



International - Will the AIPPI do more to further trademark interests?

By Trevor Little

September 27 2012

The [International Association for the Protection of Intellectual Property](#) (AIPPI) has released a [212-page report](#) which suggests a radical roadmap for the future of the organisation. While changes have yet to be agreed, if implemented the recommendations could bring increased benefits to brand owners.

With 8,000 members, AIPPI boasts a significant constituency and, while it consists primarily of 'IP attorneys in private practice', it does include corporate trademark attorneys amongst its membership. Looking ahead, it commissioned a strategy project, prepared by [Robin Rolfe Resources](#), to identify ways in which the association can develop its mission – and, in this regard, the resulting report is fairly uncompromising, noting: "AIPPI will need to make significant changes. Change is hard, especially for an association that is proud of its history and traditions. Furthermore, lawyers are trained to look backwards, rely on precedence and avoid risk." However, it notes that the organisation, if it wishes to lead debate and afford change, will have to act with more urgency, and cannot "lead by issuing resolutions or reports and leaving implementation to chance".

The document goes on to make a number of recommendations, including changes to the association's "unnecessarily complicated and cumbersome" structure and the creation of "a broader based committee system that more effectively invites participation and productivity; provides fulfilment and recognition to members; and directs greater resources and attention to the interests of the association and its members beyond the scientific work". It adds that communications should be tailored to "be relevant to different categories of members/target members" and stresses the need to focus on activity outcomes, noting that the organisation currently seems reluctant to be seen as a lobbying organisation.

The report, while critical of current structures and stressing the need for reform, is a positive development for the association, demonstrating a desire to look to the future and evolve to meet the needs of today's IP practitioner. What will be of particular interest for trademark practitioners will be whether future changes see the organisation do more to highlight and further trademark interests.

The AIPPI **has its roots in the scientific community** so it is perhaps not surprising that patents form a core focus for its activities, but the report notes that the association is often regarded as "too old, too white, too male, too European, too IP boutique, too patent". That said, the AIPPI has always had trademarks under its umbrella and two of the authors of the report boast significant trademark experience (**Robin Rolfe** served as executive director of **INTA** for more than 15 years, while **Tove Graulund** served in multiple volunteer leader positions at **MARQUES**, including as chair for five years).

An interesting aspect of the study is therefore its comparative analysis of various international IP associations, in which it states: "Many regard INTA as the leading organisation in IP, notwithstanding that its scope is limited to trademarks. Attending the annual meeting is considered essential by IP firms. While the organisation is well known for its work promoting and protecting trademarks and the interests of brand owners, the size and social aspects of the annual meeting tend to dominate its public image."

Despite regarding INTA as the leading IP organisation, it seems that an increased role as a trademark advocate could be envisioned for the AIPPI. The report concludes with the recommendation of a new mission statement for the association, which reads as follows: "The mission of AIPPI is to provide leadership in formulating fair, predictable and well-reasoned intellectual property policies and practices that balance the interests of all stakeholders and allow society to benefit from innovation, creativity and brand identity."

The inclusion of 'brand identity' catches the eye as it suggests that trademark issues will be given even more prominence if the organisation chooses to address the perception that it is 'too patently'. As to how far change will be embraced, we will have to wait and see - Rolfe is due to present the report to the association's executive committee in Seoul next month.

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