Phil's Patent Post

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In This Issue

IP training becomes more popular...

There has been a lot of attention in the media to patent disputes and there is no doubt that recent news items on Apple and Google have raised the public awareness of the impact that patents can have on the success of a business. One side effect I have noticed is that IP training requests have increased as companies seek to better understand the use of IP in all its forms.

I used to provide in-house patent training when working at Kodak and it has been good to once again provide general IP training for companies around Cambridge. I have developed some simple overviews of patents, trademarks, designs and copyright and can tailor courses to meet individual needs.

There has also been a growth in the number of online patent search engines and it has become quite difficult to know which is the best system to use for acquiring a knowledge of patents filed by competitors. Patent searching is still a key part of my day to day activities and I have tried most of the available patent search systems. I can therefore provide a good summary of the advantages and disadvantages of many of these systems and suggest ways you can keep on top of the patents emerging in your technical field.

Let me know if I can be of any help to you by running a short tutorial or Q&A session on any of these topics.

Understanding Patents - Part 3: Patent Value

Continuing the series that answers some of the frequently asked questions I receive from clients. (Refer to my website for Parts 1 and 2)

The increased public awareness of corporations buying and selling patent portfolios and generally engaging in patent litigation has sparked a number of questions around patent value such as how you can determine the value of a portfolio? These are good questions and understanding patent value will help you use patents wisely and effectively. The subject is actually quite complex (just google "patent value") but I will offer a few thoughts on the subject.

Of all the patents filed only a fraction have any real value (the EPO recently estimated that 5% of EP patents accounted for 80% of the value), this is true of many portfolios too. The reason is that older patents often become obsolete as new technology emerges and some patents are filed without due diligence on the prior art. Despite improvements in patent searches and access to databases there are still too many patents granted that are subsequently found to be invalid.

Understanding the value of a patent requires knowledge of the business sector as well as the technology itself. Does the patent address a real customer need? The broadness and validity of the patent claims will determine how well the patent can hold up against competitors blocking tactics or alternative approaches. Be wary of any fancy software that claims to calculate patent values, they will be fraught with uncertainties and generally require user inputs relating to markets, finance and strategy on top of the technology and validity issues. If it is possible to speak to the business owners of the patents this can provide the best guide to their value. If they are not prepared to talk then you can use metrics such as the size of the patent family, number of times the patents are cited by others and how widely the international filings have been spread. All these are indicators of patent value but there is no substitute for reading and understanding the patent to evaluate it in terms of its future business and strategic value in the marketplace.

Useful Links

IP Scope services
Summary of training and consultancy modules

Phil's Patent Picks
See all of the articles on recent Printed Electronics technical breakthroughs...

IP Healthcheck
Link to UK Intellectual Property Office IP Healthcheck service for self assessment

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Phil's Patent Picks

You may remember that I regularly post articles describing current patent applications that are particularly related to printed or plastic electronics. Here is an extract from the latest post on *Phil's Patent Picks*.

Thin Printable Battery Patent

Posted by Phil C on February 2, 2012

Most electronic circuits will require power to operate and for printed electronics devices to become a commercial success there is a need for a simple printed power supply that will last for the typical lifetime of the product. Printed greeting cards with electronic add-ons are a classic example where the power is needed for a fairly short period of time but these are often powered by thin button cells which are not part of the printing process. Several manufacturers are now providing printable power supplies and I have been keeping an eye on these developments.

Blue Spark Technologies recently announced an expansion of their manufacturing facilities for flexible carbon zinc batteries to meet the growing demand for printed electronics in commercial and industrial packaging. The full article is here. Back in October 2011 Blue Spark were granted a patent (US8029927) which covers the technology used in their flexible electrochemical cells and their manufacture.

The patent abstract is as follows:

> "A thin printed flexible electrochemical cell, and its method of manufacture, using a "picture frame" structure sealed, for example, with a high moisture and oxygen barrier polymer film and featuring, for example, a printed cathode deposited on an optional, highly conductive carbon printed cathode collector with a printed or a foil strip anode placed adjacent to the cathode. A viscous or gelled electrolyte is dispensed and/or printed in the cell, and a top laminate can then be sealed onto the picture frame. Such a construction could allow the entire cell to be made on a printing press, for example, as well as gives the opportunity to integrate the battery directly with an electronic application, for example."

Detailed descriptions cover the construction of the cells, sizes and thickness of the "frames" to contain the electrolyte and typical materials that can be used. Examples of a 14 step process are given and then ways to reduce the steps to a 9 step process for a more cost effective operation.

See the full article here: blog post

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Note: You are more than welcome to send the contents of this post to colleagues and friends; please forward it in its entirety, rather than "cut-and-paste".

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