Martin Langelier’s Revved Up Legal Career at BRP

Interviews and Profiles

Legal counsel, director of corporate and legal services, and *de facto* snowmobile tester. Martin Langelier has collected a wide range of titles at BRP, the Canadian recreational vehicle company that invented the Ski-Doo, the first snowmobile. These experiences drove him to his current role as senior vice president, general counsel and public affairs officer.

During his 18 years there, Langelier has seen and championed BRP's various changes as it has evolved. One of his biggest achievements thus far was playing a critical part in BRP's public offering in 2013, which was Canada's biggest IPO that year. That success took almost a decade to attain, but Langelier was there for the whole journey.

In 2003, the Beaudoin-Bombardier family and Bain Capital acquired Bombardier's Recreational Product Division. "That obviously meant that they would have to work on an exit strategy at some point," he recounts. He and his team were deeply involved in the implementation of multiple business strategies, such as diversifying the company's product offering to increase profitability. The uptick in revenue inspired BRP to consider going public in 2008 — until the economy collapsed, plunging most of the world into the great recession.

Rather than risk a potential financial loss, BRP waited until the economy rebounded in 2012. Langelier and his team, meanwhile, built the governance that the company needed to launch the public offering. Once the team finished preparing and the executives decided to go public, it was off to the races, he says.

From there, BRP's legal team worked long hours, often late into the night and the weekend. "The business just didn't stop [during the IPO], so we had to also manage the daily elements of our business," he explains. Their endurance paid off. BRP's IPO raised CA$262.3 million and sold 12.2 million shares for CA$21.20 each — the most profitable Canadian public offering in 2013.

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Now that the dust from the IPO has settled, Langelier has set his sights on BRP's global expansion. BRP was founded in Quebec, Canada in 1942, and now sells their products in over 110 countries. Although it's one of his favorite aspects, BRP's international growth sometimes complicates his job. His legal team must ensure that they're compliant in multiple countries before sending their product overseas — an increasingly difficult task, as regulations continue to change.

“Years ago, there seemed to be some kind of alignment between the countries’ regulation, which made it more simple for us to comply with,” Langelier says. However, laws have become more specific and varied for different regions in the past five to 10 years, so Langelier and his team must be painstakingly diligent.

Langelier’s role in BRP’s international expansion is not limited to compliance. BRP spends four percent of their revenue on research and development to design and update new or existing models. With all of this innovation, a lot of the legal department’s time is spent safeguarding their trademarks and patents, especially considering BRP’s growing global presence. “When you’re selling in so many countries, it adds complexity to the way you protect your innovation,” he explains.

Despite these minor speed bumps, working on international projects in an action-driven company seamlessly aligns with his career path — even if corporate law wasn’t his original destination. For five years, he was captivated by Hollywood’s glamorized portrayal of trial law and worked at a Montreal law firm. That sheen faded, and private practice bored him. So, he sought a new adventure and earned his international MBA from Birmingham University.

He had no intention of returning to law after earning his MBA. But as he was looking for business strategy roles, he met with the then-general counsel of the recreational product division at Bombardier, who assured him that in-house law would complement his educational background and put him on track to achieve his executive ambition.

Just as the former GC promised him, Langelier has immersed himself in the inner-workings of the company, from participating in board meetings to safety testing the latest Ski-Doo or Spyder, their three-wheel motorcycle. He couldn’t get that involved BRPas outside counsel. “Now I get to be with the people who actually make the decisions and contribute to them, as opposed to just execute them,” he explains.

His dedication to BRP goes beyond having a seat at the table; it’s a culture fit too. As a leader in a full-throttle industry, BRP encourages employees to push boundaries — and Langelier is too driven to stand still. “The culture that we have is really based on actions,” he beams. “Yes, of course, we like to plan, but we get passionate about making things happen. We like things to move.”

Getting to know… Martin Langelier

DO YOU HAVE ANY VACATIONS PLANNED?

We’re going on a family trip to South Africa in July. We’re spending three weeks there and we will be visiting Cape Town. Then we have a schedule where we’re going on a lot of safaris, obviously, with my three sons, and sleeping in a house in a tree. We’re also visiting vineyards. I have a passion for wine, so that part of the trip will be for me. It’ll be very exciting.

WHAT BOOK ARE YOU READING RIGHT NOW?

I’m actually reading Origin from Dan Brown. I would say it’s an easy read. It’s perfect for me because after I spend a lot of time at work, then I spend a lot of time in arenas with my boys, who are all avid hockey players and soccer players as well. I typically don’t have that much energy when I finally get to bed. So reading something light, like this book, is actually a good match.

IF YOU COULD HAVE A MEAL WITH ANYONE LIVING OR DEAD, WHO WOULD IT BE AND WHY?

I know it’s probably a recurring answer, but Winston Churchill would be one of my favorite picks because of his wit. He seemed to be a very entertaining guy who also likes good food and good wine. So even if the discussion were to be boring, I’m sure we could at least compensate with the food and wine. That’s kind of the way I would manage to mitigate the risk.

Karmen Fox

Web Content Editor

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