IP Strategies for High Tech: Answers to Three Common Questions

by Joe Dury

Last week I co-hosted a Webcast with Kalypso and Dassault Systems called “IP (Intellectual Property) Management: Setting a Foundation for Innovation”. The Webcast addressed a lot of the challenges that high tech and semiconductor firms face related to the management and reuse of their IP. The session also covered how linking IP strategy to business and product development strategies, optimized by supporting software systems, helps leading companies develop market-driven innovations.

Whether I am speaking in an event like this or working on-site at a client, I hear a lot of similar questions and concerns on IP issues, and here are a few of the most common:

Q – IP? You mean my patents, right? Or do you mean the design IP?

A – IP means more than just your patents or the design IP that patents typically protect. I think of IP as all the digital assets that a firm has, including contextual information and intangible property that result from the innovation process, which some people call their “design record(s)”. This certainly includes trademarks, copyrights, patents and trade secrets. But I think we need to expand this definition to include new ideas from the ideation process – any novel or useful process, machine, composition of matter, life state of an article that is manufactured etc – for example, new or improved devices, circuits, chemical compounds, drugs and so on. We also need to include digital assets in the definition of IP. So these include your product innovation records, design assets and information, manufacturing process assets and information, and supply chain services information. If you use Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) software, this enables a “single version of truth” information relative to these digital assets.

Q – My legal team manages our IP. What’s the benefit of involving a larger team?

A – Whether or not we expand the definition of IP, IP responsibility spans from legal into engineering, R&D and the business units / P&L groups. And if we do expand the IP definition, we need to include marketing teams, technology and manufacturing people. Why such a big team? When a legal team controls IP, it’s probably protected pretty well. But is it being effectively managed, leveraged and commercialized?

What existing IP resides in the portfolio and what’s missing? What new features and requirements can be fulfilled by existing IP? Could we license this externally? What are the cost implications of using acquired IP (royalty, licensing fees)? The only way to answer these questions, and align your IP strategy to support your business and innovation strategies, is with a balanced, multi-discipline IP team.

Q – We are using PLM to manage the lifecycles of our products within R&D and engineering processes, but we use spreadsheets to manage IP. How can these integrate?

A – Having your IP in these spreadsheets is a good start. But I would ask - do these sheets categorize the IP into the schema or category methodology already used by your CAD files or PLM system to manage the design process and/or the product record? If so, you have a starting point to integrate your IP with your PLM and CAD tools. If not, then I would recommend creating this schema congruent to the business innovation strategy and the PLM system methodology. Either way, this is the first step to integrating your IP with your PLM system, which will help your team reuse and find the IP of interest quickly and efficiently.

What’s your view?

I invite you to view the archived Webcast and other related materials at www.kalypso.com/IP. Looking forward to the discussion!

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What’s your view? Add your question or comment
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Joe has over 30 years of industry and client service experience working as an executive and advisor at Fortune 500 companies to deliver results by combining strategic planning and implementation of new process and technology to transform the business.