

5 Mar
2020

Daren Tang to WIPO: the trademark community reacts

Following yesterday's news that Daren Tang of Singapore is set to take over as the next Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), we reached out to folk in the trademark industry on how they think he could shape the organisation in the years to come.

As *WTR* previously reported, Tang will be WIPO's first Director General from Asia and will take the helm after a successful stint as [chief executive](#) of the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore (IPOS), which he transformed from being an administration registry into an "innovation agency". It followed a particularly politicised election campaign, with the most coverage focused on the candidacy of China's Wang Binying which was strongly opposed by the US government.

The [next step](#) in the election process is the WIPO General Assembly, which will take place on 7 and 9 May, wherein Tang will almost certainly be confirmed as the new Director General. If all goes smoothly, Tang is expected to start the role on 1 October.

Below are responses to yesterday's nomination result from experts in the trademark community. If you have any reaction or insight into Tang's appointment, [email it to WTR](#).

"A lawyer who thinks like a businessman"

Daren Tang is perceived as a lawyer who thinks like a businessman. He is a Harvard graduate with a hip, tech-entrepreneur attitude. He is media savvy and has managed a very active online campaign that goes back to 2017 when he was nominated as chair of the SCCR at WIPO. His campaign had a clear message of being involved in the legal and economic side of IP development. Tang is also seen as active and visible, engaging with member states, leading trainings, and publishing articles. Like Chile, some indicated that Singapore could be seen as playing a kind of crossover role between developed and developing countries. He has also been sold by the media as an excellent broker and bridge-builder between the north and the south and between the east and the west.

Another strength of Tang is his successful administration of the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore (IPOS). Back in 2017, *Forbes* described Singapore's commitment to strengthening its IP protections and creating awareness of the value of IP, and for that message to be replicated by other countries. Singapore consistently ranks among the best in the world for its IP environment, and the International Property Rights Index, which ranks countries according to their protection of physical and intellectual property rights, reported again this year that Singapore is the best in the region for protection of IP rights, and fourth overall in the world. The IPOS has pursued the toughest IP standards to attract businesses and inventors to register their IP assets in the territory.

In terms of what I think Tang's priorities should be, information technology (IT) is moving towards a point where a vast new set of IP rules will soon be needed. Artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and algorithms are all changing the way we experience the world today. We are already in a transition that is putting a lot of stress on both the economy and society, and a new set of IP laws will be needed to counteract any possible adverse effects.

To address this big technology transition, the new Director General needs to stay up to date with the new technologies and have a comprehensive understanding of intellectual property. WIPO needs to remain relevant, this can only be achieved if the organisation is agile enough to address the current technological disruption. Technologies such as AI should also be integrated into WIPO's activities. The world is changing rapidly, and hence Tang will need to understand the impact on innovation, creative and entrepreneurial endeavours, and the IP system.

[Andrés Izquierdo](#) is a partner at *Andrés Izquierdo & Lawyers* in Washington, DC.

"Keen to see the SCT's work on design filing harmonisation move towards an eventual treaty"

Daren Tang is to be congratulated on his appointment. The shoes of the current Director General, Francis Gurry, will be big shoes to fill, but Tang's successes at IPOS mean he's very well placed to do so. WIPO has a long list of important projects already in hand – for my part, I'm keen to see the SCT's work on design filing harmonisation move towards a diplomatic conference and an eventual treaty. This would be a huge boon for individual designers and SMEs, making it cheaper and easier to protect their innovative designs around the world.

[David Stone](#) is global head of IP at *Allen & Overy*.

"We need to see improvements in the daily running of the Madrid System"

I am thrilled that he is coming in with a landslide victory because it should mean that there will be strong support for him and the organisation from the beginning of his tenure. While he is one of the candidates I have not had the pleasure of meeting personally yet, he comes from one of the most advanced and forward-thinking IP offices and I feel quite confident that he has what it takes to do a good job. People tell me he is clever, proactive. Singapore was one of the driving forces in getting the ASEAN countries signed up for the Madrid system, so it must be good news for WIPO and its main goals.

However, while he comes in with strong support, I would like to see him gathering an internationally broad and diverse set of people for his management team. I believe that it will strengthen the organisation if it is seen to have different kinds of people with different skills at a high level. A combination of experienced people from within and some new blood from outside with the appropriate experience would be a good combination. WIPO has a tradition of being geographically diverse, so that should not be an issue.

Furthermore, I would be very happy if we can see a strong focus on the core business of WIPO; namely to run the systems efficiently and with high quality. There has been progress on the Madrid System, and it has been great to see many new countries join. But we need to see improvements in the daily running of the Madrid System and a reduction in the hassles for users and the national IP offices. It needs to get closer to the users and meet their expectations, and the cooperation with the registries needs to be improved and made seamless to the benefit of all. Finally, I am waiting to see how he will involve the users in this. The time leading up to the election is focused on the member states and there has been a lot of activity by the candidates to promote themselves to gather votes. It would be good to see that the users also matter, despite having no votes in the election.

Tove Graulund is owner of [Graulund Consulting](#) and previously worked as an external consultant (Madrid Protocol) for WIPO.

Jonathan Walfisz

Author | Reporter

jonathan.walfisz@lbresearch.com



TAGS

[Government/Policy](#), [IP Offices](#), [Asia-Pacific](#), [International](#), [Singapore](#)