

Guidelines for effective communication on intellectual property through the Ideas Powered for business network

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Project	Guidelines for effective communication on intellectual property (IP) through the Ideas Powered for business network (IPFB network)
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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this document do not represent any official position of the EUIPO nor of any individual working group member. These communications guidelines are a compilation of contributions from members of the Communications working group of the Ideas Powered for business (IPFB) network who participated in various meetings coordinated by the EUIPO. Members of the working group who did not attend the meetings have subsequently been given the opportunity to contribute. The guidelines are not binding. They aim to help the IPFB network design and disseminate communications on intellectual property to SMEs.

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1 Background

The Ideas Powered for business (IPFB) network is composed of 21 European Union (EU) associations and non-profit entities that have a direct relationship with EU small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and/or with national SME organisations and that include support to SMEs in the scope of their work. The purpose of the network is to create a community that has the common goal of raising awareness of the value of intellectual property (IP) among EU SMEs and to encourage multilateral collaboration.



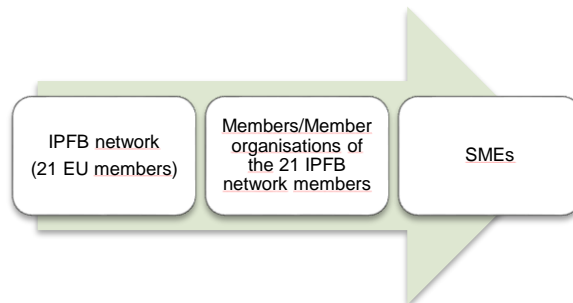
The Communications working group (WG) is a cooperation group of experts within the IPFB network. The WG kicked off in April 2023 and identified as a deliverable for 2023, the development of guidelines for effective communication on IP through the IPFB network.

Based on discussions within the WG between April and June 2023, the EUIPO, as coordinator of the WG, put together a framework guidelines document for the WG members to complete with their expert input.

Following the input received and subsequent WG discussions, the *Guidelines for effective communication on IP through the IPFB network* were finalised in November 2023.

2 Description of the project

These guidelines aim to help the IPFB network and its members design and disseminate communications on IP to the members and member organisations of the network members in an effective and engaging way and with an extensive reach.



3 Guidelines for effective communication on IP through the IPFB network

3.1 Target audience

The primary target audience of the IPFB network's communications are the member organisations of the IPFB network members, who in turn will cascade the communications down to national SMEs.

- Bear in mind that **SMEs are the end audience**. All communications shared with the primary target audience (i.e. the member organisations of the IPFB network members) need to be either ready to disseminate at national level or easy to tailor.
- The **target audience defines the communication angle** (e.g. business advisors, SMEs, start-ups). Keep in mind the specific target audience and tailor the message to their specific needs.
- When designing communication campaigns and materials, it is important to consider that the term 'SMEs' covers **many categories of SMEs**. Keep the audience as broad as possible and adjust materials and messages accordingly.

To increase your reach instantly and to a considerable degree, try to:

- contact the primary target audience (members and member organisations of the IPFB network members) **directly and personally** (by individual email or phone instead of via mass email or online meetings);
- ask members to **like and share your posts**;
- ask members to **post the information on their websites**.

3.2 Selection of topics

Based on IPFB network discussions to date and the focus of the IPFB network working groups, it has been decided to prioritise IPFB network communications for the following topics:

- **IP essentials,**
- **IP and digitalisation,**
- **IP and sustainability,**
- **IP and finance.**

Ideas for communication hooks

IP and digitalisation

- The importance of having a '.eu' website in the European online landscape.
- Existing and non-existing legal frameworks for software producers.
- Green tech.

IP and sustainability

- Green energy requirements and compliance of machines, tools and devices.
- Green tech.

IP and finance

- IP monetisation.

IP essentials

- For example, 10 things every SME should know about IP.

To promote a sense of engagement and involvement for SMEs, consider:

- using storytelling;
- referring to case studies or success stories;
- including quantitative data.

Existing materials to leverage from the IPFB network

See the IPFB network members' websites and social media.

Examples:

- IP essentials were mentioned as a subject of interest by [4iP Council](#) and [Accountancy Europe](#) considering the link to finance (for instance, IP monetisation). Both organisations have materials and previous experience on these subjects, as well as access to relevant audiences with a clear interest in these subjects.
- 4iP Council has various factsheets on [IP essentials for SMEs](#), covering what is IP?, the different types of IP, the benefits of IP, how to use IP to expand business, reasons for trade marks, etc.
- 4iP Council previously organised webinars and research on [green tech and net zero emissions by 2050](#).
- Regarding 'sustainability', the [European Digital SME Alliance](#) has close links to the European Green Digital Coalition which has leverage in the industrial domain. This setting provides an opportunity to share messages on IP rights in an IP rich industry. The topic of green energy requirements and the compliance of machines, tools and devices could be an interesting sustainability topic.
- In terms of content for digitalisation, sharing an explanation of the existing and non-existing legal frameworks for software producers could be an interesting hook.

3.3 Communication hook and style

3.3.1 General guidelines

- Whatever the communication hook, clearly focus on the **benefits for SMEs**.
- Keep it **simple**.
- Keep it **concise** and to the point.
- Be **consistent** with your key messages.
- Use **understandable** language.
- **Avoid jargon**.
- When possible, be **creative** to be memorable.
- Use **appealing messages** for your audience. For example, link them to the business or brand value, a topic that SMEs easily relate to and is high on their agenda.
- **Highlight challenges as opportunities – use positive language**. For example, ‘green’ and ‘digital’ are considered as being problematic by many SMEs.
- Short **visual** communications work best. More information can be shared via links or a QR code. SMEs are very busy and do not have time to read lengthy communications.
- Make the **link** between IP and SMEs **explicit and clear**.
- Show in your communications **why you** are well placed to convey messages to SMEs.
- The main message should come before the circumstantial explanation: **what + why/how** and not why + what.
- Complement your message with **quantitative data** displayed in a comprehensible and effective way (e.g. through infographics).
- Include **real stories, real situations, case studies, best practices and testimonies**.
- Try to **reach your audience through their social media groups**, for example, European Alliance for Apprenticeships on LinkedIn, Malta Business Owners, Entrepreneurs & Start-ups on Facebook.
- **Post regularly**.

3.3.2 EU versus national perspective

It is recommendable to adopt an EU perspective:

- when covering broad topics and situations that should **resonate with all entrepreneurs, regardless of their nationality/country of operation**;
- when preparing content for businesses that **operate in more than one EU Member State**.

When adopting an EU perspective, it is important to **emphasise the importance and relevance of the matter** in question, for instance, when explaining where certain regulations come from and why they matter to SMEs. Try and minimise the ‘this is far from my bed / does not concern me’ reaction.

In general, and when possible, it is **useful to complement the EU perspective approach with local actions in the native language(s)**.

At least some of the visual materials should be available with little or no text, so that the national language can be added easily.

It is recommendable to tailor communications to a national hook:

- for **events that are taking place in a specific national language**;
- when preparing materials for businesses that **do not operate abroad**;
- when using **best practices and examples**.

3.3.3 Vocabulary

Find a balance between technical issues/institutional jargon, and understandable/accessible language:

- use jargon only when necessary and unavoidable;
- make technical/difficult language 'fun' for the reader. For example, create a fictional character that explains jargon;
- include a **glossary** where concepts can be explained in an understandable way;
- **simplify** the language as much as possible – the complexity of information and language/jargon from EU institutions complicates communications at local level.

3.4 Ready-to-use versus tailored communication materials

It is recommendable to use ready-to-use materials provided by the IPFB network:

- when it allows for information to be **shared easily and in a timely** manner with members;
- for **standard information** such as events, webinars and conferences;
- when the information **makes sense** and does not require additional tailoring;
- for **joint IPFB network communication campaigns** – network members should use the same materials and make them available to external organisations.

It is recommendable to tailor IPFB network communications:

- for **social media posts**, as these can be easily adapted for maximum outreach by:
 - adding emojis (e.g. country flag) and a country hashtag;
 - tagging national members and asking to retweet;
 - translating them into the national language if the resources are available.
- according to the **needs of the country/countries** to which they are aimed by:
 - maintaining good communications with national authorities and enquiring about **pressing national issues**;
 - attempting to **echo the style and preferred method of disseminating** information in the country concerned.
- by adding **subtitles to videos** – if not the complete transcript, at least the key messages.

Note that '**tailoring messages**' can range from **time-consuming translations and the addition of national hooks or context, to simple tweaks which can nevertheless have a significant impact** (e.g. adding a country flag or country hashtag in a social media post).

When possible, prepare **practical guidelines on how, when, why and to whom** to disseminate the communications in question for members and member organisations. These guidelines do not need to be long. Depending on the type of communication/campaign, they can range from one to two bullet points to a page of text.

Using shared templates on real time collaboration platforms (e.g. Canva.com) helps to maximise outreach while still giving a unique identity to the campaign, especially if translations are used.

3.5 Tools and channels

Existing tools and channels

- Closed IPFB network social media group on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).
- IPFB network newflash.
- IPFB network members' cross-communication.
- [IPFB talks](#) on YouTube.
- IPFB [website](#).
- Publishing information on your organisation's website and social media.

New ideas

- Microsoft Teams group chat.
- IPFB network joint awareness-raising campaign.
- Leverage the channels of national organisations, and attempt to understand which channels work with a specific category of entrepreneurs.
- Use Facebook in Central and Eastern European countries where it is popular.
- Pairing events: present IP at a business event (i.e. together with another issue that is higher on SMEs' agendas).
- Podcasts (see, for example, [4iP Council's podcasts](#)).
- Webinars (see, for example, live and recorded [EUIPO's webinars](#)).
- Videos.
- Case studies, best practices and success stories.
- Appealing images to gain attention.
- Simple and visually appealing infographics, which could be used in addition to a news item, a blog post or on their own.
- Campaigns for specific target groups, for example, a landing page with content that flows like a story, with links to case studies, infographics and explanatory videos.
- Paid campaigns on social media, for instance, paid partnerships on Instagram and paid campaigns on Facebook (which is cheaper than other social media).
- Targeted campaigns on YouTube.
- LinkedIn articles.
- Engaging 'ambassadors' or influencers for social media campaigns – for the IPFB network, these could be success stories of how SMEs have benefitted from IP protection.
- Leverage journalists as a communication channel.
- Communication at events held by members/member organisations of IPFB network members, by providing communication materials on IP such as posters, brochures, leaflets and presentations.

3.6 Examples of hashtags and personal tags for social media posts

Using hashtags (#) and personal tags (@Organisation / @Person) on social media can increase the reach of your communications considerably, as well as ensure your target audience is reached in the first place.

Examples include:

- using emojis (e.g. country flags) and country hashtags;
- @Organisation / @Person – tagging the organisations and people you want to reach, either to support disseminating the message or as the target audience for your message;
- tagging your members or national organisations and asking them to retweet;
- using the usual hashtags: #SMEs #SMEIPStrategy #IPForSMEs #SMEInnovation #SMEGrowth #IPSupportForSMEs #BusinessGrowth #IntellectualProperty #IPStrategy;
- for webinars, using the hashtags: #webinar #freewebinar #intellectualproperty #IPrights #innovation;
- for podcasts, using the hashtags: #podcast #interview #founders #startups #inventors #innovators.

3.7 Synergies with the other IPFB network working groups

- The Communications WG would like to receive regular updates on the discussions and decisions of the other two IPFB network WGs: the Finance and IP WG and the Digitalisation and Sustainability WG.
- The Finance and IP WG and the Digitalisation and Sustainability WG should create their own IP messages. The Communications WG can then support them by simplifying the messages, making them appealing for the target audience, and promoting them through its communication channels.
- Joint meetings of all three IPFB network WGs could be considered.

3.8 Best practices

3.8.1 Examples

- **Pairing events: present IP at a business event:**
 - Since SMEs are often too busy to attend events, especially on topics considered less important such as, unfortunately, IP, consider organising a business event that combines an appealing business angle with the topic of IP.
 - Speakers include subject-specific specialists who focus on a certain business angle, as well as an IP expert who explains the benefits of protecting innovation.
 - 4iP Council, for example, organised a successful joint workshop with a UK university on sustainable packaging, taking the opportunity to highlight the value to the business and the brand of protecting IP.
- **Personalised outreach to national members:**
 - Works well with a specific target audience, topic or sector in mind.
 - Can increase engagement in comparison to mass mailing.

- SMEUnited, for example, reached out personally to national organisations to promote a communication in specific countries; the organisations reacted positively to the direct contact and the communication was shared with success.
- **An IP section on EU and national organisations' websites:**
 - Even a brief reference to the value of IP on organisations' websites gives more visibility to the topic on an ongoing basis.
 - EMECA, for example, conducted a successful pilot project on IP awareness-raising and communication on the website of the design trade fair Salone del Mobile.
- **Practical checklist:**
 - Simple and practical communication tools work best.
 - Accountancy Europe, for example, published guidelines for accountants on how they could help make SMEs more sustainable. This was welcomed but there was a need for an even simpler tool: a practical check list with tick boxes.
- **Infographics:**
 - An example by 4iP Council: <https://www.4ipcouncil.com/4smes#how-do-i-use-ip>

3.8.2 Exchange of best practices

- **Informal and thematic best practice exchange sessions:**
 - Receiving and presenting information from peers.
 - An effective way to meaningfully share best practices
 - for example, providing a space where entrepreneurs can share their positive (or negative) experiences of IP with others;
 - being able to observe and enquire about others' experiences can be effective to break the ice; this could prompt the SME/entrepreneur to take the next step and start making use of more technical material and access the many resources available.
- A series of **thematic webinars**.
- A **survey** to enquire about principal issues. Each organisation could then collect **real-life experiences** from its members which could be compiled in a leaflet or a presentation on best practices and lessons learned.
- **In-person or online meetings with members/member organisations** of the IPFB network members.

4 Concrete opportunities for the IPFB network in 2024

It is equally important to identify concrete opportunities for IPFB network communications in 2024, following the guidelines established above.

Below is an initial list of opportunities that could be leveraged in 2024 for IPFB network communications:

- The [European DIGITAL SME Alliance](#) has confirmed a project with the EUIPO where its role will be to:
 - facilitate peer-to-peer learning, exchanges and collaboration in IP protection among SMEs (call for SMEs' IP best practices);
 - offer novel SME-focused communication and awareness channels, tools and activities (short webinars in an interview / Q&A format, with an expert);
 - design, develop and deliver tools to support IP protection among SMEs (TBC: development of a guide to promote SME IP knowledge – call for experts);
 - identify and engage new partners and multiplier organisations, supporting wider SME outreach.
- Increase awareness of digitalisation and IP through the [Digital Innovation Hubs](#), even in more remote regions. [EURADA](#) is exploring how to raise awareness of an IP component in the Digital Innovation Hubs.
- SMEunited can include IP awareness in its existing projects: <https://www.smeunited.eu/projects>.
- With the 2024 EU elections ahead, SME, digital and sustainability issues will be on the political agenda. [Accountancy Europe](#) will work on its priorities for the new mandate. This could be an opportunity to integrate the role accountants can play in IP for SMEs.
- The [EURADA](#) Summer School (Malta, 6-8 May 2024) will focus on supporting start-ups to scale up. It aims to offer participants an understanding of the importance of SMEs and EU funds, and of the EU industrial green transition.
- The [EURADA](#) EU Start-up Summit (Malta, 9-10 May 2024) provides an opportunity to discuss the importance of IP for start-ups.
- [Early Warning Europe](#) has regular meetings and events during the year that can be leveraged.

To keep track of events related to SMEs and IP, check **the [events section](#) of the Ideas Powered for business website**.