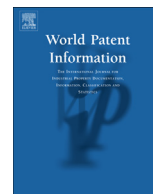


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## Internal marketing of the patent information team in the corporate environment



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## A B S T R A C T

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This article is a personal reflection by the author on the need for those patent information professionals working within large corporations to market themselves within their organisation, and hence increase the visibility of the patent information team and demonstrate the strategic value it adds to the organisation. It looks at why such internal marketing is necessary, and suggests some methods of achieving it successfully.

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## 1. Introduction

This article is not a typical paper in the nature of a definitive or scientific study of an aspect of patent information practice, but it is rather a reflection and some thoughts on the necessity of patent information professionals in the corporate environment learning and practising some marketing skills. As such, there are fewer ‘facts’ and more opinions than in the normal article. Some may feel that what is noted herein is merely common sense, but sometimes common sense needs to be said anyway.

Those of us who work in patent information teams for large corporations face many challenges; some are similar to those faced by fellow patent information professionals in IPOs, SMEs or individual consultancies, some are unique to our own global corporate environments. It is in the latter environment that we may particularly struggle to shine, being ‘lost’ among thousands of employees in labyrinthine corporate structures, perhaps not even knowing who our real clients are or should be. My own organisational structure is such that the patent information team sits within the Patent Department, which is in turn one part of the Legal Function in the Corporate Headquarters. Our R&D organisation(s) are separate, and remotely located from us round the globe. Even our own department is on many different sites globally, and not every site/country has information professionals there on the ground alongside them, so we have many clients we’ve never actually met. How can we make ourselves known, and reach out to them?

We are not employed as marketers and we cannot be experts in marketing – we have day jobs to do – but we can at least learn a few broad principles to apply in our own circumstances to help promote our teams within and across the company. Whether you call it ‘marketing’, ‘advocacy’, ‘outreach’ or some other term, the aim is the same: to increase the visibility of the patent information team and demonstrate the strategic value we add to our organisations.

## 2. Internal marketing – why bother?

As noted above, all corporate structures vary; some patent information teams are – like my own – part of the Patent Department or Legal function, some are part of an overall Information Services group in R&D, or some other corporate sector. Whatever structure you work within, your team may well be the sole provider of patent information services to your organisation as a whole. Service provision probably encompasses many, if not all, types of patent searching; patent alerts and watches; current awareness bulletins; and perhaps even business intelligence or competitor information based on patents. You may be in the happy position of holding an internal monopoly of such services, with no competitors. Lucky you! You’ve got it made! Haven’t you? So why would you need to bother spending time and effort marketing your team and its services to the very clients who have nowhere else to turn?

Well, are you sure that all those clients (and potential clients) are actually aware of you? Do they know you exist? Do they care? If the answer to those questions is “no”, then at a very basic level, you are missing out. It may be on trivial things like social invitations, or more serious things like educational or professional opportunities,

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but if people don't know you're there, you won't be included. And if people don't know you're there, they can't take advantage of all the great services you can offer them; your team's true worth is not appreciated, and its true value to the organisation not demonstrated. In tough economic times when cutbacks are rife, and we all know colleagues who have lost their positions, so *demonstrating our value is vital*.

We therefore already have several reasons to expend time and energy in marketing our teams. We might indeed hold a monopoly, but regardless:

- We still need to be trusted partners of our clients

We should be more than just the people that our clients *have* to turn to, we should be the people they *want* to turn to. They should not just be our clients, they should be our fans, even our 'groupies', and give us their active support and trust in our partnership. We need that, against the potential for the company 'bean counters' to want to cut back or outsource our work – happy partners can be good allies!

- We still need to have management support

Support of immediate and more senior managers is necessary for career development and progression within a large organisation.

- We still need to get professional recognition

In particular for those patent information teams who are embedded within the Patent Department, it can be a struggle to be seen as anything more than 'just another support function'. We need to be recognised in our own right as the skilled professionals we are, and marketing ourselves as such can help.

- We still need to counter perceptions that everything can be found via Google, and anyone can do it

We've all been there: "I can find everything on Google, why do I need you?" The challenge for us is to show what we can do that's *better* than Google or other search engines, and sell that message loud and clear.

- We still need to demonstrate how patent information adds strategic value to our organisation

This is perhaps the most vital point. In a world drowning in Information Overload, we need to make it clear to our organisations that we are skilled professional providers and interpreters of highly valuable patent information, which is crucial to organisational goals and strategies. Without patents, our companies cannot profit from their R&D, cannot get a return on investment, cannot ultimately survive. We help mitigate those risks; not everyone (including sometimes ourselves!) realises this fact. It's something we should be making known to clients, managers, and everyone with whom we interact – patent information teams add strategic value to the organisation, and provide a great ROI (return on investment) on their existence.

### 3. Internal marketing: what is it?

So, we see the need to market our team within the corporation. What does that actually mean? What is internal marketing in our context? I would argue that as much as anything, internal marketing is a mind-set; probably a whole new mind-set to most of us.

#### 3.1. The marketing mind-set

Once you start to think seriously about marketing your team, sooner or later you realise that it is not a one-off activity, not something you do in the last ten minutes of the day to tick a box, or get it over with. It is, or needs to become, an ongoing process, and an integral part of all your planning. Marketing has to be something that becomes second nature to you, and that you are prepared to do at every opportunity, even if just in the classic 'elevator pitch'. It has to be about your clients and their needs, targeted specifically at them, and driven by the benefits you can provide them, pitched to them in their own language.

If you think of the stereotypical 'salesman', you probably envisage someone extrovert, someone proactive (if not pushy), someone who gets 'in your face' and won't take no for an answer. If you think of the stereotypical patent information professional or 'librarian', you probably envisage someone more reserved, if not introvert, someone who operates in a reactive service, who tends to quietly get on with the job and not blow their own trumpet too much. Stereotypes may not always hold true for every individual of course, but they get to become stereotypes by having at least some degree of truth about them, so how do we turn introvert patent information professionals into more extrovert marketers?

Well, it's not going to happen for everyone; people are who they are. Not everyone is going to be willing or able to stand in a spotlight and sell the team's abilities. Adopting a marketing mind-set will for some, require moving out of their personal comfort zone to some degree, but

*"...results of current research emphasize the idea that librarians should be exposed to marketing concepts in order to understand the significance of marketing and its implications for libraries' survival in the 21st century.*

*There is no doubt that there is a need to encourage librarians of all branches of the profession to market their services in order to maintain their central position as information providers despite – and within – the new technologies."* [2]

Substitute 'patent information professional' for librarian in that quote, and it applies just as directly. It may be a shift in mind-set, but in the jungle of the corporate environment in a tough economy, it's one worth adopting for our own survival.

#### 3.2. What internal marketing can do for us

Adopting and acting on the mind-set of marketing our team and services brings benefits to both us and our clients:

- We get to know better who our clients are (or might be) and what they need from us (or might need)
- We can plan targeted services to meet those needs and provide added value
- We get to communicate effectively the benefits of our services
- We ensure clients are motivated to use those services and make the most of them
- We demonstrate the difference we make to the organisation and the impact we have on it

We begin to make better known the 'worth' of the patent information team, and why we are an invaluable resource.

### 4. How exactly do you go about internal marketing?

This is one of those areas where one size does not fit all, and you need to vary your tactics to suit your audience, but there's no doubt

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