

Editorial



Michael Blackman

1. Focus on nanotechnology

In April 2007 an international workshop was held in Brussels on ‘IPR in nanotechnology – lessons from experiences worldwide’. This was reported here [1] last year. With the support of the organizers mentioned in that report, I have been following up contacts made at the workshop. As a result we are pleased to have received a number of full articles and short communications which provide a nanotechnology focus to this issue. The articles and communications reflect the diversity of topics discussed at the workshop and, indeed, the very wide-ranging challenges and opportunities thrown up by the emergence of this exciting technology. Further articles in this field will be welcome, especially of course articles looking at the problems and possible solutions to searching for nanotechnology subjects.

2. Patents as a strategic tool

An article in *Patent World* provided a useful summary and reminder of the value of patents as a strategic tool [2]. It listed five main themes (securing the benefits of an innovation, a way of generating cash-flow, a strategic tool in the context of competition, patents in the service of communication, and a way of generating new knowledge). It also listed 10 more specific aspects (a monopoly grant – a means of differentiating products, transferring knowledge to companies, revenue from royalties, a fiscal optimization resource, a means of dissuasion, a means of negotiating,

corporate image, a vehicle for in-house information and communication, a competitive intelligence tool, and a tool for creativity). Altogether an impressive list and a good foil to have in mind when dealing with the patent skeptics that we all encounter.

3. Cracking Ideas

As part of the continuing effort in many countries to disseminate practical information on patents and other IP within the educational process, the UK government has backed the creation of a package on “Cracking Ideas” [3]. It is directed at pupils aged around 10 or 11 and presents attractive material in a lively and straightforward way. There are zones for teachers’ use and for students’ use. It covers topics such as how to innovate, protecting inventions, selling ideas and making a profit.

4. USPTO rule changes

Amongst the continuing changes in rules and practice at the USPTO, the requirement that an applicant must provide an ‘examination support document’ that covers all of the claims in an application, if the application contains more than five independent claims or more than 25 total claims, will clearly necessitate significant changes of practice for applicants. The ‘examination support document’ is a substantial requirement, so there is potentially a lot of extra work for applicants and their patent searchers

whenever it is decided that a lengthy set of claims is essential to fully protect an invention. Since it seems that around one third of US applications in 2006 had either more than five independent claims or more than 25 total claims, the impact on the patent search community could be significant unless these lengthy claim sets are reduced. The USPTO was concerned about the disproportionate time taken in examining large numbers of claims, especially where there are many independent claims, so it will be interesting to see to what extent the new requirements – in effect shifting the burden of some of the search and examination onto applicants – act as a disincentive to the filing of large numbers of claims.

5. Editorial Advisory Board

Paul Claus resigned from the Board this year, after some 34 years continuous involvement with the journal, from the work in founding it between 1974 and 1978 through to this year. By any standards, an outstanding contribution. We are naturally sad that he has resigned, but also, of course, extremely grateful for all the efforts that he put in over these years. On a more personal note, I particularly appreciated his support and ideas as our Associate Editor through the early years of my time as Editor-in-Chief. A full appreciation of his efforts was published here at the time of his resignation from his role as Associate Editor [4].

Caroline Bommer has also resigned from the Board. We thank her for her contributions, especially the ‘News from Australia and New Zealand’ column, and welcome her colleague, Jacinta Flattery-O’Brien as our new Board member for that area.

6. Main articles

6.1. Nanotechnology focus

An article by Iwan von Wartburg and Thorsten Teichert looks at the issues in valuing patents and licenses from a business strategy perspective, and extends valuation considerations using the case of nanotechnology as an example.

Vincent Ryckaert and Kristel Van den Broeck describe the way in which IMEC, a non-profit research institute in Belgium, implement an IPR strategy in relation to their collaborations with partners in the field of nanotechnology through their Industrial Affiliation Program.

6.2. Other main articles

An article by Christian Sternitzke et al. describes visualising patent statistics by means of social network analysis tools. Cooperation networks between inventors and applicants are illustrated, using bibliometric measures such as activity and citation frequency and also network measures such as centrality and betweenness.

The establishment of a patent and technical search department for Philips in India is discussed in an article

by Gerard van der Ligt. This department links in with both the existing search department in The Netherlands and with outsourcing activities.

From the EPO’s perspective, Curt Edfjäll explores a number of possibilities for future trends and new developments for patent information in Europe. In addition to the extension of current trends and the possibility of sudden and unpredictable events – fulgurations, other scenarios are also described.

In marking the 20th anniversary of the grant of the Oncomouse patent in the USA, Michael Fuller has explored the world of patents for transgenic animals, including discussion of the appropriate levels of protection and enforcement.

7. Short communications

7.1. Nanotechnology focus

The situation in intellectual property for nanotechnology in Brazil is described in a short communication from Claudia Chamas. It covers, for example, the Brazilian perspective on patentability, patent searching considerations, the issue of the training of examiners, and the protection of nanotechnology.

Mauro Caocci describes a service from the European Commission providing exploitation strategy seminars. In particular the seminars are explained in the context of a major use relating to experience with IPR issues in nanotechnology.

7.2. Other communications

From a vendor’s perspective, Vin Caraher provides interesting insights on how he sees patent information evolving over the next ten years, especially the influence of patent volume, complexity and non-Roman character content, and of wider developments of the internet.

Beatrix Wicenc describes Patent Space, software that helps explain different kinds of patent searches to the laymen in the fields of patents and patent searches.

Other short communications cover Questel, CAS, STN, Thomson Scientific, Trilateral Offices, PDG’s IMPACT Group, USPTO/USA, JPO, EPO, UK-IPO, Rospatent, the Canadian Intellectual Property Office, and Minesoft and RWS.

8. New symposium

Included in this issue is a description of an interesting new addition to the calendar of conferences, symposia and meetings. The first Information Retrieval Facility Symposium brought together information retrieval experts and researchers with their equivalents in the patent information community, to describe and discuss a number of major issues and challenges for these groups. Another report about the symposium has been provided by Griffin [5].

9. Anniversaries

As an appendix to our coverage of invention anniversaries in 2007, Michael White has kindly brought attention to a major Canadian invention of 1907. Peter Lymburner Robertson's socket head screw (also known as the square drive in the USA) is 7th in the list of major Canadian inventions. It accounts for around 75% of all screws sold in Canada. It is the subject of US patent 975285 (see Fig. 1).

In the 1920s Robertson developed improved screwdrivers, with removable bits, for use with both square headed and slotted screws (US patents 1824623-4). For more information, see <http://www.leevalley.com/newsletters/Woodworking/1/5/patents.htm>.

10. Future articles

Amongst the many articles submitted recently and now passing through the referee review and editorial stages,

subjects covered include: integrating intellectual property rights in technical education, assessment of technological capability in science industry linkage in China by patent database, an investigation into analyzing patents by chemical structure using Thomson's Derwent World Patent Index codes, when is a search not a search? Part 2 – non-unity – the EPO approach, decision tree analysis as a tool to optimise patent current awareness bulletins, patent information in Italy, and a comparative study of patent sequence databases.

11. And finally...inventions: successful and bizarre

A report from the UK-IPO on recent patent statistics received good coverage in the media, e.g. [6]. In addition to reporting on the increasing numbers of applications from individual inventors, the report highlighted some successful inventions from individual inventors, such as one relating to an improvement on the conventional 'chip and pin' security system for bankcards. The invention avoids users

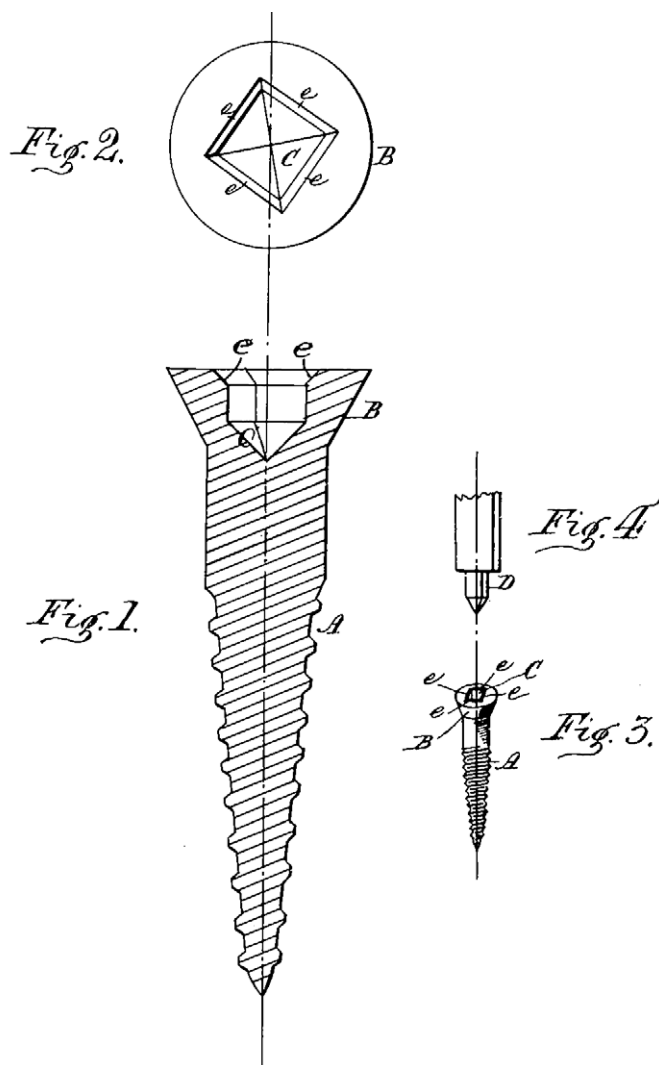


Fig. 1. Robertson's socket head screw – US patent 975285.

having to remember a string of different codes for their various bank cards. Instead users remember a pattern on a numbered grid and enter the corresponding code on a keypad. The pattern changes on each use, providing further improved security.

Unfortunately the article also perpetuates the image of the eccentric inventor by including large illustrations of bizarre inventions. Two old favourites illustrated were the apparatus to facilitate birth by centrifugal force [7] and a classic Arthur Pedrick invention – the photon push–pull radiation detector for use in a chromatically-selective cat flap control and 1000 megaton earth-orbital peace keeping bomb [8].

References

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Michael Blackman

Editor-in-Chief

45 Kenwood Drive,

Beckenham, Kent BR3 6QY, UK

E-mail address: mblackmanwpi@tiscali.co.uk