



Advanced Intellectual Property management solutions: A buying guide for IP professionals

The world of intellectual property is rapidly changing, driven not only by changes in the legal process, but also by increasing pressure to derive strategic and real value from the corporate IP portfolio. For IP professionals, from Chief Patent Counsels and corporate attorneys to their patent agents and paralegal staff, the job of IP management is also changing, requiring increased efficiency, flexibility, responsiveness, and collaboration.

Here's the challenge:

Can a single IP management software package help docketing staff improve their work product while supporting better decision-making strategies for management needs? Yes. As the process of managing IP evolves, technology is keeping pace. Selecting a better IPM solution that goes beyond docketing can help enterprise IP groups optimize their work at every level. These “next generation” solutions offer purpose-built, fully integrated, and easy-to-use applications which address the needs and goals for all users, from the patent admin to the vice president of IP, to improve the efficiency of IP management.

This paper briefly examines several key attributes to look for when considering an advanced IPM solution. By understanding these attributes and their corresponding benefits, IP staff can help facilitate the conversation with management, IT, R&D, and other stakeholders to choose a system that goes beyond simply managing docketing to a true enterprise-wide IP management solution that returns tangible value for many departments across the corporation.

Drivers of change

The business of IP management has changed significantly over the past few years, due to changes in the law, the competitive nature of business, and the availability of new, more sophisticated technology systems.

Possibly the most significant driver, the America Invents Act, altered many aspects of patent management. Namely, the move from a First-to-Invent to a First-to-File model requires enterprises to accelerate the IP process from day one of invention disclosure, and to raise standards for data integrity, work flow efficiency, and business intelligence throughout the filing process. Thus, many enterprise IP departments are rethinking their work flow processes and finding that the docketing systems currently in use are not flexible or robust enough to support these new processes and expanded business goals.

Further, as corporations begin to pay more attention to IP as a strategic initiative or profit center, there is a corresponding need for better reporting and analytics to support intelligent business decisions. Managing the corporate IP portfolio as an asset requires visibility into the patent pipeline at any given point, accurate reporting on resources, timelines, and legal spend, and metrics to assess performance and value. Of equal value are IPM solutions which easily integrate with other enterprise business solutions, to facilitate information sharing and help staff work more efficiently.

Finally, nearly every part of the enterprise organization faces increased pressure to control costs while continuing to innovate and deliver value, and the legal department is no exception. Doing more with less, or at least doing more with the same budget and resources year-over-year requires creativity, flexibility, and a willingness to rethink inefficient processes. Advanced IPM solutions provide visibility into a complex, hard-to-manage process, enabling the IP organization to better manage budgets and improve productivity while delivering on strategic invention initiatives.

One thing is certain, these drivers of change highlight the need for corporate IP departments to develop fluid, responsive processes to increase efficiencies, provide better visibility to IP assets, help control legal spend, ensure data integrity, and make it easier to manage the expanding and ever-changing portfolios of strategic IP assets.

Changes in the way teams manage IP require a corresponding change in the IP management software. Basic docketing systems that are simply outgrowths of file management programs cannot suffice. At the other extreme, trying to adapt a complex business process management (BPM) solution to the specific needs of legal departments can be a cumbersome process leading to mixed results. A wiser and more practical choice is a purpose-built suite of advanced IPM applications designed and delivered with the needs of today's IP staff in mind.

Key attributes of an advanced IPM solution

Deploying a new IPM solution impacts several parts of the enterprise: the legal staff and management, inventors and R&D, billing operations, and of course, the IT department. For each stakeholder, the overall goal is to select a solution which in some way facilitates, and one hopes, improves, each group's ability to do its job and return value to the corporation without introducing any new risk.

The table below offers a very high level snapshot of some key attributes of advanced IPM solutions, compared to standard docketing software, and how each adds value to one or more user groups within the enterprise. More detail is provided in the following sections.

Standard IPM...	Advanced IPM solutions...	User benefits with...
Limited work flows based on a fixed model of IP management and lacking tight integration with docketing and country rules	True, form-based process management work flows with purpose-built processes based on best practices, adaptable to each company's IP requirements	Fast deployment with ability to modify for continuous process improvement; More efficient work flow—the right task to the right person at the right time; increased management and control
Basic reports, static coded with no ability to incorporate new, or custom fields	Sophisticated standard and ad-hoc reporting and analytics allowing higher-level views of data and better insights presented precisely at the right time in the process	Visibility into the critical aspects of the IP pipeline for just-in-time decision making; No IT needed to run custom reports
Inflexible, hard-coded, or requires vendor or IT to customize fields, work flows, etc	Configuration allows self-service modification of fields, work flows, and dashboards while protecting data integrity	Customer requirements drive the solution; Easy to adapt to better business processes or portfolio changes; Decreases IT costs and deployment time
Considers IP as a cost center	Supports IP as a strategic initiative with robust features for easily merging/ divesting/ licensing of IP or entire portfolios	Visibility and transparency to manage costs and optimize portfolio value; Better alignment of limited resources to strategic goals; Enhances ROI of investments
Isolated, solitary system with limited functionality and flexibility	Enterprise-savvy integrated system which includes detailed financial information for budgeting and forecasting, as well as plug-and-play operability with law firms, outsourced services, and other enterprise apps	Execs have access to data and reports for intelligent decision-making; Improved manageability of outside counsel and other spend to help control costs and maximize IP value

Less work. More flow.

With the right work flow architecture the system does the tedious work which allows your process to truly flow.

True work flows

Today's enterprises need systems that are as flexible, fast-moving, and responsive as they are. So-called 'work flow add-ons' to docketing systems that do little more than issue alerts on task due dates are not enough. Advanced IPM solutions are built from the ground up around the work flow process. True work flows enable more granular reporting and efficiency improvements as users can 'see', track and improve inefficiencies across the process.

Essential features of an advanced IPM solution are purpose-built, documented work flow templates based on best practices, with a simple interface that makes it easier to bring new hires, or outside counsel, up-to-speed, reducing the potential for data entry or procedural errors. This enables tighter management of operating costs as well as closer adherence to the desired process.

True work flows are adaptable, flexible, user-friendly systems for putting the right information in front of the right person at the right time. As each process is undertaken and completed, the system—through the rules defined in the work flow—advances that task to the next person in the process order. By placing the onus of data and process integrity on the work flow system, IP staff can be assured that the information is input correctly and in a timely manner. A truly advanced work flow can reduce or nearly eliminate the process management busywork normally associated with IP prosecution, as managed by legacy docketing systems.

The most advantageous work flow solutions start with templates built from the best practices of related industry, then configured to the organization's particular needs and goals. A true work flow will reliably define the process, automate basic tasks with minimal intervention, and reduce the possibility of data entry errors. An important benefit of a configurable system is that the IP staff can continually improve its process models without causing disruption to the business or incurring exorbitant costs by having to call IT or an outside engineering consultant.

The result is efficiency gains through "just-in-time" management and automated processes. Higher accuracy, more timely work results, greater process insight, and lower risk are all benefits of this "true" work flow approach.

Unleash your data

Once exposed to an easy to use, self-service analytics solution, you'll find new ways to leverage data that would have previously been unthinkable.

Sophisticated reporting and analytics

Information is only good if it is accessible, meaningful, and timely. The data contained in an IP management system goes far beyond patent numbers and filing dates. A robust IPM solution should enable the corporate IP staff to easily mine this data in innumerable ways, providing clues to the efficiency of their processes, providers quality and cost of the IP. Today's IP managers need information-on-demand, so advanced IPM solutions that include sophisticated reporting and analytics applications are quickly becoming a must-have. In addition to a standard set of reports, enterprises can benefit from comprehensive visual analytics suites with graphical data mapping that also enable users to easily create ad hoc reports with any combination of data parameters.

For example, with an easily configurable visual "dashboard", counsel can see at a glance important statistics such as:

- How many days, on average, does it take from invention disclosure to the decision to file? Where, precisely, are the delays in the process?
- How many inventions were developed per business unit, product line, department and manager?
- Where are there gaps in the portfolio of active or in-process patents, and how is it performing versus corporate goals?
- What's the average time required for outside counsel firm A to draft and file a basic patent? Compared to firm B, which firm is providing higher quality service?
- What is the legal spend to date and how should the budget be optimized based on specific variable IP investment scenarios?

Having the right people see the data that is relevant to them in a timely manner is just one of the benefits of sophisticated reporting analytics. With easy, on-the-fly access to data in both raw and visual forms, the IPM solution becomes a business intelligence system, providing real-time strategic insight into the health of the enterprise IP.

Your best practices

Everyone works in their own way. You should have a solution that introduces you to best practices, but gives you the freedom to adapt to your best practices.

Configuration versus customization

A common hurdle in most IP management systems is the vast amount of IT resources required to deploy, modify, and maintain the software. Even the simplest user request to add a data field, change a classification, build a new report, or alter a work flow typically requires an IT resource or the vendor, to customize the software at the code level. Not only is this costly, it unnecessarily hinders the IP staff from completing their work as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Advanced IPM solutions are developed to eliminate this hurdle. Designed for heterogeneous IP environments, these systems include built-in configuration layers to minimize the need for customized coding or scripting to modify the out-of-the-box software. Configuration provides the user with the ability to define and redefine their own fields, classifications, reports and work flows. New fields are immediately added to all areas of the system and are treated as native fields which can be used in existing reporting and analytics. These modifications are maintained even if the underlying software is upgraded to a new release.

By contrast, in older, less flexible IP systems, each change no matter the size requires some form of recoding of the software. The cost of the IT engineer's time, as well as the risk associated with modification of the existing code base, makes customization a costly and difficult undertaking. Furthermore, with this rigid system, upgrades are more difficult, costly, painful, and most importantly keep the user from taking advantage of new features.

In an agile IP management system, users can easily adjust best practices' to internal needs. Not only can this dramatically reduce the total cost of ownership of the IPM solution, it gives the IP staff more flexibility to optimize the work flows and respond rapidly to changes in the corporate IP portfolio, organization, acquisitions/divestitures, patent law, or market imperatives.

IP in the C-Suite

Executives know IP is important, but often misunderstand it. The right IPM solution can elevate the understanding of IP impact on business.

IP as a strategic initiative

One of the primary responsibilities of the Chief IP Officer is to leverage IP as a valuable strategic asset. The more visibility counsel has into all aspects of the IP portfolio, the easier it is to make timely and profitable business decisions. Here again, transparent, immediate access to the right information at the right time, along with sophisticated analytics tools to help evaluate that information, is a requirement for today's enterprise legal department.

By combining flexible data structures with robust business intelligence (BI) tools, advanced IPM solutions empower:

- Alignment of IP with strategic business goals
- On-target budget management
- Improved visualization of patent families and classifications
- More accurate assessment of portfolio values
- Better management of licensing revenues and contracts
- Easier assimilation of acquired portfolios, and divestiture of underperforming patents
- Immediate and easy access to accurate data to support “just-in-time” decision making

The stakes are high. Corporate IP departments must be able to accurately and quickly provide valuations for any part of the IP portfolio. Likewise, when an acquisition or dispossession is completed, counsel needs the ability to easily consolidate and validate the related IP assets. Advanced IPM solutions can also help attorneys keep “fingers on the pulse” by delivering the most up-to-date information through ad hoc reports and timely alerts, allowing more time for higher-level IP decisions. In addition, better visibility into costs and returned value enables attorneys to better manage assets and overall legal spend. In today's increasingly competitive business environment, using advanced IPM solutions to protect and enhance corporate IP strategy is a sound business investment.

Connected and secure

There is a delicate balance between opening lines of communication and exposing risk. It is paramount to validate that your IPM solution supports rich security models before opening it up.

Enterprise integration and collaboration

The legal department cannot work in a vacuum, and neither can the IP management system. As part of a dynamic enterprise, legal staff needs the tools to transparently share information and collaborate with counterparts in R&D, finance, human resources, and other departments. However, previous generations of docketing systems or IPM software are typically solitary, closed systems. Extracting data for use in billing, patent reviews, or other corporate reporting often requires custom batch processing scripts or, worse, tedious manual manipulation.

Today's corporate IP departments require advanced IPM solutions which easily integrate with other mission-critical applications such as billing, security, and financial systems. With standard, documented APIs, the advanced IPM solution can offer seamless integration into the enterprise application network, increasing employee productivity, decreasing IT costs, and reducing the potential for manual errors. Coupled with integration APIs, the advanced IPM solution also delivers robust security layers that protect down to the data level and provide fine control for user access and authorization.

As advanced IPM becomes more integrated into the enterprise, it can better support transparent collaboration both within the legal department and among various departments across the company. This integration can also be extended to outside law firms and other outsourced services, enhancing communication while also improving project management.

Available and secure

With the right provider, a cloud solution is as secure as or more secure than on-site. But, look before you leap. Not all hosted solutions are created equal.

What you need to know about the cloud

IT departments are embracing the advantages of Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), or cloud-based software, for mission-critical applications. A cloud architecture enables software solutions that are highly reliable, easy to deploy, easy to use, and easy to modify to accommodate business process changes. This, of course, benefits the IP staff as well, as they can work more efficiently, configure the applications to their specific needs, and perform their jobs at a higher level—all at a lower cost to the business.

However, where enterprise IP is concerned, a secure software environment is absolutely critical. Fortunately, some IPM solutions vendors not only understand this concern, but have also addressed it by designing applications from the ground up to be highly secure, specifically within a cloud-based architecture.

Any company considering moving from on-premise docketing software to a cloud-based advanced IPM system should make sure to vet potential solutions for their capabilities with respect to these key security features:

- Standards compliance—does the vendor comply with the industry's best security practices?
- Data encryption—if the system is breached, is your data still secure?
- Backup and recovery—is your data safe if it is corrupted, deleted or unavailable?
- Separation of account data—is your data stored separately from other companies?
- Intrusion prevention and detection—will you, and your vendor, know if the data has been breached?

Most experienced enterprise IT teams will consider these questions and others as they validate the security features of any solutions provider. What IP managers need to know is that high-levels of security are possible with cloud-based solutions, if the vendor is carefully chosen and the IT group has a clear understanding of how to implement and maintain good security practices.

Compare and contrast

One of the best ways to evaluate your processes and solutions is to compare notes with your peers.

Starting the conversation

Moving to the right advanced IPM solution is a sound investment that starts with a simple conversation. For example, the IP department might begin with a review of current processes, opportunities for improvement, and prioritized specifications for what is required in a new IPM solution. Some questions to start with include:

- What's working and what's not working in the way we handle IP management today?
- Which parts of the process are tedious, repetitive, or low-value and can these be automated?
- What information do we want to be able to access more easily? Where do we need more insight or more transparency?
- Are there any identifiable places where the process gets "stuck" or where we could do things differently to be more efficient and competitive?
- How do we adapt to meet the future strategic goals?
- Would a better IPM solution improve productivity and accuracy? Would it make the job of IP management easier?
- Does it reduce costs and mitigate risks?
- Does it add value to the department, to the enterprise?

Intellectual property is a critical business asset, and docketing staff need reliable software systems that increase process efficiency, reduce risk of data errors, and improve the results of their work. Advanced IPM solutions offer a better environment to support more consistent docketing work, while also delivering features for collaboration, reporting, analytics, enterprise integration, security, and better decision-making. In fact, these more advanced IPM solutions make docketing easier, and enable IP staff to add value in other areas of the enterprise.

About Lecorpio

Lecorpio, the leader in IP management and analytics solutions, helps innovative companies quickly turn ideas into assets. The enterprise-class suite of applications spans the entire IP supply chain, including invention disclosure management, patent and trademark management, e-billing, licensing management and general matters management. The solution includes powerful work flow capabilities that easily configure to a company's business process and includes an IP dashboard with over 160 KPIs.

Lecorpio is used by 5 of the top 20 most active US patent filers, as well as well-known innovators such as Adobe, T-Mobile, Analog Devices, Rockwell Automation, NEC, NetApp and Red Hat.

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