Heading for Hong Kong

INTA explains their road to Hong Kong and why the organization is holding its next annual meeting in China.

Over the past decade, Asia-Pacific economies have come to play an increasingly important role in the global marketplace. The region is home to many established export economies, including Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. There are also a number of young consumer markets, such as Indonesia and Myanmar, where the middle classes are expected to expand dramatically over the next decade. And some countries, like China, are both major exporters and engines of consumer growth.

IP activity in the region reflects this economic growth, with domestic and international filings in Asia-Pacific increasing sharply over the past few years. So it comes as no surprise that the International Trademark Association (INTA) has increased its activities in the region over the last few years. INTA has been particularly busy in Asia-Pacific in 2013. And in a strategic move that will benefit the entire global IP community, INTA will bring its Annual Meeting to Hong Kong in 2014.

Ten years in China

Since 2003, INTA’s China Office has been on the frontlines of the Association’s efforts not only to grow its membership in the country but also to represent brand owners before Chinese government agencies involved in trademark law and enforcement.

A multiyear effort, in which INTA played an important role, culminated in August 2013 with the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress passing new trademark law provisions that are expected improve trademark owners’ ability to enforce their rights and deter infringers. The statute aligns with many of the proposals submitted by INTA throughout the legislative process. The Association is particularly pleased by an increase in statutory damages to RMB 3 million in the amended law. In cases where an infringer is determined to have acted in bad faith, courts may also award treble damages. These improvements will act as a major deterrent to infringers and send a strong message that China will...
not tolerate violation of trademark rights. INTA also welcomed a general provision in the new law stating that trademark applications should be submitted in good faith as well as other, expanded provisions relating to bad-faith registration.

The China Supreme People's Court will be working on judicial interpretations of the new law in the coming months. INTA has longstanding relationships with both the Supreme Court and the China Trademark Office, and will continue to hold regular meetings with officials as the Implementing Regulations and interpretations are drafted in order to advocate on behalf of trademark owners.

**Myanmar, Indonesia, Singapore**

Myanmar has also been working this year towards implementing a new trademark law – along with updates to the patent and copyright laws as required by TRIPS obligations. Currently, with no comprehensive trademark law on the books, Myanmar protects trademarks through a system of cautionary notice publications. Invited by officials from the Ministry of Science and Technology, INTA became the first international IP association to advise the Myanmar government on the draft trademark law. INTA’s written submission covered the full scope of the trademark law, from trademark office practice to enforcement. The Association hopes to see the new law provide the basis for strong trademark protection in order to avoid Myanmar becoming a haven for counterfeits.

INTA is active in Indonesia as well. In April, Association President Toe Su Aung (General Counsel, Anti-Illicit Trade at BATMark Limited, UK) led a delegation to meet with officials at the IP Office and the Supreme Court. In July, several brand owners traveled to the IP Office to train officers from the Office’s enforcement arm – the PPNS. Indonesia is also reviewing its trademark legislation, and the Association plans to comment on the proposed revisions within the next couple of months.

Finally, this past August, Ms Aung traveled to Singapore to join IP Office of Singapore (IPOS) Chief Executive Tan Yih San in signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU – the Association’s first in Southeast Asia – commits INTA and IPOS to collaborating on educational efforts such as roundtables, symposia and training, as well as sharing information and publications to support the advancement of IP awareness for the general public, examiners and government officials. While in Singapore, Ms Aung delivered a keynote address at IPOS’s Global Forum on Intellectual Property, which drew 600 attendees.

INTA leadership, staff and members who have joined delegations to the region have not missed these opportunities to promote the 2014 Annual Meeting. The Association is expecting a high turn out from the Asia-Pacific IP community, including representatives from national and regional IP offices. But… why Hong Kong?

**A global city**

With its colorful history and diverse culture, Hong Kong is often described as the place where “East meets West.” This, underscored by its status as one of China’s “special administrative regions” and its central Asian location, has transformed Hong Kong into one of the world’s leading international financial centers. With its service-based economy, low taxation, fixed exchange rate and minimum government interventionism, Hong Kong is a highly attractive location to conduct business. Moreover, English is an official language of Hong Kong.

The island also serves as a transport hub for the region with travelers using Hong Kong as the gateway to the rest of the world. Over 56 million passengers travelled through Hong Kong airport in 2012. Finally, since Hong Kong is one of the world’s safest cities, it’s easy to understand why the city hosted a record 48.6 million tourists last year and why, for INTA, it’s a logical choice for the Association’s first Annual Meeting in Asia.
A can’t miss opportunity

So, why travel to Hong Kong in 2014? The INTA Annual Meeting is the most widely attended IP event of the year, and 2014 will be no different. Over 8,000 attendees are expected in Hong Kong, with a huge influx in participation from China and the surrounding countries. As such, this meeting provides those traveling from Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America with a unique opportunity not just to learn firsthand about the potential business opportunities that the booming Asian markets have to offer, but also to establish and build a professional network in the region.

Moreover, this meeting’s educational programming will include an “Asian track” with sessions geared toward both Asian and international attendees. The programming is designed to help international attendees:

1) learn how to access Asia’s booming consumer markets,
2) acquire best practices for doing business in Asia, and
3) learn how to protect their brands in these markets.

The program will cover the globe through 34 sessions and over 200 table topic discussions of varying educational level, and over 110 speakers from 30 countries. The program also includes industry breakout sessions that cover hot topics and timely issues specific to certain industries. Regional updates will include case law updates and hot topic discussions for Africa, China, Europe, India and the Middle East, Northeast and Southeast Asia, Oceania, Latin America and the U.S.

In addition to providing attendees with excellent networking and business development opportunities all under one roof, INTA’s Annual Meeting in Hong Kong is unique in that it will provide international attendees with the chance to meet their Asian counterparts as well as representatives from both their own IP offices and Asian IP offices. Over 30 IP offices were in Dallas in 2013, and that number is expected to rise next year, especially with regards to representatives from Asian countries. Finally, international attendees who already have business partners in the region can use this trip to visit clients and colleagues on their home turf.

The Annual Meeting will be held at the centrally located Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai North, with all of the main hotels close by. Hong Kong is a fast-paced city that balances its history of Western influence with traditional Chinese practices. The 2014 Annual Meeting promises to be as productive as ever but this will surely also be one of the most unique and memorable Annual Meeting in recent years. See you in Hong Kong!

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(*) The image above contains few anomalies. Visit our website to find out more.