

How Anaqua earned the trust of Microsoft to manage its IP



One of the world's most innovative companies, Microsoft, has a bold mission to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. As part of that mission, one of the company's key commitments is to earn trust — recognizing that to create a positive impact with technology requires people to trust the technologies they use and the companies behind them. Transparency and working with the right partners are also vitally important to Microsoft.

Microsoft's IP department plays a key role in fostering the culture of innovation within the company by helping manage and progress the innovation process. To achieve that, the department itself must be innovative, efficient and agile — ready to adapt quickly, especially with the new opportunities and challenges presented by AI and the increasing criticality of timely and reliable IP data in supporting broader business decisions.

In order to do all this, while also increasing efficiency, Microsoft recognized the need to explore new IP management systems that could align with its dynamic business environment. After an extensive evaluation process, Microsoft selected Anaqua's IP Management platform, AQX®, and a wide range of Anaqua Services. They went live on AQX at the end of 2023 and have been incorporating more platform capabilities and services since then. Currently they utilize patent management, innovation management, awards management, portfolio management, finance tools, analytics, patent annuities, foreign filing services, legal support and data enrichment services.

Anaqua has quickly established itself as a trusted partner of Microsoft. AQX and Anaqua Services are embedded within Microsoft's IP ecosystem, helping empower the IP department to achieve more through enhanced efficiencies and collaborating on innovative solutions to meet their changing needs and priorities.

Microsoft's Senior Director of patent engineering and IP operations, Raghu Chinagudabha, explains why the company needed to switch their IP management system provider and the benefits they are seeing from partnering with Anaqua as they seek to future proof Microsoft's IP management.

What were some of the challenges you were facing that led you to change your IP management system provider?

Raghu Chinagudabha (RC): With Microsoft's culture of fast-paced innovation, we needed an IP platform that was flexible and adaptable to meet our ever-changing business needs — a platform where additions and tweaks could be made simply and quickly.

Critical tasks like foreign filings and IDS processing were handled separately, causing inefficiencies and limiting visibility. The lack of automation added to the delays and costs, as manual checks were required for many processes. At the end, we needed a unified platform to integrate all our activities.

During the selection process, what factors were instrumental to choosing Anaqua's AQX platform?

RC: We were looking for a fully integrated platform with a much greater degree of automation that could handle our needs in a timely and efficient way. Anaqua's IP management platform, AQX, offered all that and more. In addition, we were able to demonstrate to our Microsoft leadership team how, with Anaqua, we could deliver time efficiencies and cost savings — up to 40% in some areas.

The fact that the platform is highly adaptable and can be tailored and tweaked, relatively simply and quickly, to meet our changing requirements and priorities was important too, especially given how IP management operates at Microsoft. Due to Microsoft's extensive IP portfolio, we have developed our own working methods, which sometimes deviate from traditional approaches. We believed Anaqua could adapt to our specific operational style.

We visited the companies we were talking to. At Anaqua, we felt that, from the senior leadership down, there was a strong customer appreciation and an eagerness to work with us — and, importantly, to listen to what we had to say. We looked at companies of differing profiles and sizes, and, for us, Anaqua was in the sweet spot in the sense of not being too big or too small. It meant we were able to work directly with their leadership team and develop a close

relationship, while, at the same time, Anaqua had the capacity to provide us with the support we needed and to scale up as required.

At Microsoft, the majority of our operations are conducted within Azure due to our preference for its ecosystem. Leveraging Anaqua's technology stack based on Microsoft, including Azure, was significant. The highly secure hosting environment provided additional assurance, particularly during the transition period, addressing concerns regarding data security and compliance.

Now that you've been working with Anaqua for a while, are you happy with how things are going?

RC: Yes, and two things come to mind. First, the platform stability has exceeded our expectations from Go-Live. For any project of this nature — particularly such a big platform migration and the immense volume of data involved — you would expect quite a few issues and errors before things stabilize. We were anticipating that it would take at least nine months to reach that stage. But from the third month, we saw that the number of business-impacting major errors had dropped to a negligible level. And none of the errors, even at the time of the Go-Live were 'showstoppers', which was great.

The second thing is how Anaqua has been able to quickly scale up to meet our needs, both in terms of the platform infrastructure and capabilities, as well as building up and training our Anaqua Services team. The expertise of their staff on the AQX software and their services is unique in my experience.

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We're always going to need to do some fine-tuning. But I'd say that the modifications we're working on with Anaqua are because we changed our thinking and want to do things a little differently than we thought at the outset — and, again, Anaqua have proven themselves flexible and responsive to our changing requirements.

Do you see your IP management tools and services coming together in a more unified and cohesive way?

RC: Yes, that's the vision we had, and we've made significant progress towards it. We're now able to see all our key process areas in a single place — whether it's first filing, foreign filing, annuity payment integration or IDS.

The integration of Anaqua's Services is also a great help, providing us with better projections and management of our annuity payments. Annuities account for a significant portion of our budget, so we are under a lot of pressure to manage our budget well. With AQX, we are able to create bigger, better dashboards with data available across all our IP activities to give us an improved sense of what our projections look like, how well we are managing against budget and what we can do to keep us in line with budget.

Just to give you an idea of the scale of things, we're talking about managing payments for around 30,000+ assets every year. With access to all this data in one place, we can now evaluate each of our assets and make an informed decision, in line with the company's business needs, on whether it's something we should be paying to renew or let go.

What role do you see for your team in helping drive innovation or continuing to foster the innovation culture at Microsoft?

RC: I think everyone in the IP department would agree that it's both exciting and challenging to work with such an innovative company as Microsoft. And I believe each of us plays a part in helping foster the innovation culture and in supporting the innovators, the Microsoft engineers, in bringing their visions to life.

There is a team of attorneys and paralegals who interact directly with the engineers, helping to file and prosecute the IP for their innovations. I lead the patent engineering and IP operations team. Our role is to make sure we have the processes and tools in place to enable IP asset creation and to best manage the assets created. It is important to ensure that all our internal processes are optimized on a constant basis. And that's where our IP management platform provider comes in.

We work with Anaqua to maximize the efficiency and productivity of our IP management processes, and to develop new features to better support the whole IP management department in driving Microsoft's innovation and IP strategy, now and into the future.

Do you have any thoughts, any vision on how the IP team might be able to further support Microsoft's innovators in the future?

RC: A lot of thoughts and, yes, there is a vision. We're exploring the use of AI-based tooling and experiences to enhance various lifecycle events in IP management, including invention intake and review, drafting, and prosecution. What we're looking to do is to infuse the innovation management process with an AI-based experience with Microsoft Copilot. Copilot is an 'AI companion' for individuals and organizations, helping guide them and find answers to questions.

Going forward, how significant a role do you believe AI will play in IP management?

RC: Thankfully, there's a lot of automation now in IP management, which relieves us of a lot of mundane, time-consuming tasks. Automation is one thing, but AI is quite another. Take document management, for example. There may be some elements of AI involved, but, with today's platforms, that's more about AI scanning pre-formatted documents.

Where I believe AI could play a significant role is in docketing, helping make the process more efficient and improving accuracy. Given the nature of the emails that docketing teams generally deal with, I can see AI being able to read the emails and outline the actions that need to be taken. That way, the docketing teams would be acting not only as docketers, but more like auditors.

Another area is data integrity, which is a big issue for any IP management team and platform provider. The data on platforms gets updated by different people at different times and through different processes. But there is no 'supervising agent' that looks at the data for a particular record and says, "Hey, this doesn't make sense," and then flags that issue automatically.

In the future, AI could take on such an 'agent' role — creating the tasks, processing the information automatically, flagging data integrity issues and fixing the issues directly.

Finally, you're very active on the client Executive Council for Anaqua. From your experience, what makes working with Anaqua unique or different from other technology partners you've had?

RC: Anaqua's concept of the Executive Council where you involve the client operators directly in helping drive the road map for product development is great. I know much has been achieved through the council and a lot of progress and advances made. From my experience, it's actually a unique and refreshing approach. I love being involved and being able to give my input from Microsoft's perspective, relevant to our specific needs and priorities, but also, I hope from a broader industry perspective too at times. I like to think of myself as a committed participant, coming up with all sorts of crazy creative ideas.



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Raghu is Senior Director of patent engineering and IP operations in the legal affairs division of Microsoft and a seasoned technical leader with over 30 years of experience in the realm of computer technology. With a career spanning more than two and a half decades in intellectual property (IP) at Microsoft, Raghu has honed his expertise in IP operations, portfolio analysis, patent infringement analysis, and the management of worldwide IP licensing programs & litigations.