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A new, innovative and marketable IP diagnosis to evaluate, qualify and find insights for the development of SMEs IP practices and use, based on the AIDA approach

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ABSTRACT

As in our knowledge economy, intellectual assets represented by intellectual and industrial property and associated rights are of growing importance for companies, it is essential for them to be aware of what they own, how to manage these assets, what are their strengths and weaknesses related to those issues.

This is why, through a European project co-financed by the European Commission, an action aimed at solving such issues has been taken.

The first part of the work undertaken by this action is presented in this article.

It consists in the development of an IP questionnaire, based on the adaptation of the marketing and sales AIDA model, allowing classifying IP practices and uses within a progressive scale. In order to get rapid understanding from companies, graphics that can be easily analyzed have been introduced.

The originality of the methodology is that the AIDA classification used, gives the opportunity to classify a set of tools or services to be delivered in order to increase the IP practices and performance in companies.

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1. Introduction

Different studies have highlighted the fact that companies need to audit their intellectual property (IP) practices and uses, in order to assess the commercial value and competitive use of IP for their business [1] or to minimize the risks of infringement [2]. Small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) are also faced with these issues but are not always aware of the IP created in house and, as a consequence, often underestimate their capacities of being active in producing IP.

Moreover, the real added value of any society is clearly based on its intangible assets, as in the knowledge economy, and any company capable of innovating while optimizing the protection of its creations by using the appropriate IP rights, titles, or by using alternative protection means, will clearly have an advantage in the market place.

As explained in [3], the importance of IP for SMEs is growing as it directly influences company strategy: some might prefer secrecy for their products or innovation in order to keep their technical secrets; other will prefer speed in protecting innovations as appropriate to control other firm and industry characteristics. That is why the SME's needs for IP, as stated in [4], vary between technical information on patents, up to IP management questions, or IP protection tools.

Moreover, as presented by Ref. [5] for UK SMEs, small companies are generally unaware of the IP system. Even if the IP awareness increases with firm size, it also varies to a smaller extent with industry sector.

This is why it is crucial to have a clarified vision of the intellectual capital produced within the firm, which will clearly picture the complexity and extent of SME IP use and strategy: an IP diagnosis is a key tool to achieve a general overview of the intangible assets of a company and to undertake eventual corrective actions related to IP practices and uses. Furthermore, an intellectual capital audit can reveal hidden assets, which impacts the profitability and even the core existence of the company in the future [6]. It is now a well-known fact that a well managed IP strategy provides a better competitive position.

This is why a European project, funded under the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme of the European Commission, named IPeuropAware, has been created by a consortium of partners which include 20 National Patent Offices (NPOs).

This European program, directly targeting SMEs, aims in particular to share and develop sustainable services for NPOs and for organizations that work directly with SMEs in the field of intellectual property rights (IPR), with the final objective to increase knowledge and use of IP in these enterprises.

In order to sustainably integrate services relevant for a specific segment of companies, it is crucial to test the services foreseen to be incorporated. The objective of those services being to enhance the IP practices of firms, it is therefore essential to evaluate their

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initial level of IP performance in order to be able to address a relevant service. Of course, the same approach can be applied in order to evaluate the level of IP practices reached after the application of the service (based on the application/use of a dedicated tool).

In seeking to assess IP performance, the necessity of integrating an evaluation methodology, whatever the form (questionnaire, audit), quickly became evident.

One of the constraints regarding the evaluation methodology was that a connection between a particular level of IP practices and a tool to be applied (to enhance this initial level) was absolutely needed. This means that the same classification has to be used and established for the levels of IP practices and the tools to be further put in place.

The IP tools to be implemented in SMEs are shared by and between NPOs in order to make a specific NPO benefit from the positive experience of other partners. They are corresponding to specific instructions or an operating manual describing how to deliver a service, or a specific training material for a training course. They are the recipe (concrete steps) on how to reach the final product, the service and make that service active. The service is defined as a framework in which a tool is applied, and is based on an interaction between a customer and a service-provider.

Apart from the necessity of evaluating IP practices, there was also the basic wish to raise the awareness of firms during the diagnosis session and to progressively promote interest in IP.

Considering all of the above mentioned parameters and different studies realized in the IP field, it has been decided to work with the AIDA approach, mainly used for marketing and sales issues.

The AIDA framework is a progressive model enabling the classification of behavioral phases related to the act of purchase, indicating the different maturity levels related to this act (Attention – Interest – Desire – Action) [7]. At a specific point and time, a customer's behavior can be categorized within one single level of the model (Attention or Interest or Desire or Action).

As the progressive approach of the AIDA model is a scheme that fits to a natural behavior, and as the possibility to incorporate the use of dedicated tools existed within this methodology, it was decided to adapt the AIDA framework to the world of IP taking care of the SMEs' specificities.

This article presents the conversion of the marketing and sales AIDA approach to an IP diagnosis tool dedicated to SMEs. The background of AIDA will first be presented, then the needs for a specific and different IP audit tool will be explained, the AIDA methodology applied to IP will be presented, a discussion will be depicted on the advantages and the disadvantages of this IP diagnosis, and finally the feedback on the questionnaire from partners of the IPEurop-Aware project will be presented.

2. Background of AIDA

The AIDA model was first developed by E. St. Elmo Lewis in 1898. It is a sales model depicting the process of selling: different studies in the US life insurance market made it possible to model the act of purchasing a product, from the customer point of view [8] in four steps.

Indeed, advertising makes it possible to lead a customer from one step of purchase to the next one. These steps are Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. The AIDA model is a progressive way of dividing the fact of purchasing into four levels, and advertising is an external way to lead the customer from one step to another.

The four levels of the model can be explained as in Fig. 1 [9]:

- Level A: Attention of the existence of a product or service,
- Level I: Interest in paying attention to the product's benefits,
- Level D: Desire for the product,
- Level A: Action, that is to say buying of the product.

The sales and marketing AIDA model describes in detail the level of purchase awareness of a customer. The salesman has to lead the customer from one level of the model to the next one, that is to say to conduct the purchase following the four AIDA stages:

- Make customers aware of a product existence,
- Interest them in order to get their attention to the products, their features, their benefits,
- Produce the desire to benefit from the products offering,
- Finally get the act of purchase.

Some drawbacks are reported in Ref. [10] for the marketing application. For example, either the "interest" level is never achieved by a consumer who buys goods because he/she needs them, or the customer experience is not taken into account when buying a product. Then it means that advertising is not likely to work in such cases: the consumer knows the brands he/she is used to buying and he/she is already convinced of the advantages of buying this product.

Furthermore, the AIDA model is incomplete as the long term effects are not taken into account: brand attitude, brand advertising or brand awareness are not included despite the fact that they are recognized as advertising effective.

Also, the model assumes that "attention" happens before "interest", but it is often the opposite: it is because the consumer is interested in a brand that his/her attention grows.

Finally, no empirical evidence or validity of the model has been proven despite years of research.

Nowadays, in the marketing and communication world, as explained in [11], the AIDA model is widely rejected and some alternatives are analyzed, as the instantiation model, focusing on how the consumer interprets his or her experience on advertising and not as the receiving or processing of messages like the AIDA model. The instantiation model is then focused on the consumer mind.

3. The need for a specific and different tool for IP audit

3.1. The choice of the sales and marketing AIDA model for IP audits

Despite the above depicted limits, the AIDA model has been chosen for several reasons.

First of all, it has already been successfully applied by IBM in a European study ordered by the European Commission for the classification of services carried out by actors in IP [12].

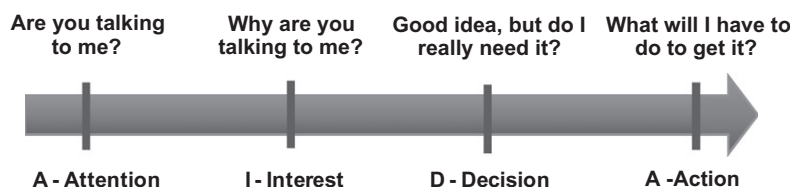


Fig. 1. The sales and marketing AIDA model.

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