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D E C I S I O N
of 29 September 2005

Case Number: T 1043/03 - 3.5.01

Application Number: 99308736.0

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Title of invention:
Personal information management

Applicant:
FUJITSU LIMITED

Headword:
Entry Screen/FUJITSU

Relevant legal provisions:
EPC Art. 52(1), 56, 123(2)

Keyword:
"Inventive step (no)"

Decisions cited:
T 0258/03

Catchword:
-



Case Number: T 1043/03 - 3.5.01

D E C I S I O N
of the Technical Board of Appeal 3.5.01
of 29 September 2005

Appellant:

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Decision under appeal:

Decision of the Examining Division of the
European Patent Office posted 16 April 2003
refusing European application No. 99308736.0
pursuant to Article 97(1) EPC.

Composition of the Board:

Chairman: S. V. Steinbrener
Members: K. J. K. Bumès
A. Pignatelli

Summary of Facts and Submissions

I. The appeal lies from the decision of the Examining Division to refuse European patent application No. 99 308 736.0 for lack of inventive step in view of

D1: EP-A-0 580 116

and a skilled person's general knowledge.

II. The appellant requests that the decision under appeal be set aside and a patent be granted on the basis of:

(main request) claims 1 to 12 as submitted at the oral proceedings before the Examining Division; or

(auxiliary request) amended claims 1 to 9 as submitted with the statement of grounds of appeal.

(a) Claim 1 of the main request reads:

"1. An information managing apparatus which has a plurality of different information management functions and generates and manages necessary data by using entered data items, comprising:

a plurality of personal information management units (44, 45, 46, 48) each for performing a respective one of said information management functions and for managing a plurality of kinds of personal information;

an entry unit (36) for entry of a plurality of data items which are necessary in at least one of said personal information management units;

a data selection unit (38) for selecting, from said plurality of entered data items, data items which

are necessary in at least one of said personal management units; and

a data generation unit (42) for generating data by using said data items selected by said data selection unit (38); characterised in that:

said entry unit (36) displays, on a display screen of the apparatus, a single entry screen (50) allowing the user to enter the plurality of data items in common for said plurality of personal information management units, and allowing the user to designate multiple ones of the personal information management units to receive the entered data items;

said data selection unit (38) automatically selects the data items for each of said plurality of personal information management units on the basis of correspondence information (40) in which a correspondence relation between each of said personal information management units and the data items to be selected has previously been defined; and

said data generation unit (42) generates, from the data items selected by said data selection unit (38), data for each of the multiple personal information management units designated by said entry unit (36)."

Claim 5 of the main request is directed to a corresponding information managing method.

(b) Claim 1 of the auxiliary request reads:

"1. An information managing apparatus which has a plurality of different information management functions and generates and manages necessary data by using entered data items, comprising:

a plurality of personal information management units (44, 45, 46, 48) each for performing a respective one of said information management functions and for managing a plurality of kinds of personal information;

an entry unit (36) for entry of a plurality of data items which are necessary in at least one of said personal information management units;

a data selection unit (38) for selecting, from said plurality of entered data items, data items which are necessary in at least one of said personal management units; and

a data generation unit (42) for generating data by using said data items selected by said data selection unit (38); characterised in that:

said entry unit (36) displays, on a display screen of the apparatus, an integrated entry screen (50) comprising a plurality of data item entry boxes (52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70) allowing the user to enter the plurality of data items in common for said plurality of personal information management units (44, 45, 46, 48), and further comprising check boxes (72, 74, 76, 78) allowing the user to designate some or all of the personal information management units to receive the data items entered into the entry boxes (52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70);

said data selection unit (38) automatically selects the data items entered into the entry boxes (52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70) for each of said plurality of personal information management units on the basis of correspondence information (40) in which a correspondence relation between each of said personal information management units and the data items to be selected has previously been defined; and

said data generation unit (42) generates, from the data items selected by said data selection unit (38), data for each of the personal information management units (44, 45, 46, 48) designated using said check boxes (72, 74, 76, 78)."

Claim 4 of the auxiliary request is directed to a corresponding information managing method.

III. In an annex to summons to oral proceedings, the Board expressed its preliminary view that the claims related to inventions within the meaning of Article 52(1) EPC (rather than a computer program as such) but raised doubts about whether the skilled person had to make an inventive step from D1 to arrive at an information managing apparatus according to claim 1 (main and auxiliary requests).

IV. The appellant argued essentially as follows.

A. With respect to D1, the following differences of the claimed apparatus have been asserted:

(a) Claim 1 requires the user to enter data items and to designate personal information management units to which (respective sub-sets of) the entered data items are to be transferred, whereas the apparatus of D1 operates on received data (from the outside) rather than user-entered data.

(b) According to claim 1, a single screen allows the user both to enter the data items and to designate the personal information management units for which the (respective sub-sets of) data items are

destined, whereas the apparatus of D1 requires a separate menu for selecting one of the management units as a destination for the data.

- (c) The single entry screen of claim 1 enables a user to designate multiple ones of the personal information management units, whereas the selection menu of D1 allows the user to select only one destination at a time.
 - (d) According to claim 1, correspondence information (e.g. Table 40 of Figure 3) enables appropriate sub-sets of the entered data items to be extracted automatically for transfer to the designated personal information management units, whereas D1 is silent on such an efficient and user-friendly extraction means.
- B. Those contributions add up to a considerable overall advantage in that multiple information management tasks can be set up easily by enabling the user to select various personal information management units at the same time as the data items are entered. Only hindsight analysis would inspire the skilled person to provide the claimed combination of modifications to D1. The apparatus of D1 and the apparatus of claim 1 serve a similar purpose (avoiding repetitive entries of data intended for multiple data managements units) but the claimed apparatus clearly takes an alternative approach.
- C. The amendments according to the auxiliary request underline the differences over D1 already pointed

out in relation to the main request, in particular the fact that a single screen is used to enter the data items (through data item entry boxes) and to designate (through check boxes) the information managements units which are to receive (sub-sets of) the data items.

- V. At the end of the oral proceedings, the chairman pronounced the Board's decision.

Reasons for the Decision

Main request

1. *Admissibility of the amendments (Article 123(2) EPC)*

Claim 1 has been amended setting out from claim 1 as filed and adding features which reflect the system structure shown notably in Figure 2 of the application as published, EP-A2-1 035 489 (denoted "A2" hereinafter), as documented by the reference numerals used in the claim.

The entry unit (Figure 2: 36) of amended claim 1 is originally disclosed in the form of an integrated entry screen (Figure 11: 50; column 8, line 36 to column 9, line 21), or single entry screen (original claim 2), on which the user can also select the type of information to be generated (column 9, lines 17 to 45).

A correspondence table for the selection unit (38) is disclosed in original claims 4 and 5, Figure 3 and column 9 (lines 33 to 39), for example.

Hence, the Board is satisfied that the amended apparatus claim 1 - and the independent method claim 5 based on the same concept - meet the requirements of Article 123(2) EPC.

2. *Invention within the meaning of Article 52(1) EPC*

The Board considers the claims to relate to inventions within the meaning of Article 52(1) EPC. In particular, claim 1 relates to an apparatus which is a physical entity having technical character (T 258/03 - Auction method/Hitachi). In the Board's view, the claimed features also contribute to said technical character in that they provide a technical effect: The entry of data to a plurality of processing units is facilitated and accelerated. Separate filters (correspondence table columns) are applied to the inputted data items in order to forward different (sub-)sets of the data items to different information management units. Each data item is routed according to its functional type rather than a merely cognitive meaning. Avoiding repetitive inputting of a data item also reduces the likelihood of typing errors. The man-machine interface becomes more efficient.

3. *Closest prior art*

- 3.1 The Board concurs with the appellant in considering D1 as the closest available prior art document. The information management apparatus of D1 aims at storing a received data item into different storage areas associated with different function modes to avoid repetitive entries of the data item, such as a person's

name, in two or more storage areas (D1, column 2, lines 14 to 32). D1 thus addresses the problem of the present application (A2, [0004]/[0005]).

- 3.2 The embodiment according to Figure 20 of D1 (described from column 14, line 14 to column 16, line 43) relates to a "Schedule Mode Process" during which appointment data from a schedule data storage area (Figure 3: 29b) can be copied (avoiding manual re-entry) into an address data storage area (29a) (D1, column 16, lines 13 to 31; Figure 28).

In doing so, an automatic filtering or selection must take place in that only (address) data items fitting the target function (address registration) are extracted from the source function (schedule mode), see Figure 29 of D1 (column 16, lines 32 to 43).

The Board further notes that the schedule mode presupposes a possibility for the user to enter data items in his personal schedule (D1, column 15, lines 9 to 12). In other words, the apparatus of D1 processes not only data items received from the outside. For data entry by the user, the apparatus comprises a keyboard (D1, Figure 1; Figure 2: 27; column 5, line 55 to column 6, line 54).

It is also worth noting that the data items to be entered during the schedule mode of D1 encompass a set of data items for use in the address registration mode. Thus, in terms of present claim 1, the schedule mode of D1 allows the user to enter a plurality of data items in common for a plurality of personal information management units (notwithstanding the fact that some of

the data items may be corrected later, see Figure 20, steps E10 and E11, for example).

- 3.3 The embodiment according to Figure 33 of D1 (described from column 18, line 18 to column 21, line 3) relates to a "Normal Message Mode Process" during which data items are received (Figure 2: 21, 22; Figure 8) and displayed (Figure 2: 32) and then can be routed to one of a plurality of functions or modes, i.e. a schedule registration mode, an address registration mode, or a memo registration mode (Figure 33, steps I6 to I12).

The data items are routed directly (i.e. without any further manual intervention) to one of the aforementioned modes insofar as the data items comply with the format required by the particular mode (D1, column 19, lines 10/11 and lines 49/50; column 20, lines 27/28). In other words, the apparatus implies some pre-defined correspondence information about which data items are eligible for which information management modes.

4. *Differences of claim 1 over D1*

When comparing Figure 20 of D1 (as evaluated at point 3.2 *supra*) with the list of differences put forward by the appellant (points IV.A(a) to (d) *supra*), the Board sees only the following contributions by claim 1 to the teaching of D1.

- 4.1 The entry screen according to claim 1 enables a user to designate multiple ones of the personal information management units, whereas the selection menu of D1

- (Figure 20, steps E8, E9) allows the user to select only one menu item at a time.
- 4.2 According to claim 1, the entry screen is a single screen which allows the user both to enter the data items and to designate the personal information management units for which the data items (or sub-sets thereof) are intended, whereas the apparatus of D1 employs a separate menu (Figure 20, steps E8, E9) for selecting an information management unit as a destination for the data items.
5. *Technical advantages achieved; objective problem*
- 5.1 Designating multiple ones of the information management units in the entry screen enables an entered data item to be transferred to several information management units in one automatic operation.
- 5.2 Having to enter data items and their intended destinations in a single entry screen prompts the user to immediately indicate both types of information and thus speeds up the overall process of propagating data items automatically to plural information management units.
- 5.3 As D1 already addresses and overcomes the general problem of plural entries of identical data items for plural information management units (D1, column 2, lines 14 to 32), the objective technical problem underlying the present application may be formulated as how to further streamline the data entry procedure known from D1.

6. *Assessment of the solution (Article 56 EPC)*

6.1 The claimed apparatus streamlines the data entry procedure of D1 by enhancing two graphical interface features: A *single* entry screen allows the user to enter the data items and designate *multiple* personal information management units (points 4.1 and 4.2 *supra*).

6.2 The Board first notes generally that the distinguishing features provide not only advantages (points 5.1 and 5.2 *supra*) but also predictable drawbacks: Where an iterative process (propagation of data to several units) is performed automatically in one operation (rather than unit by unit), human intervention is not possible until all the steps have been carried out. Where propagated data items have to be edited or corrected, the user needs to enter into a correction mode (such as step E10/E11 in Figure 20 of D1) for each information management unit concerned and, thus, may not gain overall efficiency over D1.

Similar considerations apply to the issue of making a user enter a plurality of data items in a single screen or in a sequence of screens. Where a large number of data items have to be entered, crowding the entry boxes on a single screen may be inconvenient or unergonomic.

Hence, a skilled person's choice of more automation and compactness in a given situation is subject to a usual compromise between speed, flexibility and convenience.

6.3 It is true that the embodiment according to Figure 20 of D1 provides for copying, or propagating, a data item from the schedule mode to only one target mode (address

registration). However, an explicit problem underlying D1 (column 2, lines 14 to 19) relates to storing the data item in "two or more" areas of the memory (assigned to different function modes or categories). Where more than two memory areas have to be provided with the same data item, the skilled person will obviously want to propagate it from one current entry mode to all the other modes instead of reentering the data item manually.

Consequently, according to Figure 33 of D1, data propagation is enabled from the message mode to the schedule registration mode, address registration mode and memo registration mode. This is a pointer for the skilled person to propagate data items to any plurality of information management units, regardless of where the data items originate (received from the outside or entered by the user).

Whether the data items are propagated to the information management units successively (D1) or in one operation (claim 1), is a matter of choice for the skilled person having to compromise according to point 6.2 *supra*.

- 6.4 A single data entry screen for an integrated data entry will be readily provided by the skilled person wherever appropriate. D1 (column 12, lines 12 to 19) mentions the use of a single screen which may need to be split into a sequence of screens when the number of menu items cannot be displayed on one screen.

Likewise, entering a data item and its subsequent allocation in a single screen will be envisaged by the

skilled person as soon as sufficient space is available on the screen. The fact that the schedule mode of D1 includes preliminary display options (Figure 20: E1, E4, E5) does not discourage the skilled person from integrating the data entry and the data allocation: the overarching concept of propagating data from the schedule mode toward the address registration mode (E16, E17) does not depend on the schedule selected for display.

6.5 In the Board's judgment, the implementation of the claimed apparatus does not entail any non-obvious technical effort, either. An inventive contribution at the implementing level is suggested neither by the application nor by the appellant's argumentation.

6.6 Therefore, the apparatus according to claim 1 (main request) does not involve an inventive step, contrary to the requirements of Article 56 EPC.

Auxiliary request

7. An entry screen comprising boxes (52, 54, ..., 70) for entering the data items and check boxes (72, 74, 76, 78) for selecting some or all of the information management units is disclosed in relation to Figure 11 of A2. The amendment to claim 1 thus complies with the requirements of Article 123(2) EPC.

8. However, graphical entry boxes (to be filled by a user) and virtual check boxes (to be ticked by a mouse click) constitute commonplace graphical interface elements that were available for their purposes well before the priority date.

Hence, the amendments according to the auxiliary request contribute only obvious implementations which do not overcome the objection under Article 56 EPC raised against the main request.

Order

For these reasons it is decided that:

The appeal is dismissed.

The Registrar:

The Chairman:

M. Kiehl

S. Steinbrener