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FLOSS SIG Newsletter

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In this issue...

Software Patents.....	1
Training Opportunities.....	4
FLOSS News.....	5
Conferences, Exhibitions & Workshops.....	7
FLOSS-SIG Events.....	9
FLOSS Resources.....	11

***** FLOSS-SIG Seminar: The Genii Of The Lamp - 2nd March *****

Software Patents

London 14 December: Computer Implemented Inventions Meeting

The software patents issue continues to cause major concern amongst UK software developers.

On the 14 December a meeting was held at the DTI in London with Lord Sainsbury (Minister for Science and Innovation), the UK Patent Office and an invited audience of over 200 made up of Members of Parliament and their constituents who had previously expressed their concerns about the Computer Implemented Inventions Directive.

I promised to prepare a summary of the meeting in the last SIG newsletter. It was however agreed at the start of the meeting that a transcript would be made available through the DTI web site. This was finally published at the end of January - so apologies for a delayed newsletter but since this is an extremely important topic to the FLOSS community it seemed useful to wait until this became available.

The web references at the end of this item provide a direct link to this transcript (ref 1) for those interested in the detail.

Whilst I have my own concerns about the issue and the potential impact on my business which were expressed via my own MP, I found from talking to others present that there are some shared opinions:-

1. The patent system is felt to be fundamentally flawed with respect to software - the process doesn't match the product;
2. Few software developers have difficulty accepting the patent system in general and the majority see the need to protect large scale developments needing major investment over extended periods of time, for example pharmaceuticals;
3. The copyright system is felt to work well for software. Whilst in the Q&A session the UKPO

suggested that there would be nothing to stop others creating competing software independently, developers themselves accept this both as a consequence of the freedom to develop software in the way they work at present and as a stimulus to innovate and improve their work;

4. The patent system in practice does little to protect the interests of SMEs and to encourage real innovation in such companies. Though some statistics would be helpful, it seems that only a very

****** Breaking news ******

EU requests restart

In the course of writing this article the Legal Affairs Committee of the European Parliament has just decided to request a restart of the process on the directive.

So is this back to square one?

small proportion of SMEs appear to use the patent system, especially so in their earliest and perhaps most innovative start-up phase when limited private funds are ploughed into product and market development rather than intangible assets;

5. There is a deeply held fear of inadvertently infringing a patent by independent invention in an unrelated field of work. Software techniques in particular have very broad fields of application. The costs of performing extensive patent searches across wide and unrelated fields of endeavour will cause many developers to consider whether they should continue to trade;

6. The patent industry at present has insufficient awareness and direct experience of software and its associated development processes to perform adequate prior art searches and identify the relevant 'technical contribution'. This skills shortage needs to be remedied with some urgency. In the meantime the granting of dubious patents could cause great damage to the industry and economy;
7. Whilst the essential principle of 'technical contribution' was well understood, there was general fear that the height of the inventive step is set far too low, such that mere semantical changes in a patent application made by a skilful patent attorney would allow the granting of very broad software-only patents. Some examples of where this had occurred were given at the meeting;

The UKPO has published results of a consultation process on its web site (ref 2). Some of the key arguments can be found on the Federation for a Free Information Infrastructure website (ref 3).

A high level of interest throughout the EU

A remarkable snippet that came out of this meeting was the amount of debate which the proposed Directive had stimulated within the EU government and citizens as a whole – apparently this exceeded the levels for any other EU Directive to date. I'm still not sure whether this says more about the passionate feelings of the software development community or the general lack of interest in all things emanating from the EU.

It seemed there had been some assumptions that the audience would consist chiefly of open source protagonists so it was no real surprise when Lord Sainsbury's opening remarks cited the Government's commitment to FLOSS in the recently published OGC report (see October newsletter and ref 4).

In fact, the catholic audience included software industry professionals from both large and small companies as well as owners of manufacturing companies, quantum physicists and representatives of international standards committees. All of these people gave examples on how extending software patents would have detrimental effects on their work.

Although the FLOSS community worldwide continues to be very vocal in this debate, it must be remembered that the scope of the Directive affects the entire software industry, including developers and end users alike. The audience was well aware of this and avoided being drawn into any FLOSS specific issues in its questions.

Software as a component

Much was made of the concept of software as a component within the context of an overall patentable invention. In the example given by the UKPO (a mug printing machine), the software alone (essentially a printer driver) would not be patentable, but its application within the concept of the mug printing machine would be.

This accords with present intention (though not necessarily with present practice) and the UKPO seeks to clarify this position within the Directive.

Referring to this example, Lord Sainsbury considered the software to be in the same category as nuts and bolts – not much use on their own, but when combined with other components in an innovative way clearly created something new – an invention which could be patented.

The audience felt this was treading on decidedly dodgy ground - fasteners of many kinds have been patented in the past and there seems to be no reason why 'software

'glue' should not be in the future if software patents are allowed. Ay, there indeed is the rub which will stifle men's dreams!

The Q&A session

Of particular note in the Q&A session were questions raised by:-

- Jim Daley (Cap Gemini) relating to the transparency of the EU process;
- James Heald (FFII) relating to patentability of core techniques such as b-trees;
- Tim Jackson (Premier IT Group) referring to business methods and level of technical contribution;
- Julian Todd (NC Graphics) referring to the negligible use of patents within world class British companies in the robotics and machine tools sector;
- The chairman (name not recorded) of a multimedia standards committee referring to the difficulty of achieving international interoperability standards where patents are getting in the way;
- Chris Austin's second contribution relating to the rapid innovation which is typical of software development and Peter Hayward's response;
- Richard Allan MP (Sheffield Hallam) referring to UKPO desires compared with current EU Patent Office practice;

Conclusions of the meeting

On the whole the transcript seems to me to be a fair representation of the proceedings, though there is one item I did make a note of which it is difficult to let pass uncorrected.

At one point in the meeting, Lord Sainsbury asked whether the concept of 'technical contribution' could be defined more precisely. Referring to this he said...

"Is the advice I get from the Patent Office wrong?"

The transcript buries this and fails to note that the audience responded immediately in unison with a very resounding 'Yes'.

As Richard Allan observed, the technical contribution issue is critical and must represent a sufficiently high barrier to a patent being granted if broad software patents are not to sneak in through the back door.

To this end Lord Sainsbury recommended that any specific proposals for amendments to the legislation be forwarded to him and that a workgroup (including those members of the audience who wished to contribute) be established to look specifically at the technical contribution issue.

So how will the CII Directive impact your business?

Whatever flavour of software you are developing or using the Directive will impact your work in some way and this may be vital to your future.

If you are a developer, you alone should know whether you are breaking copyright - but how will you ensure that the new bit of code you developed independently last night will not infringe any existing or potential patents? Can you afford to find out? Can you afford not to?

If you are an end user and have built your business around some specialised software written for you by a local software developer, what steps are you going to take to ensure that there are no potential infringements in the solution they provided to you? If you ask the

developer to provide the supporting evidence then costs will rise significantly – especially for one-off projects. Your systems after all might just rely on that same great bit of code developed independently and in all innocence.

It therefore doesn't matter which side of the software patent debate you find yourself, you are strongly advised to get involved – find out more by following the links at

the end of this article.

If you have any views on this topic then please let me know – but more importantly contribute to the on-line discussions so that more people will hear your views.

R E B Holland – 3 Feb 2005.

End note (4 Feb): Workshops announced by the UKPO – see FLOSS News section for more details.

Web references and resources...


- 1 Full transcript of DTI meeting <http://www.patent.gov.uk/about/ippd/issues/cii-meeting.htm>
- Summary of results of <http://www.patent.gov.uk/about/consultations/annexc.htm>
- 2 consultations by UKPO
- Key arguments regarding Software <http://kwiki.ffii.org/index.cgi?SwpatArgumentsEn>
- 3 Patents
- OGC report on Open Source <http://www.ogc.gov.uk/index.asp?docid=2190#finalreport>
- 4 software trials in public bodies
- Breaking news on JURI descision <http://news.zdnet.co.uk/business/legal/0,39020651,39186538,00.htm>
- 5 to restart procedure.

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Training Opportunities

The following organisations have indicated that they are able to provide training on FLOSS and related topics. We will endeavour to keep this updated on a monthly basis. Note that you may be eligible for financial support to attend some these training courses – the training provider should be able to help so do not forget to ask if you contact them.

Please note that inclusion in this list does not constitute any recommendation or endorsement of the organisation concerned – it is merely an indication of the training available in the region.

Organisation	Contact details	Training offered
	Unit 3, Meadow Court Millshaw Leeds LS11 8LZ Tel: 0845 122 1555 http://www.nti-westyorkshire.ac.uk/	Linux Professional Institute (LPI) courses at foundation, professional and expert levels. Red Hat Certified Engineer Many other ICT related courses – contact NTI for further details.
Wyvern Training Ltd	Wyvern House, Guernsey Road Sheffield S2 4HG Tel: 0114 255 0054 http://www.wyverntraining.co.uk/	A Learn Direct Centre offering a number of courses including LPI. Wyvern is also a Prometric testing centre.
GBdirect Ltd	Leeds Innovation Centre 103 Clarendon Road Leeds LS2 9DF Tel: 0800 651 0338 http://training.gbdirect.co.uk/	A well-established provider offering a huge variety of training courses related to FLOSS technologies. GBdirect offer training at a number of centres throughout the UK. Refer to web site for further details.
Interquad Learning	Globe Quay 16 Globe Road Leeds LS11 5QG Tel: 0113 290 4600 http://www.interquad.com/	InterQuad Learning is a large ICT training organisation with sites across the UK. It has been selected by Novell to deliver accelerated courses on Certified Linux Professional (CLP) and Certified Linux Engineer (CLE).
Rotherham College of Arts & Technology (RCAT)	Eastwood Lane, Rotherham, S65 1EG Tel: 01709 362111 http://www.rotherham.ac.uk/	Now offering introductory courses on Linux System Administration (LPI101). These are 10 week courses run in the evening.
OpenChoiceUK Ltd	S1 St James, Vicar Lane, Sheffield S1 2EX Tel: 0114 2238800 http://www.openchoiceuk.com	This exciting new development in the city centre is being established as a support centre for businesses, communities and public sector organisations adopting FLOSS. We hope to feature more about this project at a later date.

FLOSS News

These news items are a summary of those we have picked up from various sources since the last issue which we feel might be relevant to members of the FLOSS-SIG. Naturally we would greatly appreciate contributions from readers for inclusion in subsequent issues and on the web site.

4 February 2005: UKPO Announces Workshops on 'Technical Contribution'

The UKPO is inviting all those from the UK with an interest in informing the 'Technical Contribution' issue to attend a series of workshops during March and April. A response is needed by 18th February.

Full details here: <http://www.patent.gov.uk/about/ippd/issues/cii-workshops.htm>

3 February 2005: Back to the drawing board on Software Patents

News websites have been hot today with details of the decision by the European Parliament Legal Affairs Committee to ask the Commission for a renewed referral of the software patents directive. Full details here and in many other places.

<http://kwiki.ffii.org/Restart050202En>

<http://news.zdnet.co.uk/business/legal/0,39020651,39186538,00.htm>

1 February 2005: Open Source Consortium announces task force on EU Patent Law

Brussels -- The Open Source Consortium (OSC) announced on Tuesday that it has set up a Task Force to investigate the European Patent law's potential impact on Open Source technology and provide a cohesive response to the current debate.

More at <http://www.opensourceconsortium.org/>

31 January 2005: Freedom as in Beer - really!

This has little to do with FLOSS – we just liked this delightful (spoof?) item we spotted on The Register earlier...

Full story at http://www.theregister.co.uk/2005/01/31/avalanche_escape/

27 January 2005: City of Vienna Plans Migration to Open Source Software

Austria's capital recently announced that it plans to start a so-called "soft" migration of its desktop PCs to open source software this summer, meaning that workers will be able to choose between Microsoft Office 2000 and OpenOffice.org, and between Microsoft Windows 2000 and Linux.

More here: <http://news.zdnet.co.uk/software/linuxunix/0,39020390,39185440,00.htm>

21 January 2005: OpenChoiceUK to encourage adoption of FLOSS in SY

OpenChoice provides the South Yorkshire with a Centre of Excellence in open source software, the only one in South Yorkshire, UK Public and independently funded vendor neutral organization.

Further information at <http://www.openchoiceuk.com/>

11 January 2005: IBM Pledges 500 U.S. Patents To Open Source

IBM today pledged open access to key innovations covered by 500 IBM software patents to individuals and groups working on open source software. IBM believes this is the largest pledge ever of patents of any kind and represents a major shift in the way IBM manages and deploys its intellectual property (IP) portfolio.

Further details at <http://www-1.ibm.com/press/>

December 2004: South Yorkshire charity secures funding for wireless intranet

Dinnington Area Regeneration Trust Ltd has succeeded in securing funding from both the Objective 1 programme and the Big Lottery Fund for a wireless community intranet project to improve access to ICT within this ex-coalfield community. This represents the culmination of almost 3 years work and an exciting opportunity for the community. The project, which will start in January 2005, will make extensive use of FLOSS technology and aims to develop the skills of members from local community groups in the area in the use of FLOSS desktop applications, intranet content generation and computer recycling.

Further details will be available shortly at <http://www.dinnington.org/>

Conferences, Exhibitions & Workshops

Thinking of travelling to a FLOSS conference and want some help?

d-SY has a budget to support members in attending conferences and workshops elsewhere in the UK or even internationally. This trial service will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis and will generally cover up to 50% of travel and accommodation costs. Enquiries for FLOSS technology events should be directed to Bob Holland at bobholland@bradwell.net. Note: any applications should be submitted prior to travelling and reimbursement will be made retrospectively upon production of valid receipts.

An application form for funding under this programme can now be downloaded from the web site at <http://www.digitalsy.org.uk/html/SIGs/floss/>

[LinuxWorld Conference & Expo: Boston MA, USA - 14-15 February 2005](#)

LinuxWorld Conference & Expo® continues to grow and strengthen as a pillar for open source education. Now in its seventh year, it is the world's largest and most comprehensive event focusing on Linux and open source solutions.

For further details see <http://www.linuxworldexpo.com/live/12/events/12BOS05A>

[FOSDEM 2005: Brussels, Belgium - 26-27 February 2005](#)

The fifth Free and Open source Software Developers' European Meeting is a 2 days event, organized by volunteers, to promote the widespread use of Free and Open Source software. Taking place in the beautiful city of Brussels, Belgium FOSDEM meetings are recognised as the best Free and Open Source events in Europe.

Topics to be included are...

- Distribution packaging : talks on the various tools used in distribution for packaging programs
- Kernel : core kernels talks
- Desktop : future of the Linux desktop
- Cluster/GRID : talks about different Cluster & GRID tools
- Security : what's new in the security world
- Development Tools : presentation of OSS DevTools

For further details see <http://www.fosdem.org/2005>

[5th Asia Open Source Software Symposium: Beijing, China - 2-4 March 2005](#)

The 5th Asia OSS Symposium will become one of the events of the first China OSS week (February 28 -March 4). The China OSS week will be hosted by Beijing Software Industry Productivity Center (BSIPC) and co-hosted by Sun Wah Hi-Tech System Software Limited (SWHSS). Besides Asia OSS Symposium, Debian Mini Conference (February 28 - March1) and Codefest (March 2-3) will be held. During the Debian Mini Conference, Debian developers and enthusiasts from all over the world will present speeches, and Codefest will be a gathering for programmers in China and around the world.

Further details at <http://www.asia-oss.org/>

[CeBIT: Hannover, Germany - 10-16 March 2005](#)

This major international technology exhibition features LinuxPark where the main commercial suppliers and developers in the FLOSS world will be found.

Further details at <http://www.cebit.de/>

[Gentoo UK 2005 Conference: Manchester, UK - 12 March 2005](#)

Held on a Saturday at the University of Salford, this year's event will feature two tracks; a speaking programme and a demonstration / help clinic, where Gentoo developers will be on-hand to help answer your questions and solve your problems.

Further details at <http://dev.gentoo.org/~stuart/2005/>

[Novell Brainshare 2005: Salt Lake City, USA - 20-25 March 2005](#)

This year's BrainShare, among other things, is about embracing Linux and open source. With companies today growing increasingly frustrated with proprietary solutions and expensive vendor "lock-in" situations, Linux has become the fastest growing operating system in the industry and is increasingly accepted as a legitimate alternative to other popular operating systems.

Further details at <http://www.novell.com/brainshare.>

[MySQL User Conference: Santa Clara CA, USA - 18-21 April 2005](#)

The 2005 Conference will host leading industry keynote speakers, the latest MySQL Open Source technologies, in-depth sessions and tutorials, and an exhibit hall showcasing the latest open source technologies.

Further details at <http://www.mysqluc.com/>

[linux.conf.au: Canberra, Australia - 18-23 April 2005](#)

LCA is one of three major, international, grass-roots open-source conferences world wide. This will be the sixth annual conference which has in the past attracted many high profile speakers.

Further details can be found at <http://linux.conf.au/>

[Linux Tag: Karlsruhe, Germany - 22-25 June 2005](#)

The preparations have begun for Europe's most important event on Free Software, Linux and Open Source. This year's slogan: "Linux everywhere." From June 22 to 25, 2005, more than 16,000 IT decision-makers will meet at the Karlsruhe convention center to participate in LinuxTag 2005. The annual event has offered a unique combination of exhibition and conference program.

Further details at: <http://www.linuxtag.org/typo3site/8.0.html?L=1>

[OSS2005: Genova, Italy - 11-15 July 2005](#)

CALL for Papers, Workshops, Tutorials, Panels and Demos

The First International Conference on Open Source Systems will take place in Genova during July next year. For full details see <http://oss2005.case.unibz.it/>

Note: Submissions must be received by 15th January 2005.

FLOSS-SIG Events

Free Seminar: "The Genii Of The LAMP" - Wednesday 2nd March 2005

Location: The MegaCentre, Bernard Road, Sheffield

Time: 09:30 – 16:00 (registration from 09:00)

A full programme of speakers will present aspects of key open source technologies driving web applications.

The term LAMP, frequently applied in reference to Linux/Apache/MySQL/PHP, also embraces a number of alternatives software projects in similar roles. This event will provide a unique opportunity to meet some of the lead developers face to face.

In addition to the main programme, there will be a series of break-out sessions during the day where delegates will be able to question the speakers and other participants on specific issues.

Confirmed speakers include:

- ★ [Jono Bacon](#) will be providing an overview of LAMP technology. Jono is presently working with [OpenAdvantage](#), a centre of excellence for Open Source located in the West Midlands.
- ★ [Jacek Artymiak](#), leading author on building firewalls will be discussing issues relating to server security on Linux and OpenBSD.
- ★ We welcome [Ruediger Berlich](#) back to Sheffield this year to present a paper on business applications of GRID computing.
- ★ Apache developer [Hans Kind](#) will be presenting his paper "Bolting Down Your Apache Web Server", recently presented at the Apache conference in Las Vegas.
- ★ PostgreSQL developer [Simon Riggs](#) will be talking about the latest release of this very popular open source database.
- ★ [Derick Rethans](#) is a lead developer on the PHP Hypertext Pre-processor, now used widely as the glue binding many major web applications.

The event will be chaired by [George Coxhead](#) of Leeds Metropolitan University. George is a leading advocate for the adoption of Open Source software in Yorkshire and has delivered a number of speeches to the South Yorkshire community at previous conferences.

So please [register now](#) for this free event.

It would be appreciated if you would help to publicise this event by [downloading a poster](#) and displaying at your place of work.

There will be an associated **mini-exhibition** featuring organisations involved with Open Source Software. Those already intending to take part include:-

- ★ **Digital South Yorkshire** ★ **South Yorkshire e-Business Club** ★
- ★ **The IEE (South Yorkshire Branch)** ★ **O'Reilly Media** ★
- ★ **Sheffield Linux User Group** ★ **ScunDog Linux User Group** ★
- ★ **Kusala Web Developments Ltd** ★ **Bradwell IT Solutions Ltd** ★
- ★ **Hypercube Systems Ltd** ★ **OpenSolutionsUK Ltd** ★ **Merchant Pagan Ltd** ★
- ★ **Integradesk Ltd** ★ **Dinnington Area Regeneration Trust Ltd** ★

Contact bobholland@bradwell.net if you wish to take part in this.

Workshop: "Embedding Linux for the Real World" – Wednesday 23rd March 2005

Venue: Sheffield city centre (to be confirmed) – see web site for further details

Time: 19:00 for 19:30

Seb James of Sheffield based developers [Hypercube Systems Ltd](#) will be talking about his experiences in porting and using Linux in real world applications. This will be a taster session. If there is sufficient demand in the region we will look at providing some more in-depth 'masterclass' sessions on this topic at a later date.

For further details on FLOSS-SIG and other d-SY events go here...

<http://www.digitalsy.org.uk/html/SIGs/floss/dsyevents.php>

FLOSS Resources

Every now and then as we are browsing the web we all come across useful sites and information. This section of the newsletter includes some links which we hope you will find useful. Once again we will build on this as the FLOSS-SIG develops.

[Documentation and training materials for OpenOffice.org](#)

Those planning to migrate to OpenOffice.org might find their task made easier with some additional documentation and training materials made available by the COSPA project at...

<http://www.cospa-project.org/download.html>.

A quick look at the documentation available suggests it very task oriented which should appeal to those already familiar with Microsoft Office and who need to get a similar job done using OpenOffice.org.

The main OpenOffice.org site can of course be found at...

<http://www.openoffice.org/>

[TheOpenCD Project](#)

Those who are interested in trying or using Open Source software but do not wish to move away from a Microsoft Windows operating system might find this project extremely helpful.

TheOpenCD is a collection of high quality Open Source software configured to run on Windows.

On the CD image (which you can download from the site for free) you will find Windows versions of major FLOSS programs such as OpenOffice.org, the GIMP, Audacity and many more. If you are unable or unwilling to download such large files, then you can order copies of the CD from many of the organisations listed on the web site which is located at...

<http://theopencd.sunsite.dk/>

[JDi-Software: extendedPDF Macro for OpenOffice.org](#)

Thanks to d-SY FLOSS-SIG subscriber Dr. Martin Brown who wrote in last month to let us know about a macro he had developed to allow creation of PDFs from OOo complete with hyper-links, bookmarks and other facilities. These navigation tools are especially useful to those preparing larger documents in OOo for eventual release in PDF format.

Following his advice, we downloaded the open edition of the macro from the website and gave it a test run on this newsletter.

If you want to find out more and try it out for yourself, then please visit Martin's website at <http://www.idisoftware.co.uk/pages/epdf-home.php>

Thanks for the advice Martin – this worked a treat and we hope others will find this useful.

[Hypercube Systems: phpOrganisation](#)

This is a small business accountancy application developed by Sheffield company Hypercube Systems and released under the GPL. phpOrganisation provides much of the functionality of commercial small business accountancy software in a web-enabled application which can run on both Windows and Linux/UNIX computers. In addition to accounting features, it allows tracking of time on projects and contracts and stores information on communications with contacts.

For further details see <http://www.phporg.net/>

IBM: Redbook Portal - Linux

The IBM website provides a vast resource of high quality technical information. Whilst the majority of this is naturally devoted to the support of IBM's own technology, there is much of general applicability on important topics subjects such as TCP/IP network design, migration to Linux desktop software and other aspects of FLOSS.

Further details can be found at <http://www.redbooks.ibm.com/Redbooks.nsf/Portals/Linux>