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William J. Bowe

J.D. · Lawyer, Executive, Author

Overview

William J. Bowe is a corporate lawyer, executive, and author. His career runs from Army counterintelligence at the Pentagon through Chicago corporate practice, politics, and media newswire service United Press International, to twenty-eight years as General Counsel of Encyclopaedia Britannica, where he helped carry a venerable print publisher into the digital age.

From 1986 to 2014 Bill was Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., the senior legal and administrative officer of a multinational internet, software and print publisher. His work centered on trademark, copyright, e-commerce, privacy and intellectual property law, alongside corporate matters, global tax planning, litigation, and mergers and acquisitions. On the business side he served as President of Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation, headed the dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster in the 1990s, and oversaw Britannica's human resources and public relations.

In 1989 he filed Britannica's patent application for the multimedia search system behind Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia, an early roadmap for the human-machine interface. The patent issued in 1993 and led to a quarter century of litigation that reached a petition to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2016.

Before Britannica, Bill built in-house law departments from the ground up. At United Press International in Nashville he established the legal function of a 2,000-employee international wire service and saw it through Chapter 11 reorganization and sale. At The Bradford Exchange he organized the first law department of a multinational direct marketing company and advised its owner, J. Roderick MacArthur, as a director of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and in connection with related litigation MacArthur brought against the Foundation. Earlier he practiced corporate law at Roan & Grossman and Ross & Hardies in Chicago.

After graduating from Yale and the University of Chicago Law School, he enlisted in Army Intelligence in 1968 and spent three years as a counterintelligence analyst in the Pentagon's Army Operations Center, tracking civil disturbances and advising on the security of the country’s first antiballistic missile system. He later testified before Senator Sam Ervin's Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on military surveillance of civilians. In 1974–75 he was General Counsel, Research Director and speechwriter for William Singer's mayoral campaign against Richard J. Daley.

A frequent speaker and writer on intellectual property, internet law and law department management, Bill has also served Illinois governors on education and workforce task forces, chaired the International Anticounterfeiting Coalition, and led civic and cultural institutions including the Clarence Darrow Community Center, The Wayfarers' Club and The Cliff Dwellers.

Since retiring in 2014 he has published the memoir *Riots & Rockets* (2024) and built wbowe.com, home to his photography, genealogy, and the interactive Vintage Chicago map of more than 3,000 historical maps and photographs from 1688 to the present. Its companion history, *Vintage Chicago, A Cliff Dweller's History of Six Eras*, will be published by Eckhartz Press in 2027. He lives in Northbrook, Illinois, with his wife, Cathy.

Employment Timeline

1986–2014
Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary;
Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., Chicago
Retired as senior legal and administrative officer of a multinational internet, software and print publisher. Substantial time devoted to trademark, copyright, e-commerce, privacy and intellectual property law, in addition to corporate matters, global tax planning, litigation, mergers, acquisitions and transaction work. Securities and franchise law responsibilities for a publicly held affiliate. Served as President of Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation and head of dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. Responsible for the human resources department and managed Britannica's public relations function.

1984–1985
Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary;
United Press International, Inc., Nashville
Established UPI's in-house Law Department as Assistant General Counsel. Hired staff, organized the department and integrated the legal function into a 130-bureau, 2,000-employee international news wire service. Managed all litigation and the divestitures of UPI's cable television, electronic database distribution and non-U.S. news picture operations. Supervised UPI's reorganization under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code and its subsequent sale.

1979–1983
Vice President for Legal and Corporate Affairs, Secretary;
The Bradford Exchange, Ltd., Niles, Illinois
Financial and professional responsibility for organizing the first Law Department of a multinational diversified direct marketing corporation. Advised owner J. Roderick MacArthur in his duties as a director of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and in connection with related litigation MacArthur brought against the Foundation. Counseled executives of the corporation and its affiliates in direct mail, catalog, retail (Hammacher Schlemmer), food marketing, real estate, hotel and publishing businesses, and coordinated the work of 26 outside law firms in the U.S. and abroad.

1971–1980
Of Counsel, Partner, Associate;
Roan & Grossman, Chicago
General corporate practice with particular emphasis on acquisitions and divestitures. Extensive representation of steel industry clients in the U.S. and the Middle East, and of Japanese bank and trading company interests in regulatory and commercial matters.

1968–1971
Counterintelligence Analyst;
U.S. Army, Washington, D.C.
Served in the Counterintelligence Analysis Division of the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence in the Army Operations Center at the Pentagon. Briefed and provided estimates of the likelihood of federal Army and Air Force troops and assets being mobilized due to civil disturbances exceeding control capabilities of local police and National Guard units. Counterintelligence and counter-sabotage advisor to the Antiballistic Missile Development Directorate, with assessments made at NORAD's Cheyenne Mountain and Kwajalein Atoll. Member of the special group established by the Secretary of the Army to investigate military surveillance of civilians.

1967–1968
Associate;
Ross & Hardies, Chicago
General corporate and real estate practice; legal research and utility security financing for regulated companies in the cable television, telephone, gas and electric power industries.

Education

University of Chicago Law School
Juris Doctor (J.D.), 1967

Yale University
Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), 1964

Political Science Major

Latin School of Chicago
High school diploma, 1960

President of Freshman and Senior Classes

All Around Athlete, 1957, 1958, 1959

Bar Admissions

Illinois, admitted *1967*

Tennessee, admitted *1984*

Areas of Experience

Corporate law; intellectual property, copyright and trademark; patents; contracts and licensing; litigation management; international law; e-commerce and internet law; mergers and acquisitions; education and education technology; management and negotiation.

Patent

Compton's multimedia search system; patent application filed for Encyclopaedia Britannica 1989, issued 1993; litigated through a petition to the U.S. Supreme Court, *2016*

Testimony

U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee; hearings on military surveillance of civilians, chaired by Sen. Sam Ervin; Washington, D.C. *1974*

U.S. Copyright Office hearings; Distance Learning and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act; Chicago *1999*

National Assessment Governing Board; hearings on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in Civics: The Civics Education Opportunity in Our Increasingly Diverse Society; Chicago *1995*

Speaking Engagements

Using Other People's Material: Copyright Fair Use, Trademark Fair Use, and Nominative Use; Law Bulletin Annual Corporate Intellectual Property Law Conference, Chicago *2010*

Negotiating and Drafting License Agreements; Insight Conference on Major Business Agreements, Chicago *2005*

Copyright Basics: Origin and Scope of Copyright Protection; Chicago Bar Association *2003*

Knowledge Management for Corporate Legal Departments; Third Annual Corporate Legal Times Super Conference, Chicago *2003*

Best Practices Managing Outside Corporate Counsel; American Corporate Counsel Association, Chicago *2003*

Stopping Internet Piracy; American Intellectual Property Lawyers Association, Phoenix *2002*

Law Department Best Practices Examined; American Corporate Counsel Association / Altman Weil, Chicago *2001*

The Rise of Intellectual Property as a Global Resource; Michael Best & Friedrich LLP Management Seminar, Chicago *2001*

Intellectual Property: The Internet's Coin of the Realm; Practising Law Institute, Vienna, Virginia *2001*

Mid-size Law Firms: The Client Perspective; Hildebrandt Institute, Tampa *2000*

E-Commerce and Protection of Corporate Assets; Corporate Counsel Center, Northwestern University School of Law, Chicago *2000*

How the Internet Has Changed Our Business Model; Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education, Chicago *2000*

Intellectual Property in the Internet Age: Britannica's Experience and Beyond; ABA Intellectual Property Law Section, Boston *2000*

Taking Your Business to the Internet: Then Protecting It; Association of University Technology Managers, Chicago *2000*

Legal Protection for Databases? Europe Challenges; Intellectual Property Lawyers Association of Chicago *2000*

Copyright Infringement on the Internet; Chicago Bar Association *2000*

E-Commerce Law: Innovative Solutions for New Business Models; Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education, Chicago *1999*

Conduct Most Foul: Infringement on the Internet; Centennial Conference on Intellectual Property, The John Marshall Law School, Chicago *1999*

Protecting Your Company's Good Name in Cyberspace; Software Publishers Association, Chicago *1998*

Internet Trademark Protection; International Anticounterfeiting Coalition, Boston *1998*

Managing Outside Counsel; Illinois Corporate Times Roundtable, Chicago *1997*

Intellectual Property Protection in the Pacific Rim; American Bar Association, Minneapolis *1996*

Intellectual Property Protection and DVD Technology; Innotech / Eastman Chemical Company, Washington, D.C. *1996*

New Challenges for American Industry; Insight Into Electronic Fraud Detection Seminar, Chicago *1995*

European/American Business Cooperation: A New Global Challenge for Both Economies to Face; French-American Chamber of Commerce in the U.S., New York *1995*

Exploring Internet Legal Issues; Corporate Legal Institutes, Chicago *1995*

Co-Chair, "Managing the Smaller Law Department" Seminar; Corporate Legal Institutes, Chicago *1995*

Publications and Articles

Vintage Chicago, A Cliff Dweller's History of Six Eras; **Eckhartz Press,** *forthcoming 2027*

Riots & Rockets; **memoir, Amazon** *2024*

"Internet Practitioner Comments," CCH State Tax Reporter

"Managing Outside Counsel in Corporate Litigation," Litigation Management & Economics, ABA Section of Litigation

"The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act Revisited," Middle East Monthly, Anti-Boycott Law Bulletin

"Regional Planning vs. Decentralized Land Use Controls," DePaul Law Review

"The Privacy Act of 1974," Journal of Taxation; reprinted in Business Records, New York Law Journal

"The Civil Disturbance Threat," U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee

Additional articles in Corporate Legal Times, the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Lawyer and Chicagoland Monthly.

Civic and Professional Engagement

The Cliff Dwellers, Chicago; Member (1997 to present); President (2006–2007)

The Wayfarers' Club, Chicago; Member (2010 to 2025); President (2012–2013); Secretary/Treasurer (2010–2011)

Intellectual Property Law Association of Chicago; Board of Managers (2006–2009)

Illinois Governor's Appointee; Education Summit (2000–2002); Early Childhood Care and Education Work Group (1994–1995); Task Force on Workforce Preparation (1992–1993)

Software and Information Industry Association, Washington, D.C.; Intellectual Property Committee (1999–2008)

Software Publishers Association, Washington, D.C.; Government Affairs Committee (1997–1998)

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing; Board of Editors, Intellectual Property Studies (1996–1999)

International Anticounterfeiting Coalition, Washington, D.C.; Director (1989–1999); Chairman of the Board (1994–1996); Chairman, Cyberspace Task Force (1994–1998)

Illinois State Chamber of Commerce; Director (1990–1996); Education Committee (1990–1998)

The Annenberg Program of Northwestern University, Washington, D.C.; Project to Curb International Piracy (1988–1989)

IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law; Board of Overseers (1982–1986)

Clarence Darrow Community Center, Chicago; President and Director (1975–1984)

Hull House Association, Chicago; Trustee (1977–1979)

Illinois Governor's Task Force on School Finances; General Counsel (1975)

Chicago Mayoral Campaign (1974–75); General Counsel, Research Director and Speechwriter, **William S. Singer for Mayor**

Links

- **wbowe.com**
- **Riots & Rockets (online edition)**
- **Vintage Chicago interactive map**
- **Bill Bowe Photo Archive (SmugMug)**
- **Travel Photo Archive (SmugMug)**