



Client Interview



Russ Slifer
CEO

Raising the bar for renewals

CEO Russ Slifer explains how Black Hills IP is able to assist clients with their renewals strategies thanks to its proprietary technology and partnership with Patrix IP Services.

The IP legal sector is often criticized for the slow speed with which it embraces technological change. But, for Russ Slifer, who has experienced the IP industry from a wide range of roles in the past 25 years, the adoption of technology is inevitable if companies and their law firms are to remain competitive in our increasingly digitized world.

His career has taken in partnerships in private practice, senior roles in corporate IP departments, including as Chief Patent Counsel at Micron Technology, and a high-profile stint in government as the Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce for IP and Deputy Director of the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO).

Now Chief Executive Officer at Black Hills IP (BHIP), a legal service provider that is recognized as an industry and technology pioneer, Russ is excited by the potential of technology to continue to improve and assist the work of IP professionals, both in law firms and corporate legal departments.

"Much of my career has been intertwined with the creation and widespread adoption of IP management platforms, such as Patricia®," he says. "IP firms and departments today already look very different to the big file rooms and typewriters of yesterday. When I started in IP, everything was done manually with paper and simple docketing databases."



Since then, IP firms and departments have moved from basic in-house systems to cloud-based docketing, and now enterprise solutions that enable collaboration with finance, inventors and external providers. Russ finds this progress exciting, but also believes there is more that can and should be done.

Process by design

It is a space that BHIP is well placed to fill. The firm was established in 2012 as an onshore alternative for the types of IP paralegal and docketing services that were, at that time, being moved to manual data centers in countries such as India. "That sort of outsourcing doesn't work for all customers," explains Russ, "so BHIP was created as an onshore US operation, based out of the Black Hills in South Dakota."

The objective was not to compete on labor costs, but instead to "embrace technology that improves data management, reduces our customers' costs and overhead, and drives better decision-making". This same approach is now being applied to patent renewals, a global business that has not been given the focus it deserves in Russ's view.

"Simply saying: Do you want me to pay this renewal or not? is not very efficient," he explains, "plus, it's very much still a manual process for the law firm chasing and sending out reminders. Our vision was to create a user interface that allowed the asset owner to truly manage their patents, by providing analytics that would help to inform their decisions and then record that logic in one centralized place, as well as enabling collaboration between the relevant stakeholders."

Get in touch!
sales@patrix.com



Client Interview

Get in touch!
sales@patrix.com

In other words, a tool that would “make the renewal process more thorough, and yet less hassle”.

However, entering into a competitive space such as the renewals market comes with certain hurdles, including the need to establish the global networks and local agents necessary to make the required payments. “That’s where Patrix IP Services came in,” says Russ. “It already has that established network in place, and has gone through the difficult process of building that business over time. Why seek to recreate that, when we could partner with Patrix to use its platforms to make the payments on behalf of our customers?”

Having that partnership in place allowed BHIP to focus on creating its user interface software, the tool its customers use to proactively manage their portfolios, while “giving our customers peace of mind that we are working with a trustworthy partner that is respected and has been established as a service provider for a long time,” says Russ. “We are talking about financial transactions, so it gives us a level of credibility and comfort that we are working with Patrix to manage the payments.”

Transparent pricing

BHIP manages the relationship with customers, and helps them with data and analytics through its user interface. Then, when a renewal decision is made, Patrix makes the renewal payment, either directly to the patent office (thereby saving unnecessary third-party agent fees), or via its global network of Patricia clients where a local representative is required.

Cost transparency is crucial. “Partially due to working with Patrix and its use of flat fees, we are able to provide cost transparency to customers that is not common in the market,” agrees Russ.

“Cost and service fees are stated up front, including currency conversion and local agent fees. This means that before anyone instructs a renewal using the interface, they have the itemized amount in front of them.”

It’s important for renewals customers to know what they’re paying for. “You can’t make an informed decision until you see the currency conversion and local fees,” emphasizes Russ. “Our philosophy from day one has been to ensure that customers know the charges upfront, with no hidden mark-ups. Patrix has the same philosophy and also makes for a good partner for us for those reasons.”

The Patrix IP Services Promise

Patrix IP Services was founded in 2006 on the request of Patricia clients, who were looking for the same levels of service for their patent renewal payments as they received for their IP management software. In the past three years alone, we have grown by 60%, all by staying true to our customer promise:

- No hidden fees: the cost offered is the cost invoiced;
- The personal touch: a single point of contact for all clients;
- The same high quality service, no matter the size of your portfolio;
- Investment in IT to ensure seamless integration and data transfers;
- Guidance and support from an experienced team: all employees have IP knowledge;
- Technology agnostic: we support Patricia and non-Patricia user clients.

Get in touch to find out how we can help your business or law firm at: sales@patrix.com



Client Interview

Get in touch!
sales@patrix.com

It's very rare to find a company that is not under pressure to improve its bottom line, but the focus in legal and IP departments has traditionally been on reducing headcount or a number of filings, rather than looking for ways to use technology to improve the budget and/or labour burden. For Russ, this is an area crying out for improvement.

Data-driven decisions

"If an organization has unlimited people and time, it can take a deep look at the portfolio and make educated decisions as to whether each patent is worth keeping," says Russ. "However, if a company doesn't have sufficient time to analyze, the default will be to pay renewals. By providing decision makers with instant access to the data they need to review each asset on its own merits, we can bring the cost of that analysis down, and help to focus the portfolio".

The tool also provides an alternative to the time-consuming and high-risk process of managing renewals within a law firm. "Most IP firms don't want to be the financial manager of their clients' renewals business," agrees Russ. "Naturally, they'd rather be focusing on their core competence, and that's where we step in. We treat their clients as a law firm wants its clients to be treated, not as a number. We're there to help them make intelligent decisions, not to make a buck from the renewal, and we'll work with the smallest inventors from a single patent up, giving them that same high level of service."

The same applies to Patrix IP Services, which supports clients of all sizes from small businesses with only five renewals a year to large companies renewing more than 12,000 patent rights annually.

Collaborating for progress

Patent renewals isn't the only area where Black Hills IP and Patrix IP Services have found common ground. The two companies have also been working together on tackling another perennial headache for customers: the risk and cost of human error in data entry. The result has been an API in Patricia that allows BHIP to upload docketing directly into Patricia after it extracts records from patent offices, analyzes the records and extracts important data, thereby reducing time on data entry and the risks of human error.

"No matter how good your team or its processes, the errors that create dirty data are due to human input," says Russ. "For whatever reason – whether from transposing a date, missing a date or reading a document wrong – it can all be traced back to mistakes in data entry. Our solution helps to overcome that by importing IP data from patent offices directly into Patricia. By removing the need to manually enter that information, this also speeds up the process of IP docketing: we can extract data today, and have it verified and in the database by tomorrow."

Technology has revolutionized the way we shop, communicate, work and travel. Little wonder that we're also starting to see wider adoption in legal and IP departments. "It's simply not possible to run a business by typewriter and fax anymore, and the big file rooms have all but gone," agrees Russ. "That would have been unthinkable when I started in the industry. However, that's the thing about technology: progress builds on itself. I'm excited to see what will happen in the next 25 years, and the role I'm sure our collaborations with Patrix will play." ■