

IP Lawyers Speakers Series: Interview with Entertainment Lawyer, Rockson Igelige

TOPICS: Interview With Rockson Igelige

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JANUARY 10, 2016

We recently launched our IP Lawyers Speakers Series, where we talk with lawyers practicing various aspects of Intellectual Property Law, Entertainment Law and much more. Recently, we sat down with Entertainment lawyer, Rockson Igelige to find out more about his practice.

Q: Tell us about yourself and your educational background?



My name is Rockson Akpotiri Igelige. I am a lawyer and politician. My passion for the entertainment industry prompted me to study Theatre Arts at the University of Benin. I later studied law at Delta State University and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2006. In 2013, I obtained my Masters in Entertainment Law from the University of Westminster, London.

Q: How did you get involved in Entertainment Law? Most Lawyers we know who practice primarily in Nigeria focus on Intellectual Property in general.

I started as a Theatre Artiste. But because of the environment I found myself, I veered off to study law. I thought of marrying law and theatre arts together, I found that in Entertainment Law. Because of my involvement with the creative process, I knew firsthand what artistic creators go through to get their work done, the pain, and life of penury orchestrated by piracy and copyright infringement. I decided to study Entertainment Law so as to protect my primary constituency -- the Arts.

Q: You recently sued a big telecommunications network in Nigeria (MTN) on behalf of your client, can you tell us more about how you used the legal system to defend your client's Intellectual Property Rights?

Our actions were woven around the Nigerian Copyright Act, CAP 28, LFN, 2004 and the press. The Act says copyright infringement can attract criminal and civil action pari passu.

In pursuing legal remedy for our client, we filed civil action against MTN at the Federal High Court, Abuja and also reported the copyright infringement case to Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) for investigation. After many months of investigation, the NCC filed criminal charges against MTN. Before the commencement of the trial of both the criminal matter and civil action, parties involved settled out of the Court.

Q: In your opinion what are three important things an artiste should do to protect their Intellectual Property in Nigeria?

They must be vigilant and conscious, know the provisions of the Copyright Act, and secure the services of an Intellectual Property or Entertainment lawyer to guide them in all their transactions.



Q: What do you view as the emerging legal issues surrounding Entertainment Law in Nigeria?

There is nothing like Entertainment Law in Nigeria. It is still a strange concept to us. Most often, the term ‘Entertainment Law’ is used interchangeably with Intellectual Property. Intellectual property is just a tiny segment of Entertainment Law. We do however have existing laws that can be invoked to cater for some aspects of Entertainment Law in Nigeria – we can use Torts laws for defamation, passing-off and malicious damage as a legal umbrella for protecting personality or character merchandising. In the area of Sports Law, concepts like Ambush Marketing Laws and Intellectual Property Plus are still missing in our Entertainment Law legal lexical in Nigeria. Do we have fashion laws to protect our fashion world? No! We must come together as a united body for those of us interested in Entertainment Law to push the National Assembly to put some of these laws in place for effective taking off of Entertainment Law in Nigeria.

We also need legal personnel that are well grounded in the field of Entertainment Law. The NUC needs to review the Nigerian Universities curriculum to introduce Entertainment law as a course in the Faculty of Law. It should be the Department of Entertainment Law under the Faculty of Law. And Intellectual Property should come under here and not the other way round.

Q: How has the Entertainment Law sector in Nigeria grown over the years? Have you seen an increase in the number of artists suing for cases?

Entertainment Law growth in Nigeria is still lopsided. There are still many areas that have not been tapped especially in areas like Entertainment Contracts, Merchandising in the Entertainment Business, Sports Law, Technology Rights and the Law and The Media; Ownership, Control and Regulation etc. We have only witnessed remarkable growth in the area of Intellectual Property at the expense of other vital areas. Ambush marketing is still a strange term to us especially in the area of Sport. And it is so funny that Nigeria has hosted the World Cup before now. Personal merchandising field has not been explored. There are so many areas of Entertainment Law that are strange to us here in Nigeria. Entertainment Law goes beyond Intellectual property. Its tentacle includes Fashion Law, hospitality, events management etc.

Q: Any advice for students who want to practice Entertainment Law after graduation?

It is a new area for exploration in Nigeria. For those who want to make a career out of it must be serious and always be in touch with other practitioners in other developed countries to be abreast of the latest happenings.

Thank you for taking time to talk to us and we look forward to reading more about your cases.

This article was published on Nigerian Law Intellectual Property Watch (NLIPW), now Nooktoria Legal Resource.