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Changing IP data quality from a good idea to a sustainable business process

For those looking for accurate and consistent IP data there are a variety of new technologies, processes and practices that can help, writes Adam Jaffe of Thomson Reuters

The importance of data quality is generally accepted. CIPOs recognise the criticality of accurate information in maintaining their rights, at a very minimum. And it is a goal of most – if not all – organisations to have IP data that is complete, accurate, consistent and easily available for decision making and other purposes. However, this isn't always so simple: how do you obtain high-quality data and then sustain it? Essentially, the solution is to transform your strategy for achieving data quality from a one-time major project into an ongoing, well maintained function of your organisation.

Feeling the effects of bad data

There are a number of sources of bad data. These include incorrect information, incorrect setup of records, inaccurate system rule calculations, data entered in the wrong field in the database, inconsistency in how data is entered, data entry omissions and ambiguous data.

Poor data quality has an impact on date calculations such as filing deadlines, national filing dates, response due-dates, reminder dates, and annuity and renewal dates. In addition, data omissions and errors may have a detrimental effect on payment processing of annuities and renewals, fee amounts and fees credited to the correct case. Reports are unreliable as a result. Problems may also arise in the integration of other software systems. The cumulative effect will certainly decrease staff efficiency. Perhaps one of the greatest impacts is the problem associated with loss of user confidence in the reliability and veracity of the data. Of course, in the worst-case scenario errors can cause loss of rights.

Integrating data validation with portfolio management

Some organisations use software to identify problems with data quality. For example, the integrated data validation support in Thomson IP Manager® allows clients to

verify their manual data entry of bibliographic information against public records on an ongoing basis. This helps ensure that due-date calculations and official correspondence are based upon accurate information, reducing the risk of lost rights or costly delays.

When data validation is fully integrated within the portfolio management programme, users can request validation, review results and update their records as needed. The strategy of incorporating routine data validation into existing workflow processes is also possible with software; however, applying software to data quality problems is only part of the solution. Software will help you find the problems, but you need well-defined processes to break the cycle of poor data quality.

Defining processes for long-term success

Leading organisations transform data quality from a one-time task to a way of doing business through developing and following a quality assurance (QA) plan. The first step is to allocate the right resources to ensure that cleanup and ongoing QA plans meet organisational goals, oversee the establishment of quality assurance metrics, monitor the quality assurance progress and reinforce workflow processes throughout the organisation. A team should be established to:

- Evaluate and report the current state of data.
- Establish QA metrics.
- Assign resources to balance cleanup, QA and ongoing workload.
- Identify causes of quality issues.
- Implement training and documentation programs to improve ongoing quality.

Once the root causes of the quality issues have been identified, the data quality team should monitor quality assurance reports, conduct data clean-up, perform periodic audits and report to leadership concerning obstacles to clean-up or ongoing compliance with procedures.

Mechanisms should be put in place to verify correct data entry and validation of data on an ongoing basis. These mechanisms may include a periodic audit of record information such as a review of critical dates and information. Accountability for data should

be established at all levels of the organisation. For example, docket users should:

- Review key fields during data entry.
- Validate bibliographic data when docketing PTO mail.
- Validate bibliographic data and agent references when docketing agent mail.
- Validate parties, inventors, title, location, actions and the like whenever they work with the physical file.

A data quality audit should involve a combination of manual and automated processes. Staff members can manually validate case data and action history. Using software, auditing can be automated by checking data against public and private data sources. Regardless of the auditing process put in place, an organisation must establish standards for data quality, document the auditing process and ensure that auditing is conducted. One method to monitor whether auditing is being conducted is via the reporting of metrics and other quality assurance data.

Ongoing data accuracy

Making data quality a part of your business means keeping documentation updated, arranging to have continuous training options for data entry staff and communicating data quality standards – especially between geographically dispersed groups. Leading organisations continue to monitor quality assurance metrics, control write and delete access to the system, maintain control of action and other code lists, ensure that data entry conventions are followed, and conduct periodic checks against external data sources. While this may sound like a lot of work, your portfolio management system can ease the load; and the effort you invest is minuscule compared to the risks inherent in poor data quality.

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