

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

Treading a new path with Reebok

On March 1, 2022, Authentic Brands Group (ABG) announced that it had completed the acquisition of iconic sportswear manufacturer Reebok from adidas. The acquisition was the start of an exciting new chapter in the 64-year history of Reebok, bringing fresh challenges for the company and its streamlined intellectual property team. For Will Federspiel, Director & Senior Counsel – IP, it has meant establishing a clear vision for the trademark team, building a platform for growth, and getting systems and technology in place for the future.

We sat down with Will to hear about his experience participating on the Anaqua Client Working Group to help steer the development of Anaqua's flagship **AQX® IP management platform** to best meet client's needs now and in the future.

Q: What are some of the broader challenges the sportswear industry is facing and Reebok in particular?

Our industry still has a major counterfeiting problem. The brand protection component of our work is really important, and it's tough. It's hard to stay in front of counterfeiters in our world. There are a lot of industries facing the same challenges right now.

As for Reebok, we're finding our way again, treading a new path as a standalone sportswear brand. Yes, we're part of a bigger group, which has other apparel companies, but we're the only athletic footwear and apparel brand in the portfolio. The focus is on building our position in the market again, using our creativity and innovation to develop new and relevant products.

That brings diverse IP challenges as we must decide how best to protect that innovation in a crowded space. While these challenges are not unique to Reebok, the brand is in a unique position. We are now essentially a challenger brand in a big established industry, yet Reebok is still one of the very few globally recognized brands in this area. We're relatively small right now compared with where we once were. This puts us in a very interesting place, and it's fascinating to be involved from the IP side.

Q: What are the key challenges the acquisition has brought for you and the trademark team, and how are you addressing them?

For any internal trademark team, there is increasing pressure to raise the visibility of the trademark portfolio



performance with senior management and business partners. Arguably, the pressure is even greater in an acquisition situation when you're dealing with new owners. ABG value the brand and what has been achieved over the years, and they want us to continue to evolve and embrace our creativity, quality and innovation. This is an exciting opportunity to strengthen our position in the market and take Reebok to new heights. Trademarks are critically important in that. They are the face of the brand. That's how people interact with your company, and your products. But there's a lot to do, particularly around brand protection - and with a very lean team.

Q: What is your current team structure – and how does that compare with the previous structure?

Well, as I said, we are very lean. From an IP perspective at Reebok, it's two people now - myself and a new trademark attorney. The two of us handle everything -

trademark clearance and product clearance, and all the brand protection work and anti-counterfeiting matters globally. We are also handling patent clearance and patent prosecution. Previously, I had a team of dozens of attorneys and brand protection managers around the world, doing all the customs and enforcement work. We also had a dedicated patent team.

Q: A lot of people will empathize with your situation - having to do more with less. How are you managing that?

The company has just been spun out in a divestiture and is moving from one IP platform onto another, so my immediate goals are to make sure that everything's up and running properly; and to get myself and my colleague fully immersed in a whole range of activities that we're not used to doing. That means finding ways and systems that enable us to automate and streamline our processes so we can focus on the substance more than the foundational pieces. For example, every time a customs matter comes in, taking 10 minutes to log what's going on so we have a record and can keep track of it. We want a quick, simple process: we get the email, we type in a couple of things, and we're all set and ready to go.

Q: So a lot of it comes down to efficiency, having the right systems to enable you to expand your activities and the value you deliver? How is AQX helping you?

Getting good automated systems that streamline workflows and work processes is critical for us, given our limited resources and the vast amount of activity coming through. With Anaqua, we have a great partner, who is helping us deliver more, both in terms of volume and value – and AQX is key.

Initially, we were primarily using AQX for trademark clearance - tracking intake and reporting of all our clearance work. We worked closely with Anaqua to build out a custom workflow along with special tools that have been integrated into the system because we take in a very high volume of clearance requests every year. Last year alone, we handled nearly 15,000 clearances.



We use AQX to support all our trademark clearance work and reporting. It took us from the dark ages of working with email and spreadsheets to a fully automated request form our business people have to fill out, which is then routed to us with all the information we need. This information is tricky to get when people are just sending an email, saying: "Hey, can you look at these names for us?" Yes, we can, but can you tell us a little more. So that's all automated now, plus we've got the system looking up and matching against all the records that we've done previously.

We're also utilizing AQX to help keep our patent prosecution, annuities, and brand protection work flowing through the system. Furthermore, with AQX's interactive dashboards - HyperView™, we can keep track of all our activity - especially on the brand protection side - so we can tell how much work there is, where the hotspots are, and help develop the business case for expanding what we're doing and getting more resources.

I've been working with Anaqua to further build out the reporting. I'm a numbers guy, so I keep asking: "How can we get at this slice of data or that slice of data". And I really like the deep dive the AQX reporting gives me. It helps me inform my business partners, "Hey, we've got a real problem. This particular model is everywhere in the counterfeiting space." I can show them just how many knock-off products are out there, and their jaws drop. It's a powerful tool. It crystallizes what we're doing - and why - in a meaningful and impactful way, particularly with the visual dashboards AQX's HyperView has built into it.

I love working with Anaqua and we've developed an excellent relationship. Yes, you're providing a great service for us; but we also have the opportunity to exchange views and discuss ideas for improving things for us and other clients. That's unique, honestly, among the vendors that I work with, and it's been very valuable for us.

Q: Through the client working groups, you've been instrumental in helping drive further enhancements to AQX. How important have the groups been for you?

Early on, when we came in as clients, we identified the trademark search request (TMSR) as an area we would like to see improved; and Anaqua has responded, putting a lot of work into making enhancements. It will be great improvement on what was there previously. It's been really satisfying and encouraging seeing that come to life.

The working group was fun, actually, and we achieved a lot together. When you get a bunch of clients together, it can go one of two ways. It can either be really good and productive, or it can just be people complaining. Thankfully, we had a great group - they highlighted pain points, suggested improvements, and identified what could be done to make things better. On the Anaqua side, the team was great - really receptive in terms of listening and then finding ways to action a lot of what we were bringing to them.

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