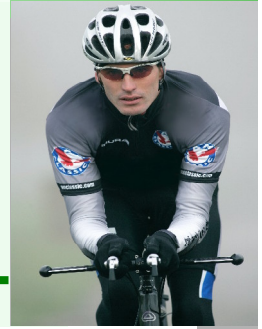


Protecting IP for Commercial Gain



USE (Ultimate Sports Engineering) was keen to maintain its sponsorship with Great Britain's foremost endurance racing cyclist (over 10, 25, 50, 100 mile and 12 hour races), who was due to represent Northern Ireland in the 2006 Commonwealth Games. As a result of discussions held with Engenuity (a specialist design engineering company), agreement was reached for the design and development of a novel handlebar, conforming with existing regulations. It was believed that a new design could improve the aerodynamics associated with the rider/bicycle profile, resulting in faster times over distances typically associated with endurance racing.

At the time of holding these discussions we were conducting IP audits for both companies. The purpose of these audits was:

- To develop an understanding of the company's Intellectual Capital (IC)
- To identify and to propose options for protecting IC
- To propose plans for commercialising their IC

It was quickly apparent from the initial design work and associated test results, undertaken in secret, that the new handlebar design gave superior performance to existing market products. Both companies realised that successful use of the handlebars could result in potentially significant commercial rewards. However, time was tight – they were about to race in the trials of the Games, thereby disclosing the design concept and losing both commercial position and any opportunity to gain patent protection.

Our advice was sought and even though there was very little time in which to act, we recommended that patent protection should be sought in advance of public disclosure. A patent application was drafted and submitted for consideration by the UK Patent Office within one week before their unveiling! The effect of the handlebars during the trials was astounding, knocking important seconds off the lap time and providing the rider (seeded 16th) with an opportunity to excel in the competition.

On the day of the race, 21st March 2006, Gold medal position was held with 17 riders still to finish – the rider ultimately held 4th position. The handlebars made a significant impression during the race and have since been successfully commercialised with high demand from major cycle manufacturers around the world!

“With this product USE was entering a new market and required the confidence that the IP protection provides to actively develop and market the product. Without the IP protection, the competitive risk would have prevented USE from embarking on the project.” – Roger Sparrow, Managing Director, USE

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