain in energy efficiency.

Use of advanced water recycling technology results in a further 10 per cent saving in water for the tower compared to an ordinary office building, according to the building guide for the day. Stuart Murray, the Sydney CBD commercial property manager for Wotton + Kearney, said he has been following the Green building Council of Australia (GBCA) and has noticed the growing awareness of sustainable building practices.

Sydney 6-star Green Star buildings: Legal tenants

- 58 Bligh Street - Clayton Utz
- 51 Cheilley Tower - Coopers Chambers Westgarth
- 103 Castlereagh Street - Herbert Smith Freehills
- 85 Castlereagh Street - Alan Overy, Remonds and Wotton + Kearney.

More and more law firms are signing up with AusLSA, says general manager Emily Wilson, and its almost at the point where it can identify the ones that aren’t there.

Media mentions

Mark Vincent
Sheilton 3

The issue: There are currently discussions about rights to the Copyright Act to allow more flexible business models and the inclusion, inclusion, if fair use provisions to the Act. There’s some interest over copyright allowing the right to cloud to infringe copyright. The issues picked up by the Australian Financial Review was that if the government were to expand instances where people can use copyright material, we might have more creative business models in Australia.

How did you become involved?

An issue which I talk about a lot is cloud computing. I’ve been commenting on intellectual property (IP) and IT law issues for the sector for a long time. Journalists have come to know me and approach me for comment.

Your background: I work for Shellton 3, one of the leading IP boutique firms in Australia and New Zealand. We specialise in patents, trademarks and IP law; a large part of our work is related to being a lawyer for over 30 years and always gravitated towards the intersection of technology and law.

Your reflections: Copyright tends to be a topic which gets people dodged in a philosophical sense. There are those that back the rights holders – those in the software, music and film industries – and push for greater protection of copyright interests. But I think there is a need to re-examine the balance between the rights holders and the public.

More people are coming to us in a more cautious way in terms of allowing access to new uses. I think it is very useful to continue to debate whether our laws adequately deal with new business models and technological developments. Without a proper debate, our laws will fall further behind technological development.

How did the Copyright issue and any advice for dealing with the media?

The media captured the different interests of all the various stakeholders well on this issue. I’ve been busy in a number of seminars on the Copyright Act in Australia who understand a lot of the IP and IT issues. They often know the story they want to write before they call the experts. That said, you should always approach the media with caution and a healthy respect. Participate in media training if you are not comfortable with your knowledge from corporate communication professionals.

Filer your thoughts and opinions on your position before the interview. Prepare some notes with the key messages if that will help. Most importantly, remember there is more to life of the record. If you don’t want to see it in print, don’t say it!

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