

## Dinner Speech MIPLM 1st module 2019

### Company Blanc & Fischer Familienholding /E.G.O. (speech version – official company version see below)

We are all eating and for that we need to cook beforehand. Many of you are having radiant heaters in your kitchen - most probably you are using EGO Radiant Heating Elements. Many of you remember the old cook plates – black with these engraved rings. Most probably these cook plates are as well manufactured by E.G.O. And last but not least, if you are cooking with induction heating - with a certain probability these induction heating elements are as well products coming from E.G.O.

E.G.O. is a company within the Blanc & Fischer Familienholding. Our business is the **white goods industry** and we are delivering components in a **B2B** manner to many of the big brands.

Other products E.G.O. is delivering are touch controls, tubes with thick film heating elements, displays for oven controls and many more.

Blanc & Fischer Familienholding has a total turnover of close to 1.2 Billion € with more than 8.000 people.

### Torn between day2day business life in a B2B company and fast changes in technologies

Traditionally patent engineers and patent attorneys need a good technology understanding as well as legal knowledge. To answer the challenges of digitalization and industrie 4.0 they do not only need to extend their technology understanding but as well need to add business economics skills to their toolbox much more as before.

#### 1. Efficient day2day business as basis for “free time” to focus on the “new”

First of all, we have to be efficient in managing inventions, filings and the prosecution process. That’s nothing spectacular, that’s a standard requirement.

To do that we are using latest IT technologies and we are focusing on a clear and efficient decision-making process. In fact, we have established a frequently meeting so called “patent comity” with participants from R&D, Product Management and patent department in order to make in a face2face discussion patent related decisions.

As well FTO, licensing issues and infringement questions take a significant role in day2day business. We need to work straight and efficient in the standard business to free up time for the new challenges.

## 2. Focus on the new world of IP – characterized by increasingly fast changing environment.

When it comes to filings, the traditional way of working means that we as a patent department wait until people from R&D or Product Management are coming to our desk, presenting invention reports – invention reports which are a result of engineers day2day work on customer products.

Additionally, we get invention reports from the research group. Many companies do not only have R&D or developments department focusing on clearly defined customer products but as well a smaller department for research – or concepting (in German often called “Vorentwicklung”), looking more far into the future.

In a rapidly changing environment waiting for invention reports, might it be developers or researchers, is under threat.

## 3. The challenge of early protection in a world of fast technology changes

Let’s shortly look at our business. Blanc & Fischer Familienholding is in B2B business. We are delivering components to branded companies. That means our business customers are defining the features visible to end customers. What we get are the individual specifications for the next products to be developed. But the overall long-term plans of these companies are mostly secret to us as a B2B supplier.

In the old days, up to a certain extent, we could have been waiting until the customer tells us what we should deliver – start development – and in good case deliver according to agreed cost, within timeline and feature set.

The key changes the whole industrie is facing since quite a while: Increasing speed of technology changes together with squeezing pressure from customers on development cycles drives us to situation where waiting for customer specifications is just not longer possible. We as a development company don’t have time to evaluate requirements, evaluate technical solutions, start development cycles and deliver long time later. We need to prepare in advance and as well we should have secured already our ideas and visons about the future when talking about requirements with our customers.

The basic answer to that challenge is to come more to the front end.

To do that we need to understand key technologies and future key features. We need to understand the maturity of technologies and the probability that the technologies come true. This can only happen together with product management and partly with any type of foresight. When discussing with inventors we as patent department should have the needed market insights in order to have an “educated guessing” about the future requirements. Overall guided by the company strategy.

For a patent department the “speed challenge” means on a concrete working level: Besides the traditional patent filing as we have always done, we need to file in advance as well. But as we as patent people are not inventors we need to drive the development teams to think ahead and send invention reports on ideas which are still “visionary” from technology perspective. Ideas in an early stage. And as well we as patent department need to manage researchers. We need to motivate

those to strongly think about customer benefits and applications instead of technologies only – as researchers tend to do. And we need to strongly interact with product management on application level. Patent in advance. Anticipate needs and possibilities.

End of the day we need to add a new skill to the toolbox of a patent engineer. And that's my point:

- **Have a strong interaction with Product Management** to understand market needs
- **Show leadership skills** when it comes to discussions with development teams in order to file their visionary ideas on top of the ideas coming from concrete development tasks.
- **Be more product management oriented** and focus on the applications when it comes to discussions with research teams – do not focus on technology alone.

Nothing totally new, but crucial in a world with still accelerating technology- and business changes.

It's important that a B2B company protects early enough, that it anticipates market needs. We have to ensure that when agreements with our customers are made and product development starts, many ideas, including application ideas are already protected by us. Otherwise we might fail coming into the business at all as too many IP hurdles from others are making business unattractive.

End of the day it's a balancing act between broad IP protection of future needs and staying within the IP budget. In order to find the right balance a good business understanding is needed. But how the balance work is done on a concrete level, having as well other challenges e.g. challenges from China in mind, is a different story in a different talk.

Just to mention it. I'm not talking about standard essential patents. Here we have specific rules.