

Internal distribution code:

- (A) [-] Publication in OJ
(B) [-] To Chairmen and Members
(C) [-] To Chairmen
(D) [X] No distribution

**Datasheet for the decision
of 6 March 2015**

Case Number: T 2338/09 - 3.5.07

Application Number: 99304645.7

Publication Number: 0965929

IPC: G06F17/30

Language of the proceedings: EN

Title of invention:

Image data management system and method thereof

Applicant:

Panasonic Corporation

Headword:

Image data management/PANASONIC

Relevant legal provisions:

EPC Art. 56

Keyword:

Inventive step - (no)

Decisions cited:

Catchword:



**Beschwerdekammern
Boards of Appeal
Chambres de recours**

European Patent Office
D-80298 MUNICH
GERMANY
Tel. +49 (0) 89 2399-0
Fax +49 (0) 89 2399-4465

Case Number: T 2338/09 - 3.5.07

**D E C I S I O N
of Technical Board of Appeal 3.5.07
of 6 March 2015**

Appellant: Panasonic Corporation
(Applicant) 1006, Oaza Kadoma
Kadoma-shi
Osaka 571-8501 (JP)

Representative: Grünecker Patent-und Rechtsanwälte
PartG mbB
Leopoldstrasse 4
80802 München (DE)

Decision under appeal: **Decision of the Examining Division of the European Patent Office posted on 31 July 2009 refusing European patent application No. 99304645.7 pursuant to Article 97(2) EPC.**

Composition of the Board:

Chairman R. Moufang
Members: R. de Man
P. San-Bento Furtado

Summary of Facts and Submissions

- I. The applicant (appellant) lodged an appeal against the decision of the Examining Division refusing European patent application No. 99304645.7 for lack of inventive step in the subject-matter of the independent claims of all requests.

- II. With the statement of grounds of appeal, the appellant replaced all claim requests with a single new request comprising claims 1 to 8. As an auxiliary measure, it requested oral proceedings.

- III. In a communication accompanying a summons to oral proceedings, the Board expressed doubts in respect of the inventive step reasoning set forth in the decision under appeal, in particular the Examining Division's broad interpretation of certain claim features and its choice of closest prior art. Nevertheless, the subject-matter of the independent claims appeared to lack an inventive step in view of the following document:

D8: US 5598279 A, published on 28 January 1997.

- IV. With a letter dated 9 January 2015, the appellant withdrew its request for oral proceedings and requested a decision based on the current status of the application. The appellant did not comment in substance on the Board's communication.

- V. Oral proceedings were held on 6 March 2015 in the absence of the appellant. At the end of the oral proceedings, the chairman pronounced the Board's decision.

VI. The appellant requested that the decision under appeal be set aside and that a patent be granted on the basis of claims 1 to 8 filed with the statement of grounds of appeal.

VII. Independent claim 1 reads as follows:

"An integrated image input/output apparatus (10) for enabling a user of a computer (30) connected to said integrated image input/output apparatus (10) over a network to output image data, said integrated image input/output apparatus (10) comprising:

an operation panel (4b) including a start button (4c), image data input means (2a), being a document scanner, for inputting image data by reading a document when the start button (4c) is pressed, and image data output means (1a), being a printer, for printing the image data; storage means (9) for storing the inputted image data;

attribute information generating means (3) for issuing a registration number which uniquely identifies the inputted image data in the integrated image input/output apparatus (10), in response to the start button (4c) being pressed, and generating attribute information for the inputted image data, the attribute information containing the issued registration number;

image data management means (8) for adding a location of the inputted image data to be stored on the storage means (9) to the attribute information for the image data, and recording the attribute information in an attribute information table (9a) on the storage means (9); and

publication means (6) for conducting data communications with the computer (30) over the network, for sending data over the network to create on the computer (30) a list for displaying items of records in the attribute information table (9a) and clickable items for specifying the stored image data to be outputted; in response to a list transfer request from the computer (30) and for, upon receipt of an output request from the computer (30) together with the registration number of the image data specified by using the created list, notifying the image data management means (8) of the received registration number,

and wherein the image data management means (8) fetches the image data to be outputted from the storage means (9) according to the location of the image data corresponding to the notified registration number, and the image data output means (1a) prints the fetched image data, the image data being printed without passing through the network."

Reasons for the Decision

1. The appeal complies with the provisions referred to in Rule 101 EPC and is therefore admissible.
2. *The invention*
 - 2.1 The invention according to claim 1 relates to an integrated image input/output apparatus comprising a document scanner and a printer. The apparatus is operated by means of buttons on an operation panel. The operation panel includes a start button which, when

pressed, causes the document scanner to input image data by scanning ("reading") a document.

2.2 The apparatus may be used to store scanned documents. To this end it comprises "storage means", "attribute information generating means" and "image data management means". The storage means is for storing the inputted image data. The attribute information generating means is for generating attribute information for the inputted image data, the generated attribute information including a unique registration number. The image data management means adds to the attribute information the location of the inputted image data in the storage means and records the attribute information in a table on the storage means.

2.3 The apparatus is further configured to be accessed over a network by a user, who may browse through a list of items of stored image data and may select items for printing. To this end the apparatus comprises "publication means". Upon request, the publication means sends a list of items to the user's computer for display on this computer as clickable items. Upon receipt of an output request from the user's computer comprising a registration number of a selected item of image data, the image data management means is notified of the received registration number. The image data management means fetches the corresponding image from the storage means and supplies it to the image data output means for printing.

2.4 Claim 1 clarifies that the image data is printed without passing through the network. As explained on page 2, first and second full paragraphs, of the description of the present application with reference to Figure 21, in conventional image data management

systems image data must first be transferred from an image data server, over a network, to a personal computer for display on a screen before it can be printed out by either a network printer or a printer connected directly to the personal computer.

3. *Inventive step*

- 3.1 Document D8, abstract, discloses an apparatus for circulating documents among a number of computer terminals. The apparatus is an integrated image input/output apparatus (Figure 1 and column 3, lines 31 to 38) comprising a scanner (column 3, line 42, to column 4, line 9), a printer (column 4, line 12, to column 6, line 13) and an operation panel (column 7, line 59, to column 8, line 4). The apparatus may be used to read and store images and may form a network with a number of terminals which can read images from storage (abstract). The Board therefore considers document D8 to be a suitable starting point for the assessment of inventive step.
- 3.2 The Board first notes that document D8 does not explicitly disclose that the scanner is operated by pressing a "start button" on the operation panel. However, the use of buttons for operating an apparatus is entirely conventional and hence obvious.
- 3.3 The embodiment described starting from column 13, line 1, implements optical character recognition (OCR) and optical mark recognition (OMR) functions (column 13, lines 37 to 41). Using the OMR function, a bar code is detected in a scanned document (column 13, lines 44 to 62). On the basis of the content of the bar code, a number of areas of the scanned document are identified and the OCR function is used to identify

- character data written in those areas (column 13, line 62, to column 14, line 6, and Figure 28).
- 3.4 Among the elements of character data extracted from a scanned document may be the user's name, circulation term, keyword, title, and whether or not automatic distribution should be effected (column 14, lines 21 to 32). As explained in column 14, lines 49 to 53, documents marked for automatic distribution are automatically transmitted when a terminal accesses the apparatus.
- 3.5 Document D8 discloses in column 14, lines 45 to 48, that "At a terminal, the title is used to display and search titles, to output a list of stored image documents at output means, and to allow the system operator to manage image documents". In the Board's view, it is at least obvious from this passage that a user may retrieve an image document that is not marked for automatic distribution by selecting, on his terminal, the document's title from a list of displayed titles.
- 3.6 Since the titles of stored image documents may be viewed at a terminal connected through a network, the apparatus of document D8 comprises "publication means" for sending a list of items over the network to the user's computer.
- 3.7 Document D8 does not explicitly disclose that the displayed titles are "clickable" as specified by claim 1. However, this is not a feature of the claimed integrated image input/output apparatus but of the "browser means", which is external to the claimed apparatus. The feature hence does not limit the claimed subject-matter. In any event, presenting items as

"clickable" was a well-known user interface feature at the priority date of the present application.

- 3.8 Although the passage in column 14, lines 45 to 48, discloses that a "list of stored image documents" may be printed from a terminal, in its context this phrase may be understood as referring to the printing of a list of *titles* of the stored image documents. The Board therefore considers that document D8 does not unambiguously disclose that the operator of a terminal may instruct the apparatus to print a selected document. However, such functionality is obviously desirable, and adding it to the apparatus and terminal of document D8 would only require trivial modifications. Indeed, the apparatus of document D8 already automatically prints out image documents whose term has expired (column 16, claim 3).

Since the document to be printed is stored in the apparatus and would be selected at the terminal on the basis of its title, there would further be no need to pass its image data through the network for display at the terminal (cf. point 2.4 above). In the absence of such a need, it would be obvious to the skilled person not to pass the image data through the network.

- 3.9 Document D8 does not explicitly disclose the assignment of a unique registration number to image documents being stored. However, in order to keep track of and refer to image documents stored on the hard disk it is obvious to assign a unique identifier to each document, for example in the form of a file name.
- 3.10 Finally, the further feature of adding a "location of the inputted image data" to the attribute information of a stored image document is a straightforward detail

of internal file organisation on the storage means. In particular, it is well known that file systems typically store the file name of an (image) document in association with the location on the hard disk of the corresponding (image) document data.

3.11 In view of the above, and in the absence of any arguments by the appellant to the contrary, the Board concludes that the subject-matter of independent claim 1 lacks an inventive step over the disclosure of document D8 (Articles 52(1) and 56 EPC).

4. Since the sole request on file is not allowable, the appeal is to be dismissed.

Order

For these reasons it is decided that:

The appeal is dismissed.

The Registrar:

The Chairman:



I. Aperribay

R. Moufang

Decision electronically authenticated