

## **The changing face of the patent information industry – an interview with Brian Gore**

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*In July 2005, Brian Gore retired after working for Derwent Information and Thomson Scientific for 30 years. In a fascinating interview, he spoke to Luke Foster about a career that's spanned the rise of globalization, the fall of the Berlin wall, a technological revolution, and more.*

**You recently retired after working for Derwent and Thomson Scientific for thirty years. But I believe your involvement with the company and patent information dates back even further?**

I joined Derwent in 1975, but I'd been involved with the company and patent information since 1962. After graduating with a Chemistry degree, I worked as drug researcher for a pharmaceutical company. And as a research chemist in the pharmaceutical industry, you watch patents all the time.

**How were Derwent delivering patent information back then?**

They produced current awareness bulletins. Monty Hyams, who founded Derwent in 1951, had noticed that only one patent office gave advance warning of what was coming through. In those days the patent system was different. If you were Kodak, for example, you probably wouldn't know what Polaroid were doing, or vice-versa, for six years because you'd have to wait until after the granted patent was published.

But the library of the Belgian patent office had a hand-written register of patents. And anything important would be filed in Belgium within a year of the original filing. So Monty would go across, make notes, and get them typed up into bulletins. And like many other companies, the company I worked for in 1962 were taking these.

But we needed a retrieval system. ICI at Jeallott's Hill and several other companies devised a coding system that became a forerunner of the *Derwent Chemical Patents Index*. In 1962, I used to spend a half or a whole day a week coding up, according to this chemical punched card code. In 1963, as a group, we approached Derwent and said we're all using your abstracts but we're all doing our own coding and it's costing us a fortune. We'll tell you what we need, you sell us the system back, and it'll be a lot cheaper. The companies that were interested met in Milan. This led to the launch of Farmdoc in 1963.

### **How did you come to join Derwent?**

My company funded me to do a PhD in Medicinal Chemistry. When I came back, the Derwent system was far more evolved. I worked in the lab, and then spent six years as an information manager. But I got further interested in patent information and Monty Hyams asked if I would like to work for Derwent. He said they could use me, as I knew the systems and the customers.

### **What was your first role with the company?**

Online had become important by then. So Monty decided my first job should be Online Co-ordinator. Derwent had been trying to get their information online for a number of years. But it was difficult, because the phone companies didn't understand why anyone would want to use the phone lines for anything other than phone communication. Eventually, Derwent honed in on the only company that could help them, which was System Development Corporation (SDC), based in Santa Monica. Most of their technology dated back to NASA projects. *Derwent World Patents Index*<sup>®</sup> (*DWPI*<sup>®</sup>) was put up online in January 1976. It was very rudimentary because full abstracts weren't available.

I subsequently spent a lot of time trotting over to SDC in Santa Monica. It was fascinating. They did what no one else could do at the time: update any part of any field in any record. Other companies had to do a complete re-load.

### **How did your role evolve?**

When we first launched *DWPI* online, our American customers wanted training, which was a bit scary as they knew more about it than we did! So I spent a lot of time training customers, firstly in North America and then Europe. I remember going to Chubb Locks and showing them how to search for locks online.

We discovered that the Americans were heavily into searching words. The European view was that you searched using classification coding; that was the only decent search. But we rapidly realized if you didn't know where to start, searching words was a good point of departure. So some of the 1980s were spent going back in time and getting all the Derwent abstracts in machine-readable form to enable text searching.

### **Can you talk about how you became involved with the Eastern Bloc in the 1980s?**

I got involved with the Eastern Bloc in about 1980. It was big business: patents were legal intelligence in the Eastern Bloc countries. They had state information institutes that would spend fortunes, particularly the East Europeans who were doing most of the manufacturing. They didn't have the technology to do the kind of searching we were doing in the West, and had to take information on magnetic tape. But they would take all the Derwent data and process it. For ten to fifteen years, I was the Derwent expert in those countries. I would

regularly have to disappear into this completely different world. My friends and neighbours thought I might as well be going to the moon! But it was just scientists and technologists like us trying to using patents as intelligence information.

**What were your experiences of visiting the Eastern Bloc during the cold war?**

You went where you were put! And you'd do a lot of walking. The technicians who were running the systems looked after many locations and would take you to see them. We would have a lot of discussions while walking around glassworks or plastics factories. They called it the cultural programme. But the point was they could walk around and chatter without fear of being inside a building that was bugged. There was a lot of caution.

On one visit, I took a very early laptop with me. It was like carrying a sewing machine around! It contained a chemical code menu that I wanted to show a representative from the Chemical Institute of Czechoslovakia. The laptop was back in my hotel room and I was short of time, so I suggested he meet me there. But he was so worried about state security that he checked my room for bugs. He even unscrewed the light bulb!

But for us, it was never a political situation. These people were scientists and technologists working within the given system that they had. They were doing the sort of things we were doing here, but with rather more difficulty.

**What happened when the Berlin Wall came down?**

All of the central institutes were wound down as you no longer had centralization. And the industries they supported no longer had customers. A lot of the electronic industries in the Baltic totally depended on being in a separate economic area. Their knowledge of electronics was so far behind the west that the industries went almost over night. The western companies moved in and captured the markets. A lot of the business we had there wound down.

It's starting to build back up again, but it'll take a long time to get back to where it was. And it's no longer a separate economic area, it's all global. It's an extreme case of what's happening with customers generally. Everything is global now. That's been a big change over the years.

**More recently you've been working with patent offices. How does that compare to working with other Thomson Scientific customers?**

Patent offices are big business. But it's completely different to working with the likes of GlaxoSmithKline or Chubb Locks. Patent offices are our customers, our suppliers, and our competitors, such as through Espacenet. Balancing this is a question of pure relationship management. It's been fascinating to watch. But it has actually worked.

### **How have customer requirements changed over the years?**

The biggest change has been the revolution in computing and the idea of information for all. In the 1960s, it was very difficult to get hold of your company computer and only one or two people, or a small department in a large corporation, could get involved with searching. But we've all got computers on our desks now and anyone can conduct a search. At the same time, the European and US patent offices have taken the view that patent information should be available to everyone because it's in the public domain. So we've had the growth of services like the USPTO Web site and Espacenet.

We've had to adapt our services to deliver information directly to the desktops of end-users. This has meant putting together more than just patent information, as patents are only part of intellectual property and running a business. *Thomson Pharma<sup>SM</sup>*, for example, puts together business information for managers with patent, scientific, and financial information.

### **How has this development affected the role of traditional searchers?**

It's good for end-users to be able to search, but if they're not searching all the time, they might not do a good search. If it's a business critical query, you've still got to use an expert. If you want to stop people infringing patents, or need to find out where you have freedom to operate, you need professional searchers.

### **Has the increasing volume of patents been one of the main changes you've witnessed?**

It has been a continuing one. When I first started we were covering 12 countries — now we are up to 42. As for patent volumes: we were assessing, classifying and indexing about 40,000 documents a year when I started, now we are close to handling the same number every week! Coping with this growth has been a big challenge for the organization. Our biggest success has been in the last two or three years, where we've kept the production volume up but also managed to achieve decent timeliness.

### **What has driven the rise in patent volumes?**

The law has changed. You've also got vast growth in technology, so there are more people active. And there's greater awareness of the importance of intellectual property. In the United States particularly, a lot of people are producing patents just to keep as a bank—to negotiate with the opposition.

### **What changes in patenting law have you seen?**

The biggest change was the introduction of publication without examination—the 18-month rule. That was probably the biggest driver in increasing patent volumes. In the last couple of years, the US has also caved in and gone for pre-grant application. It's interesting that the US has always had very different ground rules. For example, whereas the rest of the world had first to file, the US had first to invent. It's very expensive going to law with first to invent. You

have to keep all of your laboratory notebooks, so you can prove you invented it first. But now it looks like the US will go towards first to file as well. Practically it's better, and it's cheaper for litigation.

**What other trends have you witnessed?**

One of the main trends we're seeing is the increasing importance of analytics. There's such a vast amount of information, it's become impossible to read everything. So a growing trend is to get the computer to read and to analyze, and to spot patterns and trends. You've still got to do a decent search to start off with, but it's a different kind of search. Using a computer to analyze information and then drill down is the way things are going.

**How do you see the industry progressing?**

It's very difficult to see even three years ahead. It depends what happens with the impact of the Internet. I think there'll be even more of a shift to end-users using our services, but they'll also be using competitive services. So you'll have a competition for the desktop. It's going to be very important to not only develop services for the big companies but to also support the small ones.

Putting together different types of information is going to become increasingly important. The Thomson strategy of aligning businesses and integrating content makes a lot of sense. You need to have control of a lot of technology and content, so you can put it together. Even though I'm retiring, I'm fascinated to see how this will develop.

As an organization, we have to be more international than we were 30 years ago. We need to be more global, but also more local. We can't be English global. We need to burrow into the local, smaller industries and be able to offer local support. This is how I see the business moving forward.

**And what are you plans for the future?**

I shall take a sabbatical, but I'm sure I'll still take an interest in it all. I only ever worked for Derwent because it was interesting. That was the driver. I shall take three months to think about it, but my wife is fearful that I shall become interested in something else!