

Knobbe Martens

Knobbe Practice Webinar
Series: Strategic
Considerations for Non-
Disclosure Agreements Part I

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Overview of NDAs – When and How Do Use an NDA

Overview of NDAs

Offensive Uses

- Preserve trade secrets
- Establish contract protection for inventors with pending applications
- Protect information from theft/use by former employees
- Clarify confidential nature of negotiations/offers

Breach of NDA

- Beware of provisions limiting what is treated as confidential information (e.g., independently developed)
- Need to prove breach and resulting injury (irreparable harm?)
- State law issue – variances could result from state-to-state
 - Breach could result in trade secret misappropriation, copyright infringement (access), or unfair competition claims
 - NDA must be reasonable to be enforceable
 - All valid contracts, including NDA, require consideration
 - May need to show information is confidential or valuable

Defensive Uses

- Establish clear boundaries of incoming information
- Preserve potential rights in patentable inventions
- Confirm allowed uses of incoming information
- Limit time window for non-use of shared information

Dealing with Unsolicited Ideas

- Develop a company philosophy
 - Don't accept – or –
 - Accept but without confidentiality obligations
- Communicate Terms and Conditions under either philosophy.
 - No obligation of confidentiality, to review, respond...
 - Consider signed agreement under "Accept" philosophy
- Document internal developments (e.g., notebooks/provisionals).

Key Terms in NDAs

Key Terms in NDAs

- Defining the Scope
- Information Flow
- Ownership of IP
- Duration
- Granted Licenses
- Residuals and Feedback
- Relationship to Other Agreements
- Breach
- Exceptions to Confidentiality Obligations
- Assignment
- Third Party Access
- No Formation of Partnerships
- Prohibitions Against Poaching

Definition of Scope

Key Considerations

- Definitions of Confidential Material and Purposes for which it can be used
- Will impact all the other terms and conditions of an NDA
- Broad, general definition of scope will provide the most protection for disclosing party
- Overly broad definition of scope could create potential issues for receiving party
 - Increased management of received data
 - Increased potential for disputes for tangential data
 - Increased scope of granted licenses and residuals

Strategic Decisions

- Is the information flow bi-lateral or unilateral?
- Will the NDA cover a specific project that is well defined or intended to cover future, undefined projects?
- Will the parties engage in additional contracts for future projects?

Definition of Scope - Example

Example – Broad (Confidential Information)

- For purposes of this Agreement, "Confidential Information" is any and all information concerning the business of a Party and such Party's customers, including without limitation, any and all current and future technical operational or financial information, marketing or business plans, unpublished financial information or business results, forecasts, customer names, customer addresses, and related customer data, vendor names and information, employee names and information, contracts, practices, services and support, procedures, trade secrets, and other business information including, but not limited to, technical data, know-how, software, reports, methods, strategies, plans, documents, drawings, designs, tools, models, inventions, patent disclosures, and requests for proposals that may be disclosed between the Parties whether in written, oral, electronic, website-based, or other form which is designated as Confidential Information by each Party disclosing such Confidential Information ("Discloser") whether verbally, in writing by letter or by the use of an appropriate proprietary and/or confidential stamp or legend, prior to or at the time any such confidential information is disclosed by Discloser to the other Party ("Recipient"). Notwithstanding the foregoing, information which is orally or visually disclosed to Recipient by Discloser, or is disclosed in writing without an appropriate letter, proprietary stamp or legend, shall constitute Confidential Information if it would be apparent to a reasonable person that such information is of a confidential or proprietary nature. This Agreement shall apply to all Confidential Information disclosed between the parties.

Definition of Scope - Example

Example – Broad (Purpose)

- Recipient will use the Confidential Information only for the purpose of and in connection with the Parties' business relationship and not for its own benefit or the benefit of another without the prior written consent of Discloser. Recipient shall hold in confidence, and shall not disclose (or permit or allow its personnel to disclose) to any person outside its organization (except as provided below), any Confidential Information. Recipient shall protect the Confidential Information using the same degree of care it uses to protect the confidentiality of its own information of like kind (but in no event less than a reasonable degree of care). Without limitation of the foregoing, Recipient shall not cause or permit reverse engineering, decompilation or disassembly of any Confidential Information. Recipient shall disclose Confidential Information received by it under this Agreement only to (i) persons within Recipient's organization and (ii) agents of Recipient who have a need to know such Confidential Information in the course of the performance of their duties and who are bound by a written agreement or legal obligation, enforceable by Discloser, to protect the confidentiality of such Confidential Information. Recipient shall adopt and maintain programs and procedures, which are reasonably calculated to protect the confidentiality of Confidential Information and shall be responsible to Discloser for any disclosure or misuse of Confidential Information by Recipient's employees or agents. Recipient will promptly report to Discloser any actual or suspected violation of the terms of this Agreement and will take all reasonable further steps requested by Discloser to prevent, control, or remedy any such violation.

Information Flow

Key Considerations

- Unilateral/one directional vs mutual/bi-directional obligations
 - One direction: restricts only the disclosing party; does not protect the confidential information of the other party that may be disclosed later; does not protect nonbusiness information (such as deal terms or deal process) that both parties will likely want to keep confidential
 - Mutual: protects confidential information of both parties; protects nonbusiness information about the actual deal; provides a more balanced form that typically results in a faster review and signing process; imposes restrictions on both parties to the transaction, regardless of which party has more leverage in the deal
 - NOTE: Courts may decide to not enforce unconscionable agreements, including NDA/confidentiality agreements

Strategic Decisions

- For unilateral disclosure, when should recipient accept information?
- Will recipient have any need to disclose information?
- If mutual disclosure is required, will the exchange of information be equal?

Information Flow

Key Considerations

- Most trade secret/breach issues result in a battle of circumstantial evidence. Most compelling evidence relates to:
 - Documentation of disclosure
 - Maintenance of disclosed information
 - Documentation of access/use of disclosed information
- Documentation practices closely aligned with definition of Confidential Information and Scope
 - May require business practices to label disclosure materials
 - May require confirmation emails for oral disclosures
- Best practice to define return/destruction of confidential information
- Who is allowed to have access to the information (restrictions on use)

Strategic Decisions

- What documentation best practices can be defined and followed?

Ownership of IP

Key Considerations

- Definition of pre-existing IP and retained ownership will mitigate intended ownership and license grants
- Jointly owned IP
- Assignment clauses in NDAs

Strategic Decisions

- Who will/should own IP developed?
- Will the NDA cover a specific project that is well defined or intended to cover future, undefined projects?
- Will the parties engage in additional contracts for future projects?

Ownership of IP - Examples

Example

- Discloser is and shall remain the exclusive owner of the Confidential Information and all intellectual property rights therein, if any. No license or conveyance of any such rights to recipient is granted or implied under this Agreement. Should Supplier or any member of its organization have developed or will develop, either solely or jointly with others or with Discloser, any improvements in the Confidential Information or any intellectual property related thereto (collectively, “Developments”), which Developments are based on or result from access to the Confidential Information, Supplier agrees to assign and **does hereby assign** to Discloser, all of Supplier’s right, title, and interest in and to said Developments worldwide. Any such Developments shall be included within the definition of Confidential Information for purposes of this Agreement. Supplier hereby appoints Discloser as its attorney-in-fact for the limited purpose of executing all documents and performing all other acts necessary to give effect and legality to the provisions of this paragraph. Supplier represents and warrants that it has the right and will have the right to grant all right, title, and interest in the Developments. Each Party retains sole discretion to assign or reassign the job responsibilities of its employees.

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