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A GC who is always courtroom-ready

Former Mayer, Brown attorney helps guide Encyclopedia Britannica in the Internet age

BY ROY STROM

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For a 246-year-old company, a copyright dispute embroiling Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. for much of the past two years represented a decidedly 21st century legal problem.

And, it turns out, that's what its new general counsel, Douglas M. Eveleigh, was hired to handle.

Eveleigh came from Solo Cup Co. in January as the heir apparent to William J. Bowe, the 28-year general counsel who retired in May from the private company that now brings in 90 percent of its revenue by selling educational software to schools. Its 32-volume reference book was last printed in 2012.

Trained in intellectual property and litigation as an associate at Mayer, Brown LLP, Eveleigh spent much of his first months at Encyclopedia Britannica's 325 N. LaSalle St. office learning about the business and personally litigating a case that he said initially seemed "insane."

An entrepreneur wanted to publish 70 percent of the company's Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary in his own online "dictionary textbook," purportedly designed to improve readers' English skills. When Encyclopedia Britannica did not consent to his plans, the entrepreneur filed a lawsuit seeking a court's confirmation that he was not violating Merriam-Webster's copyright.

However strange it may have initially sounded, the lawsuit was a direct threat to a business that Encyclopedia Britannica is keen to expand: Generating Web-based advertising revenue. It

plans to do that by making a larger portion of its encyclopedia articles freely available online.

"The more I looked at it and looked at (the plaintiff's) arguments," Eveleigh said, "the more (I realized) there is a risk here, not only to this dictionary but also to the entire publishing industry if what he's saying is right."

A little history

As with all publishers, legal risks at Encyclopedia Britannica have evolved in the Internet era.

Former general counsel Bowe recalled fighting against encyclopedia counterfeiters in China, Taiwan and Greece in the pre-Internet age.

"Britannica, after all, it's a global brand," Bowe said. "And it remains in the digital age, a prime target for those that would like to snatch it and use it for their own purposes."

Today, the company sells online subscriptions to its world-renowned encyclopedia. Its latest business plan is to complement those subscriptions with advertising revenue — generated by making certain articles available to anyone.

As of two years ago, subscriptions accounted for 95 percent of the encyclopedia's revenue, the company said. Today, that number is 75 percent, due to an increase in the sale of advertisements, the company said.

"Our content is second-to-none out there as far as trusted, vetted information," Eveleigh said.

"And as we make more and more of that content free, our visibility in the search rankings is going to increase and (that) just means huge revenue potential for the company. So it's exciting."



Douglas M.
Eveleigh

Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary at Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.

- **Location:** Chicago
- **Size:** 500 employees
- **Law department:** Two lawyers, paralegal and an intern
- **Age:** 41
- **Law school:** The John Marshall Law School, 1998
- **Interests:** Chicago Blackhawks

New challenges

But that business model comes with legal challenges of its own. Online counterfeiting, for instance, is as easy as copy and paste.

Eveleigh said the company sends out "four or five" cease-and-desist letters a month when it finds its content being used without permission. Tom Panelas, Encyclopedia Britannica's communications director, said even an Ivy League professor has received such a letter.

But perhaps no case has caught the company's attention as much as the one involving James T. Richards, the entrepreneur and plaintiff in a lawsuit seeking permission to publish the majority of the Merriam-Webster dictionary for free.

Richards' argument that his idea was legal — the one Eveleigh said posed a threat to

the entire publishing industry — was based on a fair-use claim.

By removing some of the dictionary's "archaic words" and formatting, Richards said his "dictionary textbook" would help people learn the English language. That was the basis of his claim that it would "promote the progress of science and the useful arts," which Richards argued favored fair use.

Last month, a federal judge in Massachusetts issued a summary judgment ruling siding with Eveleigh — who personally wrote the briefs in the case and even appeared in a Boston courtroom.

"Richards' action in copying approximately 70 (percent) of the [d]ictionary's definitions is beyond the scope of the fair-use doctrine," wrote U.S. District Judge Indira Talwani.

She based her decision, at least in part, on an argument Eveleigh made that provides an in-depth view of the company's advertising-based business model — and how heavily it relies on search engine algorithms.

Richards' dictionary would create, in the parlance of search-engine optimization, a "duplicate content" problem for merriam-webster.com. Search engines rank unique information — such as Encyclopedia Britannica articles or Merriam-Webster definitions — higher than information that can be found in multiple places. So, in theory, Richards' textbook would knock down Merriam-Webster's definitions on search results.

Because those rankings drive so much traffic, they are a crucial component of the website's ability to sell ads. An expert Eveleigh hired in the case said the first result in a Web search is clicked on 80 percent of the time.

"We went through a painstaking process on a brief to make sure we were (able) to convey how that all works in layman's terms, because it is a new thing," Eveleigh said.

"We were able to very convincingly show that if there was this duplicate content out there, if this guy was successful in

publishing our dictionary for free, that it would basically wipe out the market for our own copyrighted content,” Eveleigh said.

While the dictionary has always been freely available online, Eveleigh said an adverse ruling in the case could have put Encyclopedia Britannica’s content at a similar risk of being slightly edited and then copied onto a different website.

In the past, counterfeit encyclopedias meant missed sales. Today, a copycat website creates the Internet-age equivalent: relegating search results to Page 2.

Not a paper-pusher

Very few general counsels write their own briefs and even fewer make court appearances.

But to lawyers who have worked with Eveleigh, it was no surprise that, in his own words, he prefers “to be a real doer as opposed to a paper pusher.”

Jason C. White, an IP partner

at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP, said he did not recall “dealing personally with anybody in-house who has filed cases and prosecuted them on their own.”

Jason K. Schmitz, an IP shareholder at Vedder, Price P.C., said, “His ability to handle those matters on his own or internally goes immediately to the bottom line of the company.

“He’s a quick study, and his value will not only be the Xs and Os on the legal side but also his ability to grasp, big picture, what the business is trying to do.”

Bowe said his successor was selected out of an applicant pool of more than 300 lawyers. Eveleigh stood out because of his background in IP and litigation and experience in both private practice for seven years and as an in-house lawyer at Solo Cup for eight years.

“And that just speaks really to legal skills and capacity,” Bowe said. “But on a personal level,

he’s terrific with his internal client. He’s just got a wonderful way of dealing with adversaries as well as those that he’s counseling.”

Originally from Stamford, Conn., Eveleigh’s father, Dennis G. Eveleigh, is a Connecticut Supreme Court justice.

Eveleigh graduated from Boston University with an engineering degree before moving to Chicago in 1995 to attend The John Marshall Law School, which he was attracted to because of its highly regarded IP program.

As an associate at Mayer, Brown, he branched out from drafting patent applications to IP-focused and general litigation.

He made a similar expansion of his practice at Solo Cup. At the end of his time there, he handled general corporate matters in addition to what his title, chief IP counsel, implied.

At Encyclopedia Britannica,

he leads a department comprised of one other attorney, a paralegal and, at the moment, an intern.

In the general counsel spot for roughly half a year, Eveleigh said he still has more projects aimed at making the legal department more efficient. For instance, he’s testing a software program that will help manage the company’s contracts, which constitute the bulk of the legal work produced by the much-larger education side of the company.

As litigation arises, Eveleigh said he will continue to handle it personally. It’s the part of law practice that he “really enjoys,” he said. As a business leader, he is just as excited about the company’s prospects for selling ads on its websites.

“I’m really excited where the company is going on the consumer side,” he said, “being on the first page of Google search results.”