## THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAW ASSOCIATION OF CHICAGO

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# 2016 Creator Of The Year Award

The IPLAC Creator of the Year Award is given to honor the creative achievements, primarily in the Chicago metropolitan area, that are eligible for patent, copyright, or trademark protection. This year IPLAC is proud to recognize John Nix, currently Founder and CEO of Vobal Technologies and formerly Founder and CEO of Go2Call.com, as the winner of the 2016 IPLAC Creator of the Year Award, for his achievements in the area of patents.

After graduating Davidson College with a major in Physics and serving in the U.S. Army Signal Corps, Mr. Nix joined the Coca-Cola Company as an engineer in 1992. While tasked with projects to evaluate and improve the performance of plastic bottles, Mr. Nix developed his first now-patented invention for measuring the shelf-life of plastic bottles using infrared spectroscopy, being awarded U.S. Patent Numbers 5,473,161 and 6,138,497. Over the subsequent 20 years, Mr. Nix has been named as an inventor on more than 20 patents, with several of his patents and publications being in the top 99% in terms of forward citations for the respective patent age and class.

After working at Coca-Cola, Mr. Nix moved to the Chicago region in 1997 to complete two master's degrees at the MBA and engineering schools at Northwestern University. While at Northwestern, Mr. Nix co-founded his first company, Go2Call.com, which provided international telephone service for developing countries using "voice over internet protocol" (VoIP). With a business plan and a working prototype, but no customers or revenue, Mr. Nix raised $3 million in venture capital funding. Through the following difficult economic environment for Internet companies, Go2Call rapidly expanded. Go2Call was ranked the 22nd fastest growing technology company in North America over five years, by the Deloitte Technology "Fast 50". At Go2Call, Mr. Nix also received the "Best Bosses" award from *Fortune Small Business* magazine.

While leading Go2Call's technology development and engineering, Mr. Nix's continued inventing with members of his technical team resulted in four additional U.S. patents. In 2007, Mr. Nix sold Go2Call's primary business lines with patent licenses to Delta Three, while retaining patent assets. In 2009, Mr. Nix sold Go2Call's patent portfolio covering PC-to-phone calling to Skype (now Microsoft). Based upon this initial successful monetization of patent assets, Mr. Nix decided to focus on developing new patent portfolios where he could identify new opportunities for important technology development.

In 2008, Mr. Nix identified the combination of both VoIP and mobile phone networks as a field with important unsolved problems. With experience gained at Go2Call, Mr. Nix realized that regular mobile phone calls in the future would be transmitted as VoIP. But, there would also be future issues related to seamless handover of those calls, especially with WiFi. With financial assistance from investors, Mr. Nix prepared and filed five patent applications, which have subsequently become a portfolio of 9 issued patents. Building upon prior experience with patents, this was the first portfolio where Mr. Nix handled all primary patent prosecution tasks such as drafting the specifications and claims, and responding to office actions. Google purchased the patent portfolio from Mr. Nix in 2012.

After the sale of the patents in 2012, Mr. Nix was looking for the "next big thing", where he could apply his experience and technical knowledge to solve problems and acquire additional patents. In 2013, he realized there were many important and unsolved problems related to the security of the "Internet of Things" or "machine-to-machine" (M2M) communications. Mr. Nix's view of opportunities in the future is well summarized by the Harvard Business Review (May 2013): "The fact that there will be a global system of interconnected computer networks, sensors, actuators, and devices all using the internet protocol holds so much potential to change our lives that it is often referred to as the internet's next generation." But, there are many essential but difficult technical challenges to keep those networks and devices secure, especially for industrial applications.

In 2013, Mr. Nix prepared and filed a series of 8 patent applications to address securing the "Internet of Things". During 2015 and 2016, these applications have resulted in 6 issued patents, two allowed patents, and 10 additional continuation and international patent applications. One example for commercial use in the portfolio is U.S. Patent 9,319,223, providing security for embedded SIM cards. With an embedded SIM card, smart devices connected to mobile networks can change the home mobile network operator without swapping out the SIM card. Among many

examples from industry, the automotive industry has recently announced the use of embedded SIM cards in cars for the future.

Mr. Nix's present company, Vobal Technologies, both develops and manufactures specialized cell towers for container ships. Using satellite connections, these cell towers allow large shipping lines to both monitor their refrigerated containers while at sea and provide basic cell phone service for crew. As one example customer, Vobal's solution was selected by Shell Oil in 2015 for ensuring that critical food supplies would be successfully delivered to crew at remote offshore drilling sites.

Over the past decade, Mr. Nix's primary volunteer work has focused on supporting education in the city of Chicago. He has been a board member of a charter school, The Academy for Global Citizenship, since 2007 and also served as chairman of the board from 2010 – 2015. Mr. Nix lives with his wife in Evanston.