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Public PAIR: The Newest Tool to Monitor the Filing and Prosecution of Competitor Patents

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) recently announced a new electronic database as part of its effort to make the patent examination process fully transparent to the public. The new database, known as the Public PAIR (Patent Application and Information Retrieval) system, allows anyone with Internet access to track the status of a public patent application as it moves from publication to final disposition. Public PAIR allows the public to view, download, and print an array of information including PDF files of all the documents contained in approximately 500,000 patent application files not covered by confidentiality laws. The types of documents available for viewing include Office Actions, Amendments, Information Disclosure Statements, Notices of Allowance, and similar prosecution documents. New applications will be continually added to the database, and at least 300,000 new application files are expected to be added annually. The Public PAIR database may be accessed on the internet at

<http://portal.uspto.gov/external/portal/pair>.

- The Public PAIR system allows access to information that companies and individuals may find helpful in monitoring patent prosecution of competitors or partners, or making strategic decisions regarding patent protection and the direction of research.
- Public disclosure of patent application file documents will permit others to more easily "design around" a product for which patent protection is sought by their competitors, and may help guide innovation into those areas not occupied by competitors' filings. In general, the later in the patenting process a competitor becomes aware of a relevant patent in the field, the more difficult and expensive it becomes to design a non-infringing product. With the Public PAIR system, one can become aware of a competitor's patent claim scope much earlier (e.g., before grant), and begin the design around process earlier and before major capital investment has been made.
- The Public PAIR system will publicly disclose the most current version of the claims in a published application, thereby allowing a more accurate determination of whether the claims may cover an infringing activity of a competitor. By using Public PAIR, the infringer can be alerted to cease its infringing activity well in advance of patent issuance and thus prevent the applicant from recovering potentially significant damages.
- Public PAIR can facilitate due diligence activities and negotiation of patent representations and warranties as a prelude to patent licensing or other corporate transactions. For example, by allowing public access to the file history of the patent assets, potential licensees can more carefully determine the scope of patent protection being offered.

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continued

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The new Public PAIR system is an excellent complement to the European Patent Office's (EPO) Online Public File Inspection system which allows for viewing, downloading, and printing of documents contained in the published application files. Together, the EPO's Online Public File Inspection and USPTO's Public PAIR allow for monitoring of filing and prosecution of patents in the United States and Europe, arguably the two largest markets in the world.

Wiggin and Dana has extensive experience in establishing patent monitoring procedures and can tailor a useful and comprehensive system to monitor worldwide patent filings and prosecution of your competitors using Public PAIR and EPO's Online system, as well as fee-based services such as Derwent, Inpadoc, and selected Dialog databases. If you are interested in establishing such a system, or would like to find out more information about these services, please contact your regular Wiggin and Dana attorney, or one of us.

This document is intended as an informational reminder and does not constitute legal advice. If you have any questions or would like to discuss a particular situation, you should contact your regular Wiggin and Dana attorney, or one of us.

Todd Garabedian, Ph.D.
860.297.3716
tgarabedian@wiggin.com

Dale Carlson
203.498.4385
dcarlson@wiggin.com

Bill Simons
203.498.4502
wsimons@wiggin.com

Greg Rosenblatt
203.498.4566
grosenblatt@wiggin.com

Anthony Gangemi
203.498.4395
agangemi@wiggin.com

Elizabeth Geschke
203.498.4345
egeschke@wiggin.com

Mike Kinney
203.498.4411
mkinney@wiggin.com

Timothy Olson
860.297.3709
tolson@wiggin.com

For more information about the Firm and our Patent Practice Group, please visit www.wiggin.com.

One Century Tower
P.O. Box 1832
New Haven CT
06508-1832
Telephone 203.498.4400
Telefax 203.782.2889

400 Atlantic Street
P.O. Box 110325
Stamford CT
06911-0325
Telephone 203.363.7600
Telefax 203.363.7676

450 Lexington Avenue
Suite 3800
New York NY
10017-3913
Telephone 212.490.1700
Telefax 212.490.0536

One CityPlace
185 Asylum Street
Hartford CT
06103-3402
Telephone 860.297.3700
Telefax 860.525.9380

Quaker Park
1001 Hector Street, Ste. 240
Conshohocken PA
19428-2395
Telephone 610.834.2400
Telefax 610.834.3055