



Stories / Good practices

A story behind the success: BlackBinder

We have talked to Julian de Juan, IP advisor and Board Member of the Spanish SME BlackBinder S.L., on how they contributed to the Performing Arts Industry through their patented invention.

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- Julian de Juan

Julian, first of all, let us thank you for accepting our request to interview you. Now, how about starting with your company? Can you tell us a bit about your business?

BlackBinder S.L. was incorporated in 2017 as the holding company of the BlackBinder Group, which also includes NewMusicNow S.L. and Rolling Scores S.L. NewMusicNow acts as the R&D and product development business unit and is the applicant and holder of all the patents rights of the group.

You have an invention called “BlackBinder” which automatically scrolls music notes but we are sure it is not as easy as it sounds. Can you give us some more information about this invention and what makes it different?

Our invention is a solution to one of the main problems of performers: turning the pages of sheet music. Our invention is like a teleprompter to read music, in which the score is continuously scrolled in a display. It continuously adjusts its speed according to the music notation being displayed at any given time, and the tempo at which the performer is playing.

The invention is supported by a new digital format for music notation that, unlike PDF, contains all the information of a music score and enhances the live music experience for all, musicians and audiences. Most other digital readers are limited to the use of PDF scores, or other formats that retain the concept of a “page” and therefore, they have to provide external (i.e. Bluetooth pedals) or internal (additional software) solutions to “turn the page”.

We keep improving our technology in collaboration with a selected group of musicians, a few ensembles and, especially, with the Spanish Radio Television Symphony Orchestra, which is advancing very quickly towards a complete digitisation of all their processes. We view these collaborations as an extended and essential part of our R&D team. They constitute our living lab.

So, it is a perfect and novel tool for instrument players while they are performing their music. Speaking of novelty, I know that you took further steps to protect your invention. Which IP protection means have you used?

To protect our invention, we have elected to maintain a dual approach: a) file for patents to protect our differentiating technology to scroll and synchronise scores, and b) to keep as trade secret our knowledge to edit and visualise music notation in our proprietary digital format. We also have trademark registrations to protect our brands “BlackBinder” and “Rolling Scores”.

Have you seen any positive effects of patenting in your business? And related to that, I should also ask if you have faced any difficulties while patenting and exploiting your rights. We are well aware that intangible assets represent most of the value of our business. In particular, patents are at the core of our business strategy since our business model consists mainly in providing our proprietary technology through licensing. Since our technology can be easily reverse-engineered, we have no better option to support our business strategy than to protect our core licensable technology by patents. We have pursued the processing of our patent portfolio to achieve good, strong, enforceable, wide and difficult-to-circumvent patents.

Since 2014, our “music teleprompter” solution has served as an inspiration to other app developers, to introduce page-turning solutions in their music notation and music reading apps. A couple of years ago, we identified one of those solutions that infringed on our patents. We sent a warning letter to the potential infringers and that was enough to make them remove the scroll feature from their app. At that time, we were not ready to offer a license for our technology, as we are today.

Since the middle of 2020, we have started to offer our scroll solution to developers of digital solutions to work with scores, since they represent the segment with the highest potential to capture the value proposition of our licensed technology. Among them, we have identified a few which could be infringing our patent. We are hoping that these cases can be resolved in amicable terms.

A REVOLUTION IN LIVE MUSIC PERFORMANCES THROUGH A PATENTED INVENTION

BlackBinder, an all-in-one system to facilitate working with scores in hands-free mode, converts pages into a continuous flow that adapts to the music score as musicians play their instruments, and automatically scrolls without interrupting the performance. Besides, the scroll, being a non-printable format

per se, offers a measure of protection to copyright owners.

The app is available for download in the Apple Store and, since 2013, the private investment raised amounts to more than EUR 2 million with the post-capitalisation valuation of the company being EUR 4 million (2018).

The company currently has two European families of patents along with their extensions in the USA, Russia and China. This territorial extension covers more than 90% of the top 100 music schools and 80% of the leading orchestras in the world.

Please check the [European IP Helpdesk website](#) for the full case study. Find more information about the BlackBinder [here](#).