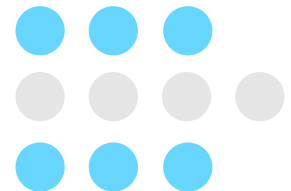




Shift from consultancy to licensing helps design associates fly high



Specialist aircraft seating designers, Acumen Design Associates, made a momentous decision around 10 years ago.

Founded in 1981 and based in London Acumen has become a very successful design consultancy enjoying a worldwide reputation, however, CEO Ian Dryburgh decided to diversify.

His decision did not see them move away from working closely in one of their specialist niches of aircraft manufacturers and seat designers. Instead, the decision would have a dramatic and positive impact on their income stream.

Whilst Acumen's work was traditionally carried out on a consultancy basis for a bounded project fee, to the airline or seat manufacturers' project specifications, Ian decided instead to create designs which Acumen would patent to secure their own intellectual property rights.

Acumen started investing more time in developing their own ideas and designs and worked with James Ford, Partner and aerospace and defence specialist at UK-based Abel + Imray IP practice, to self-fund intellectual property rights for those designs. This underpinned their move towards a licensing income model, where royalties would provide an income stream rather than bare consultancy fees.

In 2016 Acumen Design Associates made a historic deal with one of the world's largest airlines, at the time, United Airlines. This related to the seat design that later became known as 'Polaris', and was one of the largest aircraft interior upgrades in aircraft seating history. Acumen had licensed the design of their business class seating to this airline giant for the US market.

Thanks to its patents, the small London design studio saw off competition from larger players in the market, typically dominated by the big three seat manufacturers: Safran, Rockwell Collins, and Recaro.





IP FOR SMEs CASE STUDY



JAMES FORD
Patent Attorney (Partner)
at Abel + Imray (UK)

Acumen then licensed the rest of the world IP rights to Safran, the world's biggest seat manufacturer, for the seat that later became known as 'Optima'..

"Whilst consultancy projects were a bit quieter," explains James, "Acumen decided to create new market opportunities by investing time in designing additional products and product enhancements and securing IP rights, ready for the market to become more buoyant again."

"Having achieved the dual income stream through patenting, Acumen is in a fantastic position to be able to pick and choose which projects to do and has firmly positioned itself at the top end of the market."

Commenting on the benefits of seeking independent IP advice, Ian Dryburgh, CEO of Acumen Design Associates Ltd, said, "We were extremely pleased with James' work on this key project. He has been instrumental in Acumen obtaining a robust and commercially-focused patent portfolio. He has also demonstrated a superb understanding of the business background by tailoring the patent portfolio to enable it to be used to leverage commercial success."



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