



Company:

Leica Microsystems GmbH

Industry:

Microscopy and imaging

Operations:

Sells in 100+ countries

Customer since:

2016

Replaced:

In-house docketing system

Leica Microsystems Upgrades IP Program with IPfolio

"With IPfolio, I know instantly whether we are winning."



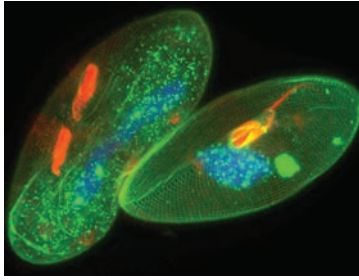
- TONY AFRAM
CHIEF PATENT COUNSEL
LEICA MICROSYSTEMS

COMPANY

Leica Microsystems GmbH is a truly global company. Headquartered in Wetzlar, Germany, Leica develops and manufactures microscopy and imaging products and software for customers in more than 100 countries.

Leica is also a subsidiary of Danaher, an American Fortune 150 company and one of the world's most successful lean manufacturing proponents. Danaher has seen huge growth (>21% annual shareholder returns since 1997) by buying successful companies and implementing its Danaher Business System (DBS), which combines key pillars of lean and kaizen-based systems and practices. It acquired Leica in 2005.





The Leica DFC9000 sCMOS microscope camera is highly sensitive with its high quantum efficiency of up to 82% and extremely low noise. The image shows a paramecium expressing GFP-Epiplasmin and Cy5-polyglycylated Tubulin. Nucleus stained with Hoechst 33258 (blue). Acquisition with LAS X. Specimen courtesy of Dr. A. Aubusson-Fleury, CGM-CNRS, France

BACKGROUND

After joining Leica in 2014, Chief Patent Counsel Tony Afram began attending DBS and Transactional Process Improvement (TPI) training sessions. He quickly saw the potential of applying lean practices to IP management.

“Lean models have traditionally been much more common in manufacturing, and to some degree in software development. Adoption in other departments has been much slower. Fortunately, every Danaher company encourages people to think in terms of lean, then provides technology support to do it.”

The traditional world of physical patent files stacked on desks didn't fit cleanly into Danaher's efficiency model, nor did Leica's incumbent process based on email, spreadsheets and an old docketing system. With a European IP team located in three locations across Germany and Switzerland, Afram thought the lean practices discussed in training could help his team standardize processes and collaborate much more efficiently on the 50+ first filings it handles annually.

FUNDAMENTALS OF EFFICIENCY

Afram's initial project roadmap was to focus on two fundamental areas; standard work and visual management.

Standard work ensures that teams work toward the same goal, everyone following the same process for each activity. A checklist documenting each step is a standard work foundation. Visual management means creating metrics and visualizations so everyone can understand where they are, their workload, and be able to answer the *“Are you winning with your daily tasks?”* question in seconds.

While beta testing this new IP model, Afram quickly realized that his visual management attempts in Excel would remain unsuccessful and that updating worksheets and exporting data took far too long. The need for IP-specific technology was obvious, yet, many of the IP management options he considered were too expensive and required far too much customization to be feasible.

“We needed one system for everyone, fast and easy access for our different locations, and something we could easily configure and update without tech support help. It needed to be an enabler so we could combine standard work, checklists and visual management. In addition, because we needed a lot of reporting flexibility, a combination of dashboards and granular reports were high on our list. IPfolio met all of our criteria and priorities.”

IMPLEMENTATION: GETTING UP-TO-SPEED

The on-boarding process took two months. IPfolio was connected to the existing infrastructure, including the finance department's SAP software. Hundreds of database tables were migrated from Excel, Leica's invention disclosure processes were mapped, and multiple dashboards were created to enable visual management.



Leica Microsystems has been driving imaging technology forward for well over 100 years.

“When we compare what we did before and what we do now, the ability to visualize what we are working on has made a huge difference. Now, when I ask my team, “Are you winning?”, they have the data to answer me very quickly.”

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“We mimicked our manufacturing environment by applying the workstation model to our mapping. The eight-step workflow, from receiving an invention disclosure and finalizing the files with the patent office, and all the associated files and activities were visually created in the IPfolio UI.”

When asked about the benefits of IPfolio for the IP department, Afram first emphasizes the fact that lean is an operations model that has been extremely successful for decades across dozens of Danaher companies.

“As far as standard work, we now have everything in one place. This includes what we call documentation or checklists, which are the routines or orders of operations we follow for everything. In terms of visual management, though, it’s early days. Overall, we’ve seen benefits in a half-dozen key areas, some of which have improved the workloads of individuals, while others have helped me as a manager.”

According to Afram, the areas include workload conformation, task prioritization, team cohesiveness, capacity utilization, resource allocation and resource acquisition.

MOVING FORWARD

Borrowing a hockey reference from his native Sweden, Afram feels as if they’re *“just in the first period right now.”* There’s been a huge amount of progress and early returns, but work remains, including selecting KPIs to track. The plan in the coming year is to identify the best KPIs based on business impact then focus on a handful.

“We knew that to update our IP processes to the fullest, we needed the right tool. We’ve got it. We wouldn’t have reached this point without this Salesforce/IPfolio combination. I definitely know we are on the right path, because whenever I meet other European colleagues and show them what we are doing, they frequently say “wow, I didn’t know you could do this.”



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