



IP Management made easier.

# Managing IP Beyond Excel

New approaches to intellectual property (IP) portfolio and information management

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## Intellectual Property Management Beyond Excel: Times Are Changing

### 1. The Challenge

Creating and maintaining a high-value IP portfolio is expensive and time-consuming. Most companies have outsourced IP prosecution work to law firms, with the in-house IP team focusing mainly on managing the portfolio. In a surprising number of organizations, an Excel spreadsheet is still the tool of choice to accomplish this task. We would not doubt that Excel is a flexible and useful software application, but it has a few fundamental limitations making it quite inadequate as an IP management tool.

#### Excel is a Spreadsheet, not a Database

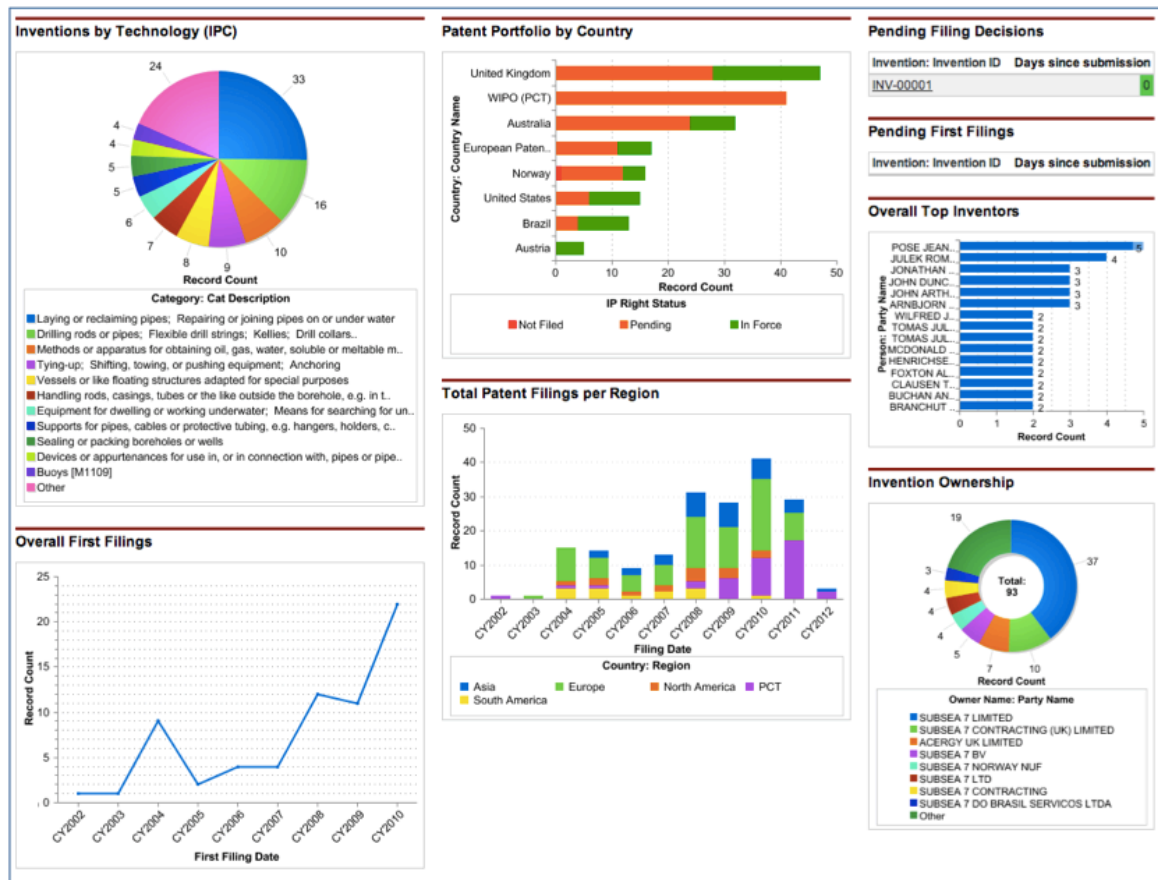
First and foremost, Excel is not a database, nor is it a reporting solution. It does not enforce any structure or consistency, neither on the input side when entering data nor on the output side when generating reports. Just think about inventor names as an example: you will typically find the same name in a spreadsheet with different spelling variations, with and without their middle initial, and with first/last name in different order. This makes it very difficult to derive any meaningful statistics, such as who were your most active inventors over a certain time span. This seemingly simple reporting exercise becomes a manual and error-prone counting game with your typical spreadsheet.

Second, Excel is not connected in real time with the patent office databases, so all data has to be entered and updated manually. In practice, this is often not done in a timely manner, resulting in the information being neither current nor complete.

Third, Excel is a single-user application and provides no meaningful way for sharing information in real time with a number of other individuals. You probably have been in the situation of emailing around several updated versions of the same spreadsheet, and then finding it hard to track which was the most current version in circulation. If more than one person should enter and update data, this becomes entirely unmanageable.

#### Reporting Woes

How many times have you been working on an Excel spreadsheet for hours and hours, only to discover that you have bad data? It is a frustrating but very common situation. Reporting with Excel involves manual data gathering and verification, manually building charts and graphs, and manually distributing the final result to colleagues. Since these steps are not automated and standardized, employees will spend many hours creating, adjusting, refining and sharing spreadsheets. The result of each report will depend on each individual's skill level in Excel, with different people visualizing the same data in different and inconsistent ways. That is a real problem, since the primary goal of graphs and charts isn't just making the data look prettier, but to enhance its usefulness for making decisions.



Standard IPfolio Dashboard – It would take most users hours to create this in Excel

## Document Management

The information management problem does not end with tracking structured, tabular data. What about documents? Many IP departments have built folder structures or use collaboration tools like SharePoint to manage the considerable amounts of documents and files that accompany a patent portfolio – entirely detached from the “master” spreadsheet. Let us also not forget the thousands of emails between attorneys, paralegals, inventors and other stakeholders that also go into the mix of data and information to manage and keep at hand.

## 2. Traditional Solutions

### Relying on Outside Counsel on Reporting

Many IP Managers receive reports from their law firms on the status of their IP rights, and smaller companies and IP groups in particular tend to rely on these as their main information source regarding the status of their portfolios. However, these are static reports that contain

mainly legal (bibliographic) data and usually lack any information linking the IP to the company's business, technology, and products – information that is essential for managing an IP portfolio.

### **Docketing Systems**

Do docketing systems solve the problem? They have been around for many years and provide a more structured home to the multi-faceted data surrounding a company's IP portfolio and activities. However, they only provide a partial solution. Designed mainly for law firms, most docketing systems focus on the legal aspects of IP Management and have limited fields and flexibility to store more business-related information, such as invention ratings, technology categorizations, and connections between the company's IP, contracts, and products. Furthermore, the reporting capabilities of docketing systems have been notoriously limited and the source of much pain and complaints by their users. Finally, most of these systems do not provide adequate document management.

### **Hybrid Approaches**

Due to the reporting limitations of docketing systems, many IP portfolio managers have become experts to some degree in exporting data out of these databases and manipulating the data in Excel. This approach is obviously subject to the limited suitability of Excel as a tool for producing and sharing reliable and consistent reports, as described above.

### **Enterprise IP Management Systems**

Over the past years, a few docketing systems have evolved into more comprehensive IP Management software that addresses some of the issues described above. The main problem here has been the cost of acquiring and implementing these systems. In most cases, such an implementation is a highly complex and time-consuming endeavor, with project timelines of several years being the norm rather than the exception. The involvement of in-house IT and/or third party IT service providers that have to install and maintain servers, databases, backup systems, and the like, frequently leads to the total cost of implementation and operation ending up at a multiple of the mere software licenses.

These facts explain why sophisticated enterprise IP Management systems have not found a broad market beyond the very largest corporations with resourceful global IP groups.

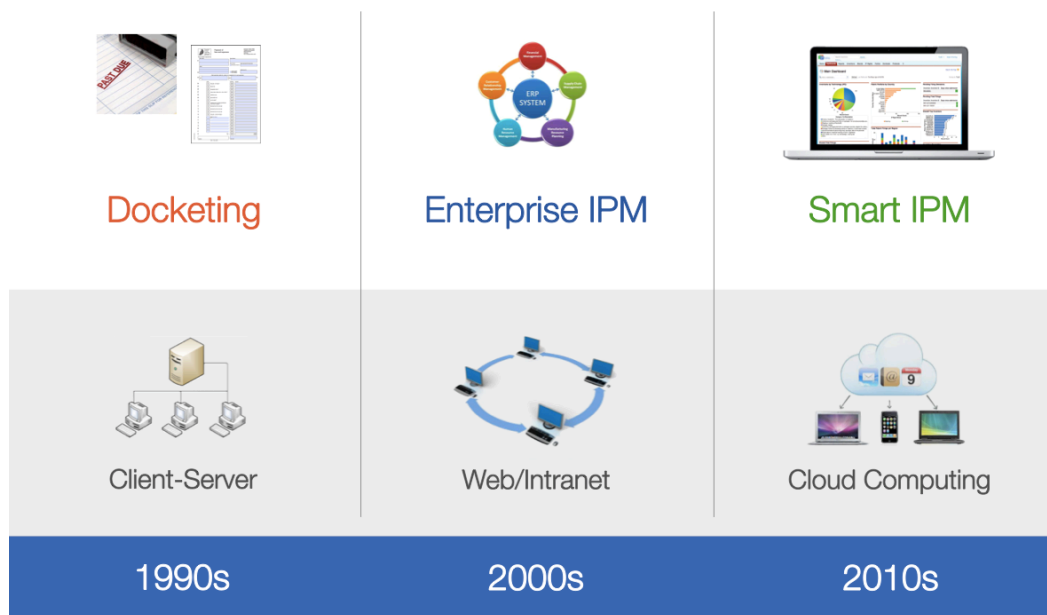
## **3. A New Generation of Tools – Smart IP Management**

So what is the most efficient way of managing a mid-sized or small and growing IP portfolio? How do we avoid a mess, and what is the path toward more efficiency? How do we get more accurate, real-time reports on the status of the IP portfolio and its connection to the business? How can we reach a more strategic level? How do we organize, visualize and strategize IP on a daily basis?

IP Managers have long waited for a robust yet affordable alternative to Excel, homegrown databases, docketing systems, and prohibitively expensive high-end solutions. **IPfolio** has

entered the scene to fill this gap. For the first time, a comprehensive software tool that can handle all of the aspects discussed is available at a minimal investment in terms of cost, setup time, corporate IT resources, and data entry.

Some users may be cautious about low-cost alternatives to more established, expensive software systems, as they fear that a simpler tool might require a lot of time as the main investment. The good news is that times have changed, and new technology is changing the game in the software industry. Fundamental advances in how business software is delivered as a service over the Internet enable a new generation of powerful and flexible applications for many niche business needs, including IP Management.



### *Evolution of IP Management Software*

If you want to get a taste of this new world, we recommend visiting the [AppExchange](#), the Enterprise Cloud Computing marketplace that hosts close to 2,000 business applications built on the Force.com platform, which is also the foundation of IPfolio. Many of these business apps are described in the customer reviews as the magic bullet for which people have been searching for years. Whether the task at hand is contract management, project management, risk management, or – you guessed it – intellectual property management, the AppExchange is home to solutions that are much more powerful than the spreadsheet used so far, yet much more affordable and easier to implement than traditional enterprise software.

For IP managers and professionals, of course we want to encourage you specifically to take a closer look at what the future of IP portfolio management looks like – just visit us at <http://www.ipfolio.com>.