Embracing Innovation During Evolution — The 139th Annual Meeting of INTA Successfully Held in Barcelona

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From May 20 to 24, 2017, the 139th Annual Meeting of the International Trademark Association (INTA) was successfully held at Fira Gran Via Exhibition Center in Barcelona, Spain. This is the third time that INTA hosts its annual meeting in Europe, as well as the fourth time outside of North America. Barcelona, as a famous tourist destination of the Iberian Peninsula, enjoys a very important cultural, historical and architectural heritage. Besides, it is one of the world’s leading economic, trade fair and cultural centres, and its influence in tourism, commerce, education, entertainment, media, fashion, science, and arts all contribute to its status as one of the world’s major global cities.

INTA, established in 1878, is the global association of trademark owners and professionals dedicated to supporting trademarks and related intellectual property in order to protect consumers and to promote fair and effective commerce. Its members are more than 7,000 organizations from 200 countries, representing some 30,000 trademark professionals and include brand owners from major corporations as well as small and medium-size enterprises, law firms and nonprofits. There are also government agency members as well as individual professors and student members.

China IP Magazine, as INTA’s only Chinese media partner, appointed journalists to the 2017 Annual Meeting to record the world’s largest trademark assembly.

This year, the number of meeting registrants topped 10,668, making it the largest annual meeting ever. 2,421 registered for the participation of the event for the first time, with a 32% increase compared with 2016. 38% of the attendees were from European Union, while 25% from America, 21% from Asia Pacific, and 12% from Latin America and Caribbean. The top four countries with most participants were
the US, UK, Germany and China. This year the number of participants from China also made a new record. The increase in all types of figures proves the organization's rising influence in the world.

When first arriving at the Fira Gran Via, a registrant could pick up his Annual Meeting badge at any counter marked Express Check-In by using a unique bar code in his online registration email. During the five-day meeting, there were more than 300 educational sessions, 225 roundtables, over 20 networking opportunities, more than 100 committee meetings and over 30 receptions. Different kinds of networking opportunities were provided for attendees to build connection efficiently, such as Meeting Point, Hospitality zone and Speed Networking area. Besides, there were 156 exhibitors, in which one quarter were new exhibitors. IP offices, law firms and service agencies gathered here to show their expertise and seek cooperation.

The year of 2017 marks the last year of INTA's 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. In the Opening Ceremony, Mr. Etienne Sanz de Acedo, CEO of INTA, highlighted that INTA's focus was to serve its members and to become more influential. He made a review and summary of INTA's work from four aspects: protection of trademarks, communications, international expansion and member satisfaction.

Over the last three and a half years, INTA has reinforced its policy priorities, engaged in hot topics and expanded its substantive scope. INTA has been submitting comments to, for example, Canada's C-31 Bill, China's Implementation Rules of Trademark Law and more recently China's e-commerce rules. It has been participating in recent Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) reviews and referring to the right protection mechanism to the access to domain registration data and to the application of new gTLDs. Besides, counterfeiting has always been a priority for INTA. Its active Anti-Counterfeiting Committee contains more than 270 members from 70 corporations around the world. During the annual meeting, there were several anti-counterfeiting programs, making sure that it was a priority in this conference as well as in every step INTA has made.

INTA keeps enhancing both internal and external communication. Internally, INTA has done a lot of things for its members. INTA Bulletin produces global reports, reviewing what is happening worldwide. The association also has started publishing new in brief in different languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese and Japanese. Externally, it pays attention to interacting with legislators, media and public at large. Last year, it provided Chinese officials with a short report on the back feed of Chinese brands registration outside China.

INTA has done a lot for its international expansion. Several weeks before the meeting, it opened a Latin America Representative Office in Santiago, Chile. Therefore, to date, headquartered in New York City, INTA has offices in Brussels, Santiago, Shanghai, Singapore and Washington D.C. and representative offices in Geneva and New Delhi.

INTA continues developing its interaction in China. In 2016, INTA's Board of Directors convened in Beijing in September for the Association's first-ever Board meeting in mainland China. Just one week before the annual meeting, it signed a Letter of Intent with the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC). On May 22, INTA and Quality Brands Protection Committee of China (QBPC) renewed a Cooperation Agreement, which was originally signed in 2014, providing the foundation for the two organizations to work together on a range of issues to protect brand owners in China.

For its members, INTA constantly provides education, networking and online resources. In the past two years, INTA held conferences with different topics in Rome, Japan, Cape Town, and Hong Kong. And later this year it will have conference in Colombia and Germany. As for legal resources, which is one of the biggest assets of the association, INTA published and reviewed Country Guides, Enforcement Guides and International Oppositions Guide for its members. It produced the trademark report in multi-language issues.

In the annual meeting, INTA's Strategic Plan 2018-2021 was launched. It has three core strategic directions: promoting the value of trademarks and brands, reinforcing consumer trust, and embracing innovation and revolution. The new plan was designed with a desire to be open-minded, inclusive and bold. Mr. Etienne Sanz de Acedo pointed out that this is not a change of focus, it is an evolution. He believed that with a clear vision and objectives, regardless of the challenges, INTA would achieve that vision.

On May 24, 2017, the 139th Annual Meeting was successfully concluded. Next year in May, the 140th annual meeting will be held in Seattle, Washington. We believe that INTA, in a healthy developing state, will present us with more fruitful results under the new plan next year.