

DB/C Newsletter

October 2006

News and Comment

I've written about my negative opinion of software patents in previous newsletters. Generally, I hold a very low opinion of those companies that engage in software patent and copyright litigation for the purpose of putting competitors out of business or for profit. Note that I have no problem with defensive software patent collection, or with suing those who steal software. It's the use of a badly broken patent system to harm others that I object to.

SCO is the poster child for bad behavior in this area. SCO was taken over by lawyers motivated to make money via suing IBM over very weak claims that a few lines of code were stolen from software that it was unclear SCO actually even owned. Whenever anyone asks about SCO, I tell them that I believe the company is no longer focused on technology, and therefore is not a good choice as a technology partner.

Unisys was another bad actor in the area of software patents. Long after the GIF file format was accepted as a standard, Unisys acquired a fundamental LZW compression patent which affected GIF files. Unisys used the patent to sue various companies who could afford to pay. Fortunately, the last of the GIF patents expired this month.

There is a new bad actor on the scene - IBM. This month they announced that they are suing Amazon over five very general patents covering e-commerce. Here is a link describing their lawsuit -

<http://www-03.ibm.com/press/us/en/pressrelease/20481.wss>

After a quick perusal of the IBM patents, it is apparent to me that IBM has very weak claims, but with the sad state of patent law in the United States, one never knows what the outcome might be. I suspect many readers will say that they don't need to worry, IBM won't ever interfere in their particular e-commerce software. I strongly disagree with such an attitude. If IBM is emboldened by a big success in suing Amazon, who's to say that they wouldn't hire a big law firm who would go after everyone who's infringing on these patents? Would they come after your company or mine? I certainly hope not, but it's not outside the realm of possibility.

We continue to work on DB/C DX 15. We'll have a preview of planned features in an upcoming newsletter.

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DB/C DX Class Schedule

Class: DB/C DX Fundamentals
Date: January, 2007
Location: Woodridge, Illinois

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