



As the head of Boeing's Intellectual Property Management organization, Martha Ries' goal is to "shape Boeing's destiny through intellectual property leadership."

BOB FERGUSON PHOTO

The know-how for know-how

Martha Ries' goal: Create a competitive edge for Boeing by protecting, leveraging its intellectual property

BY WILLIAM COLE

The management of Boeing's ocean of intellectual property might appear to be a serious, often lawyerly, responsibility.

So it is, said Martha Ries, an attorney. But it can also be exciting—and fun.

"One of my true joys lies in meeting Boeing inventors," said Ries, vice president of Boeing's Intellectual Property Management organization, referring to the company's employees who are creating much of Boeing's intellectual capital. "It's like meeting the brains and soul of Boeing. You can see their enthusiasm. You can see their

Martha Ries at a glance

Current position: Vice president of Intellectual Property Management

History: Ries joined Boeing in 1997 as litigation counsel, focusing on commercial litigation and investigations. Three years later, she became chief counsel of Commercial Aviation Services within Boeing Commercial Airplanes. In 2003, she was appointed to lead the attorneys representing the Army Systems group within Integrated Defense Systems in

Philadelphia. Before assuming her current position in October 2007, Ries was Vice President of Boeing Ethics and Business Conduct, Office of Internal Governance. Ries began her law career as a judicial clerk at the Missouri Supreme Court, later serving as a trial attorney in the Commercial Litigation Branch, Civil Division, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. She was in private practice in a large Seattle law firm in 1990 and became a partner in 1994.

Education: Bachelor's degree in French and psychology from Boston College; law degree from St. Louis University.

eyes shining. They are our inspiration because they are creating technologies that change the way we live and work."

Taking a leaf from the book of the inventors, Ries applies persistence, ingenuity and an energetic optimism to reaching toward a vision of "shaping Boeing's destiny through intellectual-property leadership."

The mission of her small team is to deliver to the business units functional expertise that allows IPM to identify, protect and leverage intellectual property to achieve a competitive advantage. And a competitive advantage, Ries said, will result in strategic and economic benefits to Boeing.

FINDING SOLUTIONS

Finding strategic solutions and making difficult licensing decisions can test the skills even of a counsel as seasoned as Ries, who has experience in government and industry and a background in business ethics.

She gives much of the credit to her team, which she joined last October. "Their knowledge and sophistication has had significant impact on my understanding of intellectual property," she said.

Her legal background has come in handy as she moves out on two major priorities in 2008. One is to revise Policy 1—the overall Boeing policy that sets out the functional and business-unit responsibilities. The main objective, Ries said, is to allow IPM a greater role in providing the business units with policy guidance, tools and processes for the protection and release of the company's intellectual property. "This will provide us with greater functional responsibilities and oversight in the overall management of our IP," she said.

The second priority "is to make sure that we are even more deeply aligned with the business units and the Enterprise Technology

Domains, so we can give our guidance as early as possible in the process to ensure proper protection of our intellectual property," she said. In fact, the management of Intellectual Property is considered so important that Ries has a seat on the Enterprise Technology Board.

But the proof is in the results, and Ries derives satisfaction from watching her team generate real business for Boeing by leveraging IP. "We have helped generate new markets through strategic partnerships and the licensing of our IP," Ries said.

MYRIAD TASKS

The IPM organization faces tasks ranging from building IP awareness in the workplace to dealing with unauthorized distribution of Boeing information and products on the Internet.

The organization devotes a lot of energy to educating Boeing employees about the information that surrounds them at work. Identifying IP is not always straightforward, she said. Inventions and business and technical information are just part of a vast range of intellectual property that comes under IPM's jurisdiction. Ideas, know-how, images, tools and plans, all of which deserve protection, are less easily pinned down.

When in doubt, ask somebody, Ries advised. "We have many employees within IPM who provide advice and training to inventors, to the business units and the technology domains. They can all answer questions about what constitutes IP. If nothing else, ask your manager for assistance."

It's important, she said, because big companies often are tripped up by the smallest of things. "An idea—no matter how simple—for, say, an improvement in the way we do things, could be valuable information for a competitor," Ries said. "All of us have to stop and evaluate information before we pass it along."

The Internet remains one of the biggest challenges for the team, she said, because of the multiple ways people can rapidly share information. Before the Internet, acquiring or distributing proprietary information was harder, she said. The Web, however, can work in Boeing's favor, Ries added: "Certain search tools have made work easier for Boeing enforcement employees who can better track down the source of unauthorized materials."

SPREADING THE WORD

Building awareness among employees through education is the most effective way to change the prevailing culture, just as it was when Ries was in charge of Ethics at Boeing. And training remains one of the most effective ways to create a lasting effect, she said. Now there are courses that deal with IP for engineers and for supplier management employees, for example. A half-hour class at Boeing Commercial Airplanes, designed to give people a general understanding of what constitutes IP, has been a hit. Some 47,000 employees have signed up to take this online course.

For all of its complexities, IPM is an organization well-suited to Ries.

"I wanted to be more on the front end of issues. I wanted to be guiding people and helping them to make better decisions while they were in process of working a problem early on, not after the fact when it had become a legal issue," Ries said. "Boeing has an enormous breadth of products, technologies—and opportunities. An exciting part of this journey is learning how to do things and to continuously improve. And best of all, each of us can make a difference. That's what makes this a great company." ■

william.cole@boeing.com

What is intellectual property?

Intellectual property is defined as a product of the intellect that has commercial value, including copyrighted property such as literary or artistic works, and ideational property, such as patents, appellations of origin, business methods and industrial processes.