

IP Centrum: Reinventing renewals

The Patent Lawyer Magazine has been granted exclusive access to IP Centrum's top secret R&D suite, gaining insight into an exciting new project that could change the renewals industry.

Renewals are a big challenge faced by IP firms and large applicants, fraught with risk, a complicated regulatory landscape and arduous administration. The renewals industry is predominantly serviced by a small number of large, incumbent service providers, but many clients consider these services a necessary evil, and cite numerous criticisms such as a lack of transparency and inflated currency charges.

The renewals service industry has a notoriously high barrier to entry. The margins are very low, and the litigation risk disproportionately high. Then there's the problem of the gargantuan effort and investment required to research all of the regulations, and set up a foreign associate network, and of course to find clients who are willing to move from their existing provider, porting all of their cases over to a new service. All of this adds to the stronghold of the large incumbents.

But from what we've seen, all of that may be about to change. It would have been hard not to be impressed as we were ushered through the pure-white, iconic test-tube decaded corridor into what IP Centrum's staff lovingly call The Geek Suite. There's glass and technology

everywhere, and complicated code or next-generation graphics on every screen. The centerpiece being a custom designed and commissioned six-position desk, overlooking an entire "white-wall" painted with a white-board finish, covered in drawings, lists and diagrams. CEO, Simon de Banke, explained "It took us over a year to find a company that had the capability to build this desk for us to the precision and standard we wanted. Notice how it's designed so that every person working at it, can see the white wall or anyone else at the desk with as little twist as geometrically possible? We take great care of details like that. If you want the best people, and want to help them do the best work of their lives, you need to provide the best possible environment".

IP Centrum are currently the industry leader in European Patent Validation services: they have never failed a patent validation. "We file more Validations than any other company in the world now - with a 100% perfect record - no losses, no deadlines missed". Simon believes that although the way they handle validation now may seem obvious, it didn't originally. "As human beings, we instinctively find it hard to move away from 'the way it's



done' regardless of whether there may be a better way. It seems obvious to use us for EP validation filing now, but in the beginning it wasn't so obvious and so it took a few bold and visionary formalities people to make that early decision to go with this new service. We build services for formalities people who want to do better, to be special, not just to do 'no worse than everyone else'. Now, IP Centrum have done exactly that for renewals too, and have built a service that, as Simon and his staff believe, will change the way renewals are handled forever.

Aside from Simon's infectious passion towards the future of renewals, it is clear IP Centrum places a high importance on taking care of its team. Staff have a glittering array of benefits from free on-site hairdressing, to healthy organic cooked lunches selected from an online-menu each morning. There's a chill-out room set aside with a massage chair, free chiropractic treatment (as Simon explains "it isn't just for people with back problems, it's great for overall health, vitality, mental acuity and general wellbeing") and language lessons in the evening. They even roast their own coffee beans on-site!

"These guys work 12 hour days at busy times, they work while on holiday, in the evenings and weekends, and even from their sick-beds if they're ill – despite my complaints that they should be resting! We all really care about and believe in what we do, and in supporting our clients. We think of our team, our clients and also our agents and suppliers as family, and families take care of each other."

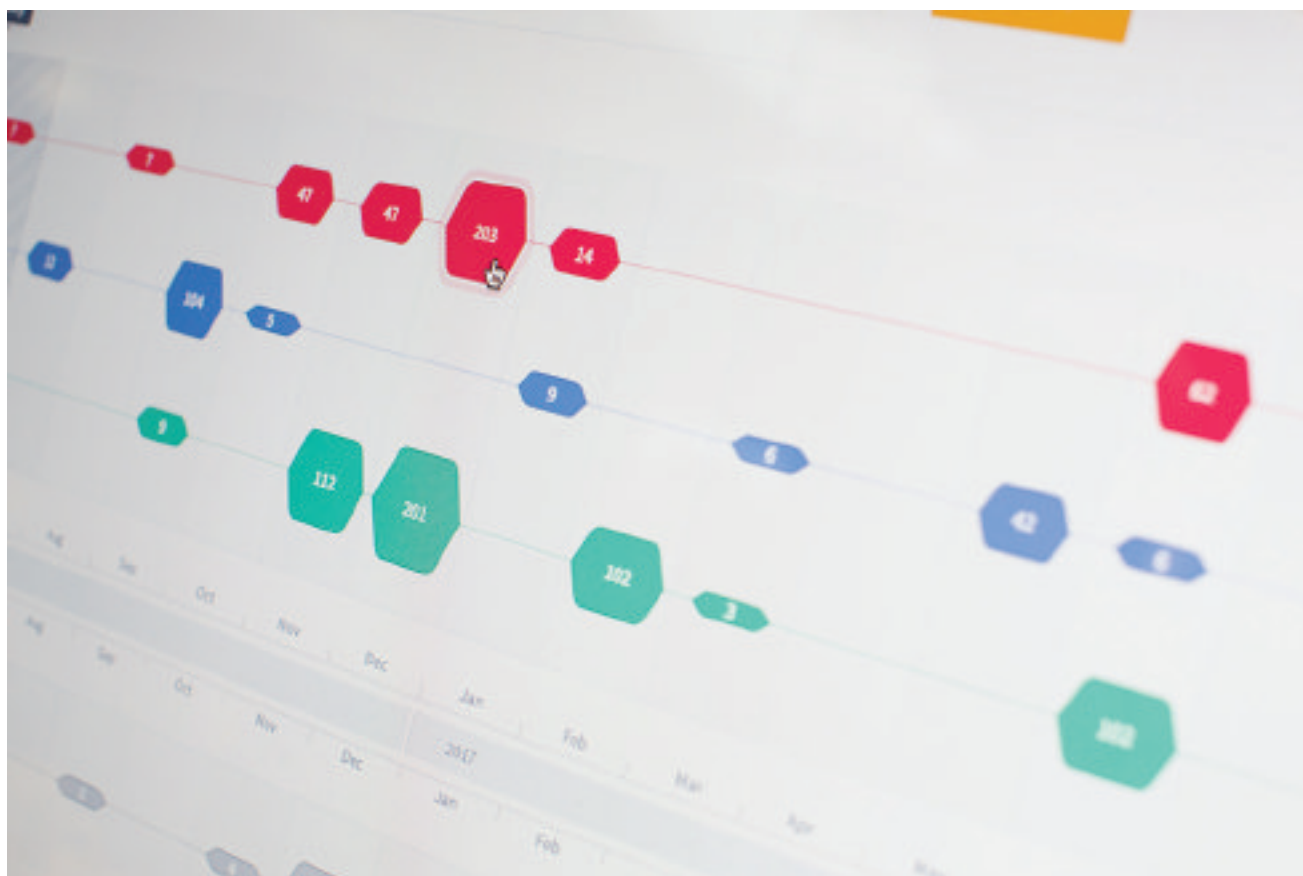
When asked whether this improved staff performance, Simon simply answered "I don't know, we don't do it for that reason, and we don't track it. We just do it because it's right, and because great people deserve to be treated well."

Despite these uniquely modern ways of operating a taskforce, the reason for IP Centrum's success is not limited to this. During *The Patent Lawyer's* exclusive tour of IP Centrum's office in the United Kingdom, and more importantly of their top secret R&D suite, we learnt about their current project that is expected to "revolutionize"

“ We learnt about their current project that is expected to “revolutionize” the patent renewals industry. ”

the patent renewals industry. Although the company are not allowing too much information about the new product to be released yet, as the new service is closely kept under wraps, *The Patent Lawyer Magazine* were allowed to explore some of the test runs of the new project, and witness first-hand what makes this project so fascinating. The new service will certainly bring about a change, and will give “control, comfort and visibility back to formalities professionals.” Although the complexities of managing a portfolio of renewals cannot be undermined, Simon suggests it is no longer a necessity to tolerate these difficulties, thanks to new technologies and ways of thinking. “It's extremely exciting to be a part of a service like this which, once launched will change the way renewals are handled forever; subtly in some ways, but irreversibly and substantially for the better.”

Through asking Simon why IP Centrum entertained attempting to build a renewals service, considering the challenges they would face, and the large scale of the competition, there was a further insight into IP Centrum's unorthodox approach. “When we started building our renewals service, we didn't know a lot about what the competition was doing, and we actively resisted finding out. This was important. There are a few things nobody else has ever done before, simply because they're just too hard to do!” Simon continues “We simply didn't know they were too hard to do, and couldn't imagine a





renewals service our clients would want without them, so we did them anyway! This couldn't have happened if we already 'knew' what a renewals service should be before we started." Simon continues, "Of course, we got to a stage where we needed to start benchmarking our service to the competition, so we did. What we found was that many aspects of what we'd built were no different to some of our competitors. There were one or two things we'd got plain wrong – there was a better way we hadn't recognized - so we fixed them. But then, there are a handful of things we'd done, which nobody else has, which are game-changing. Then it got really exciting."

Stood in The Geek Suite, although initially daunting, once the technological processes were explained the underrated simplicity of the end result surpassed all expectations. The substantial changes IP Centrum's new service will make to the way renewals are instructed and processed are original, modern and groundbreaking.

When asking Simon about the process of innovation, he conceded there is no magic formula. "Coming up with something completely new isn't easy. We have a small team of insanely passionate and brilliant engineers and artists. This is ultimately what great software is about; the harmony of art and engineering. It isn't enough that it can do what you want, it has to also be a joy to use – you have to know how to use it before you've even seen it. We obsess over every detail and process; simplifying, continually asking 'what if' and constantly considering what our clients will care about at any given moment. It's a human thing, not a techy thing". But even this isn't enough, according to Simon, "You then need to be able to back that up with

amazing, passionate and diligent people to help actually deliver the service, and first-class agents and partners. People who really care about doing the best we can for our clients – every time".

So what is it that's so special about IP Centrum's new renewals service? Well, while we were courteously walked through the R&D suite to meet some of the "Geeks", and were shown some of the top secret tech, the underlying sense of flickering screens as we walked by gives us the knowledge that there's plenty we didn't get to see. What we did see can be summarized by saying that every single frustration we've heard about the renewals industry has been eradicated; that isn't an overstatement, we ticked them off! Yet, somehow that was not the information we came away most enthusiastic about - the way the whole service fitted together, the way the technology worked, how the client interface responded to interaction, and the way the staff at IP Centrum spoke about what they were working on, about their passion about the types of people and companies who choose IP Centrum and even about each other, made the whole thing greater than the sum of its parts.

There's something very special happening at IP Centrum; a company devoted to the notion of doing as Simon puts it, "Something that matters," and to making a real difference.

IP Centrum is expected to be launching their new service at around the time this goes to print, so whether or not all of this adds up to a successful service will be answered very soon. Having spent the day with the guys and girls at IP Centrum, though, it's hard not to get behind them and wish them well!

“There's something very special happening at IP Centrum; a company devoted to the notion of doing something that matters.”



Unsung Hero



IP formalities people are the unsung heroes of the IP industry.

We get it.

We build services for brilliant IP formalities professionals.

Those who chose their career to do something special. Something that matters.



contact@ipcentrum.com

+44 (0) 207 186 1800

www.ipcentrum.com