

COVID-19 and IP: How the pandemic impacted IP portfolio management

World events invariably have repercussions for corporate innovation priorities, brand messaging and, therefore, IP. But, the unexpected arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic had an effect like no other on all our day-to-day lives, as [Karin Kärvling Søholt](#) from Patrix IP Helpware explains.

From the sudden switch to remote working to the cancellation of the busy IP conference calendar, how IP professional manage and communicate about IP changed completely in the past 15+ months. Some key lessons have been learned and some positive changes have also emerged as a result of this time of crisis, not least the introduction of more flexibility in the workplace.

Flexibility in a crisis

Pre-pandemic it was rare for both law firms and legal departments to even allow some of their staff to work from home; particularly, paralegals and admin staff. Whether a question of trust or presentism, most IP professionals were required to be in the office at all times during working hours.

This period of remote working has revealed what many teleworkers knew all along, that efficiency can actually increase when you work from home. Absent the distractions and minus the often long commutes, more work is being completed, and more effectively, by many employees.

What will happen post-pandemic? It seems certain that there is no way back, with many firms already announcing new working policies that enable employees to share their time between the company and home office, depending on their situation and preferences.

Of course, this requires the right levels of technology and IT support, something that many law firms and legal departments had to race to establish in the early days of the pandemic.

Technology kept us moving but exposed many shortfalls

Understandably, the sudden move to remote working placed extreme pressure on IT departments and infrastructure. At first, the focus was simply on making sure that staffs were equipped to do their jobs from home, whether supplying laptops or access to IP management systems and online meeting tools.

This subsequent period also exposed important holes for companies and law firms when it came to their reliance on technology. As it became increasingly clear that we would not return to our offices any time soon, those using systems that did not have remote or cloud-based access faced a major challenge, both in terms of access and security.

While no one knows for sure what will happen in the coming months, the need to invest in technology is completely certain. Companies need resilient and secure systems in place, including IP management systems that are accessible remotely. For some, it makes far more sense to invest in IT than in their premises.

As a software company, we see this in our interactions with customers. The need for digitalized and secure IP portfolio management tools is now top of the agenda for companies and law firms that may previously have preferred to keep their data within their four walls – or within their own systems.

It's also becoming increasingly clear that few internal IT teams have the time and resources to support such critical infrastructure alongside their other growing tasks. Better to switch to software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions where the provider takes care of the security, uptime and ongoing investment in technology.

Indeed, companies still using offline or internal systems are also missing out on a huge range of efficiencies, from automated workflows that streamline common processes to the reduction of manual entry (and human error) afforded by the ability to digitally compare and verify data against official (PTO) records.

Modern IP management systems, such as [Patricia®](#), enable flexible working patterns and a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach to information-sharing that speeds up our old ways of doing things. It also keeps sensitive IT data secure from prying eyes as we work from home, and perhaps over time, from airport lounges and coffee shops again.

Finding a new type of work-life balance

Of course, a balance must be found. So reliant are we now on technology that it is far too easy to spend all our time in front of our computers and the situation can be worse in these pandemic times for those that live alone or are based in countries under lockdown.

As a result, many companies and law firms have started to address employee wellbeing, and they have rightly done so. From virtual social events to reminders to take a break or exercise, taking the time to raise awareness about work-life balance when working remotely, and helping team members to establish it, is likely to be key to employees' health, motivation and retention in the coming months and years. It is something that we at Patrix have been focusing on this past year.

Of course, as a profession, we all miss the opportunity to catch up and mingle with our peers at the many IP industry conferences and events. It is hard to recreate that magic virtually, although there are obvious environmental benefits to us all taking fewer flights.

Now that we are beginning to see the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, I hope that we will get the chance to meet again in person to share our stories and challenges from this extraordinary time.

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