



European IPR Helpdesk

Case Study

Vtree Energy: Building a solar future through intellectual property

June 2018

Company details

Vtree Energy

Start-up

Solar-powered trees

www.vtree.solar



1. Background

Vtree Energy was founded in 2015 by Mr. Andrei Vaida and Mr. Miguel Borges as a start-up company in Romania, and since then it has been developing smart furniture as charging stations for electronic devices, gadgets and electric vehicles.

The company's main product, the Vtree solar tree, converts sunlight into chemical energy through its solar panels. The energy is then used to provide power for Wi-Fi, USB charging outlets for mobile phones and tablets, night time lightning, car charging stations or LCD info-monitors through its on-board ports.

Moreover, as Vtree devices can also analyse the flood of data, they can identify the biggest vulnerabilities and risk zones. For example, a solar tree infrastructure can be used to gather real-time data about the traffic to optimise the traffic lights according to the traffic flow.

The company is active both in national and international markets.

2. Problem faced

At the time when the company created its innovative product, Vtree, the Romanian market was not mature enough for such a type of product, as the market was not yet aware of the importance of green energy.

It was challenging for such a young company at the beginning to convince the investors that these products would be widely used in the future, and that their value consisted not only in the innovative design and system, but also in the environmental friendly components.

The company accordingly tried to figure out solutions in order not only to increase the value of their product, but also to create a sustainable market growth.

In this way, Vtree Energy came up with an idea to develop its business strategy based on intellectual property (IP) management and protection of IP rights to increase their products' market value and to compete better in national and global markets. However, the company had very limited knowledge of IP and needed to get professional support on how to deal with IP issues.

3. Actions undertaken

As a very first step, Vtree Energy decided to work with a law firm specialised in IP, who could support them during the IP portfolio-making process.

After having several discussions, the following IP applications were filed in order to develop a thorough IP portfolio for the company, in line with its business objectives:

- Trade mark: The company applied for a European Union trade mark registration to protect its brand "Vtree" in the EU Member States.
- Design: Several Community design registrations were filed to protect the new and original aesthetical features of the product around the European Union against similar designs.
- Utility Model: Apart from its unique appearance, in order to protect the product's technical aspects, a national utility model application was also filed in Romania.

4. Outcome

Through its trade mark and the number of registered designs together with its granted utility model, implementing a comprehensive IP protection strategy allowed the company to take braver steps in business markets, which then led to approximately 400% sales growth in 2017 and 300% sales growth in the first quarter of 2018. This IP-based approach has also strengthened the company's position in business negotiations, as protected intellectual assets are deemed more valuable and reliable in business markets.

In addition, together with a thorough communication plan, making use of IP protection strategies has also helped the company in increasing its visibility when competing in both local and European markets.

Vtree Energy is now present in more than 70% of the EU Member States and its products are now well-received with the current rise of sustainable, green and smart city industries.

The company is now planning to expand its business outside Europe, which will soon oblige them to take IP protection steps all over the world without any delay.

5. Lessons learned and suggestions

Especially for new enterprises, start-ups or SMEs, IP can be quite complex to deal with. Because of its massive importance and highly sensitive nature for the businesses, it is essential for companies to work with IP experts to reap the full benefits of their intangibles, and to have an extensive understanding of IP protection processes. Although finding a suitable IP professional can be quite challenging in the beginning, by following a rational approach and knowing what to do before taking any steps, getting professional support is of great help for businesses, especially when they are at their early stages¹.

IP refers to creations of the mind, from names and images to inventions, from literary and artistic works to aesthetical appearances. When considering IP protection, it should always be remembered that a unique product/service can be protected by means of several IP rights at the same time².

For example, while a brand name on a product can be protected as a trade mark, the novel and inventive technical features of the same product can also be subject to a patent or utility model protection. In the meantime, its new and original design can also be protected as a design. Still more, a user's manual explaining how that product works can also be copyrighted.

Once it is carried out in parallel with a proper business and communication strategy, IP strongly supports business growth, as IP protection measures secure companies' intellectual assets and make businesses more active and competitive in global markets. Therefore, building up a business strategy around IP always brings competitive advantage for companies and supports business growth, particularly when a company's business strategy is based on new and innovative products or services.

¹ The European IPR Helpdesk's publication "[10 steps to find a suitable IP professional](#)" provides guidance on the steps to be followed to find a suitable IP professional.

² Please check the European IPR Helpdesk's IPR Charts [here](#) to get more information on different IP titles.

GET IN TOUCH

For comments, suggestions or further information, please contact

European IPR Helpdesk
c/o infeuurope S.A.
62, rue Charles Martel
L-2134, Luxembourg

Email: service@iprhelppdesk.eu

Phone: +352 25 22 33 - 333

Fax: +352 25 22 33 - 334



©istockphoto.com/Dave White

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN IPR HELPDESK

The European IPR Helpdesk aims at raising awareness of Intellectual Property (IP) and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) by providing information, direct advice and training on IP and IPR matters to current and potential participants of EU funded projects. In addition, the European IPR Helpdesk provides IP support to EU SMEs negotiating or concluding transnational partnership agreements, especially through the Enterprise Europe Network. All services provided are free of charge.

Helpline: The Helpline service answers your IP queries within three working days. Please contact us via registration on our website – www.iprhelppdesk.eu – phone or fax.

Website: On our website you can find extensive information and helpful documents on different aspects of IPR and IP management, especially with regard to specific IP questions in the context of EU funded programmes.

Newsletter and Bulletin: Keep track of the latest news on IP and read expert articles and case studies by subscribing to our email newsletter and Bulletin.

Training: We have designed a training catalogue consisting of nine different modules. If you are interested in planning a session with us, simply send us an email at training@iprhelppdesk.eu.

DISCLAIMER

The European IPR Helpdesk project receives funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 641474. It is managed by the European Commission's Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME), with policy guidance provided by the European Commission's Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs Directorate-General.

Even though this Case Study has been developed with the financial support of the EU, its content is not and shall not be considered as the official position of the EASME or the European Commission. Neither EASME nor the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of EASME or of the European Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of this content.

Although the European IPR Helpdesk endeavours to deliver a high-level service, no guarantee can be given on the correctness or completeness of the content of this Case Study and the European IPR Helpdesk consortium members are not responsible and may not be held accountable for any use which might be made of this content.

The support provided by the European IPR Helpdesk should not be considered as of a legal or advisory nature.

© European Union (2018)