



European IPR Helpdesk

Case Study

Auto-Plas International: IP and business growth

December 2016

Auto-Plas International Ltd

Plastic product manufacturer

Construction and Auto Tourism



1. Background

Auto-Plas was originally established in 1957 and, through the years, it has gained an international reputation for design and manufacture of automotive styling accessories, winning some important awards for export on various occasions. Following a change of ownership in 2014, the company set about re-installing the foundations, which made it a huge success. A five-year growth strategy was created which fundamentally involved adding value through, among others, strengthening the asset base and establishing an intellectual property (IP) portfolio.

Auto-Plas had previously used IP many years ago under its previous ownership to develop trade and increase exposure whilst protecting its ideas and products and exploring international markets. Unfortunately, these were not maintained or managed proactively and eventually expired.

2. Problem faced

Whilst progressing the growth strategy of the company, it became immediately apparent that Auto-Plas' technical "know how", its products and even the company name were vulnerable to unauthorised replication from both home and international competitors who may seek to use its reputation via fraudulent association i.e. company name, similar web domains, copy products, brand alignment.

3. Possible actions to be undertaken in this situation

Working with a number of external partners such as the Enterprise Europe Network, the Department for International Trade and the UK Intellectual Property Office, the company began to learn about the various ways in which their business could be protected.

This education was a critical part of the business development plan of the company, as all the areas that were intended to grow or to have value added would be affected. Although Auto-Plas initially had a basic understanding of IP protection and its importance, through its engagement with external partners, it gained a much greater understanding of “what intellectual property is” and of the numerous ways in which the company’s interests could be protected even with a small budget or no budget whatsoever.

Some basic measures to re-establish the company were adopted, including:

- Consolidation of website domains,
- Improving employment contracts to include: confidentiality clauses, control of internet and social media usage, anti-bribery and retention,
- Establishing non-disclosure agreements with customers and suppliers,
- Developing contracts to control the sale of goods and onward usage,
- Reviewing trade mark applications and registrations.

After this first round of relatively low cost activities, the company took the opportunity to complete a full IP audit under the sponsorship of a grant provided by the UK Intellectual Property Office facilitated by the Enterprise Europe Network. This audit involved a complete review of the business (people, products and processes), identifying areas of improvement. Once all areas of possible improvement were established, short, medium and long-term actions were identified to support the business growth plans and to ensure that all priorities had been established.

This IP project plan has provided the company with a clear view of:

- what needs to be done,
- when it needs to be done,
- what are the associated costs,
- what are the benefits to the business.

These intangible assets would not only protect Auto-Plas’ business activities in the long term but would also create opportunities for trade through confidence and assurance that brand value is retained.

4. Outcome

Following on from the abovementioned audit, the company now regularly reviews its IP project plan to ensure that actions are taken at the right time throughout the company’s growth journey. Auto-Plas is currently in the process of registering two patent applications for new product inventions as well as numerous trade marks and trade name registrations to support its new business development.

Furthermore, Auto-Plas is currently rebranding the business and creating a new website to encompass the latest technology, social media aspects and tools essential to promote the ease of doing international trade.

The company has continued to work with external partners locally, nationally and internationally to ensure that networking and communication is directed to a global community. This provides Auto-Plas with a continuous education in commerce and keeps it up to date with the latest opportunities, trends and applications of business. According to Reshad Shamtally, managing director of Auto-Plas, their external partners are also incredibly important contributors to their business plans by providing a “Sanity Check” through assessment and support.

Working with local partners has strengthened the company’s trade partnerships, community integration and exposure to new opportunities of mutual benefit.

5. Lessons learned and suggestions

Mr. Shamtally explains: “I believe the best lesson learned is the fact that the world is still a big place which is constantly evolving and changing, particularly with regards to business conduct and culture, where IP plays an essential role. Therefore, in order to remain informed and stay at the forefront of this evolutionary cycle, we must engage with and contribute to the wider business community on a continuous basis”.

He further emphasises that: “Any products or services a business provides rely on consumers and the perspective of consumers is heavily influenced by external factors outside the control of your business. Therefore, to create sustainable business it is vital to understand the changing needs of the customer and create a business structure that can be flexible and quickly adaptable to change. A large part of this involves good up (sales and distribution) and down (procurement) stream structures which are all based on confidence and synergy. Generating intangible assets and protecting your intellectual property assists these processes by displaying professionalism whilst providing something investable for trade partners to buy into”.

John Christopher, who gave support to Auto-Plas during this process as a European IPR Helpdesk Ambassador and Senior Innovation Adviser with the Enterprise Europe Network comments: “Not enough people understand the importance and value of IP. There is much that can be done at minimal if any cost. Along with the IPR Helpdesks we are there to help companies in this respect and many others. Think of IP as the foundations to your business; you don’t build a house without them and you need to have a sound IP strategy upon which to secure your business”.

[The European IPR Helpdesk](#) and its collaboration with the [Enterprise Europe Network](#) through the [European IPR Helpdesk Ambassador](#) scheme help companies to build up an R&D and IP based business strategy to reach sustainable success in their markets and assist in further creation of an innovation ecosystem.

GET IN TOUCH

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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.

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