



CASE STUDY: ABLYNX

Over the past year, the Belgian biopharmaceutical company Ablynx N.V. has been busy. In October 2017, it closed a \$230 million initial public offering (IPO) on Nasdaq in the United States. Then in January 2018, it entered into an agreement with French pharma company Sanofi SA to be acquired for \$4.85 billion. Ablynx is developing a new class of drugs that combine the advantages of conventional antibody drugs with some of the features of small-molecule drugs, and judging by the reception in the market, this technology is in high demand.

The company's intellectual property—more than 500 granted and pending patents—played a key role in both the IPO and takeover bid, not to mention in the other partnerships Ablynx has entered into over the past decade. And throughout that time, Wolf Greenfield has served as Ablynx's U.S. partner in pursuing an intellectual property strategy that has allowed it to achieve these goals.

"Wolf's advice has been very much essential," says Frank Landolt, VP of IP & Legal at Ablynx. "It has been important to us to have a steady hand on the steering wheel, guiding us on a stable course. Wolf's reputation has also played a significant role. When you are a relatively young and maybe not so well known company negotiating with large companies, being represented by a known and trusted firm enhances your reputation in the eyes of your partner as well."

John Van Amsterdam, a shareholder in the firm's Biotechnology Practice Group, has led the Wolf Greenfield team since it began working with Ablynx. Since then, he has learned the company's business inside and out, working as seamlessly with scientists on the research side as with attorneys on the legal side. He has also developed an in-depth understanding of how the company prefers to do business.

"John fits well with our style and our way of working," says Landolt. "As a person who serves as the face of our company to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, and to other partner companies, he represents us the way we want to be represented."

For his part, Van Amsterdam values a team approach to IP—one in which he and Ablynx work as partners to achieve common goals. "We're not operating in a vacuum," he says. "They're able to provide us with details of their business, which allows us to tailor our advice to their specific needs. It all comes down to communication."

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The stability of the Wolf Greenfield team over the past decade has helped immeasurably in maintaining this partnership. "When you're growing a company, you have to look at long-term goals," says Landolt. "One of the things we often see working with law firms is that there's very little stability. It's quite rare to have a longstanding relationship, because people leave and move on to other firms. But the consistency with Wolf over the

years has been remarkable."

That consistency was highly conducive to formulating and implementing an IP strategy that helped Ablynx develop from a startup with four employees to one of over 450, worth nearly \$5 billion. Landolt recommends that other small biopharma companies follow Ablynx's lead in prioritizing the hiring of strong, strategic IP counsel. "Though we'd like to keep Wolf to ourselves, we regularly recommend them to other companies looking for IP counsel, because we know that they will be in good hands," he says.