



CREATING AN IP ORIENTED BUSINESS CULTURE

COMPANY DETAILS

GA Drilling a.s. is a Slovakian R&D SME. The company grew significantly and currently has 50+ employees on 3 continents. They have a home base in Slovakia with branches in the UK, US, Brazil and UAE.

GA Drilling built a robust IP portfolio with 23 granted patents for 8 different solutions, and another 2 patents pending (PCT phase), 5 utility models and 3 trademarks and still growing. GA Drilling is focused on the proactive protection of their intellectual property for which the company developed a unique approach to building an IP oriented business culture in house.



BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

Geothermal energy may be the answer for stopping global warming as it can provide carbon free, clean and relatively cheap energy source for anyone, anywhere. Certain spots in Europe have especially high potential for utilizing this energy source, but it is globally available.

However, with increasing depth, the price of deep drilling becomes non-competitive, and prices of traditional drilling become too expensive under the 5 km range.

GA Drilling does research and development with PLASMABIT technology that uses electrical plasma. This technology makes geothermal drilling under 5 km significantly cheaper and more efficient than traditional drilling, which makes the use of geothermal energy cost effective and efficient. The developments also concern ways of connecting the new technology with the existing ones. The solution is still in development and testing phase with extensive IP activities to protect the technology and ensure the return of the current and future investments.

GA DRILLING BUILT A
COMPANY CULTURE
THAT PROTECTS IP
FROM TOP
MANAGEMENT DOWN
TO SPECIALIST LEVEL.

IP STRATEGY OF GA DRILLING

The company is currently in pre-commercial stage. In this phase, revenues are limited and the activities of the company are mainly funded by investors, industrial partners and from over 20 successfully secured grants. The company sees IP as proof of value for the money of the investors and has built a strategy to support this.

Their IP strategy is founded on priority application in Slovakia or in the UK, where they have branch offices. After this, they move to the PCT application and to obtaining national patents as a result of the PCT application. To avoid filing failures, GA Drilling thoroughly investigates competitors with a 360-degree angle including conventional mechanical technology, combined mechanical and emerging technology and solely emerging technologies as well. Finding the right balance between filing as early as possible and filing with a fine-tuned solution is an extra challenge for GA Drilling.

CREATING IP ORIENTED CULTURE IN A BUSINESS

GA Drilling built an IP focused culture on 4 pillars that holistically supports the proactive IP protection approach of the company:

I. Corporate culture and motivating environment

GA Drilling relies on the simple fact that all of their staff from the founders and the top management down to specialist level fully understands the value they create and the importance of protecting it. The work is supported with trainings, clearly defined binding company procedures and the requirement of documentation including templates that record all the necessary data when new IP is generated.

On the other hand, the company puts special emphasis on the motivation of their staff. They reward becoming inventors with financial benefits and the potential of profiting from the commercialization of the inventions. They also make sure that their staff understands the personal benefits of their own work from prestige of publication to simplifying the daily work.

II. Education of employees

GA Drilling built their own education procedures for their employees to ensure that they understand IP rights and the IP protection system. They also enable the staff to handle IP databases in order to take full advantage of the state-of-the-art that can support their work.

To make the learning more engaging, the company introduced an IP challenge program with the ultimate goal to uncover relevant IP that may either contribute to their work or may be an obstacle of patenting. The challenge is held monthly with 5 participants who deliver 8 minutes flash talks about findings related to their technology which must be focused on information previously not known or shared commonly with each other. A jury of managers of the R&D department and IP experts rewards the most valuable contributor with a prize.

This program enables GA Drilling to access a significant amount of prior art which can be a game changer in their developments as well as engage their employees in their IP protection efforts in an intellectually and financially motivating way.

III. Building a filing strategy that reflects technology maturity

Technology readiness level (TRL) is a methodology developed by the NASA in the 1970s. It divides the development process into 9 phases depending on the market readiness of the technology. GA Drilling uses EU TRL scale to decide whether or not to move on with a patent application to prevent undercutting their own efforts with a premature filing regardless how positive the prior results were in a PCT application.

For instance, in one case, a PCT filing resulted in all A marks indicating a high probability that patenting would have no obstacles anywhere in the world. Regardless, GA Drilling did not proceed with the national phase due to the inventions low, only TRL3-4 level of maturity.

The market is super competitive and competitors watch each other with eager eyes. With the invention being published 18 months after the application date, they would have provided open access to ideas that their competitors can adopt to develop solutions which, in turn, may undercut the company's future patenting activities.

With using the TRL scale, GA Drilling proactively protects their future patenting potentials as well making sure that this forward-thinking planning paves the way to the protection of their future solutions they invent based on their current know-how.

IV. Safe data keeping policy

Intellectual property can be in danger not only by infringements, but physically as well which includes theft, fire, natural disasters or technology malfunction. In a modern R&D environment, when all research data is stored electronically, the back-up and safe keeping of data is vital. There are excellent solutions to support such efforts, which have saved precious IP for GA Drilling on more than one occasion.

GA Drilling follows a four-step process to ensure safe keeping of data:

1. Diligent recording of research results and IP based on the awareness of staff to know what to protect, how and from whom.
2. Restricting access to IP with a three-fold system:
 - a) Allowing access of third party (eg. business partners or patent attorneys) only directly at the company's internal Sharepoint with all downloads denied. This includes the restricted use of documents on any non-company device.
 - b) All documents are labelled according to their level of sensitivity and tracked which makes it possible to follow who did what with the information. This set-up allows access for internal staff only and even within that, it restricts the rights of reading, printing and modifying. This also makes data protection possible even in case of an accidental data leak.
 - c) Legal protection with non-disclosure agreements for all external parties may they be on the legal or business side.

+1 TIP

form GA Drilling: apply a counter intelligence mindset

Industrial espionage is on the rise and thinking about ways you would spy on your own company may uncover weak spots that are indeed an open gate for attack against your IP.