
CHAMBERS GLOBAL PRACTICE GUIDES

Patent Litigation 2025

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USA: Law & Practice

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USA: Trends & Developments

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Law and Practice

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(PTAB). Rothwell Figg sees patent litigation not just as a legal challenge, but also as business and strategic challenges. Through an approach that addresses all three angles, it provides clients with representation that minimises risk, maximises opportunities, and firmly represents their interests. In addition to patent litigation, Rothwell Figg provides a comprehensive range of IP, litigation, and technology services for US and international clients in jurisdictions across the globe.

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1. Intellectual Property Rights and Granting Procedure

1.1 Types of Intellectual Property Rights

The USA offers protection of inventions through the intellectual property rights associated with patents or trade secrets. Patents provide broad, time-limited rights to the patentee in exchange for public disclosure of the invention. In contrast, trade secrets are not publicly known; have narrower rights; and, in principle, an indefinite duration.

Patents arise from federal law. Congress created the US patent system based on its authority in the US Constitution, which grants Congress power “to promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries”. Title 35 of the US Code contains the federal laws related to patents.

Trade secret law is primarily based on state law. Specific definitions vary but, generally, a trade secret must not be known to the public, must confer economic benefit on its holder because it is not publicly known, and the trade secret-holder must take reasonable measures to keep such information secret. Most states have adopted the Uniform Trade Secrets Act (1979) as amended, or a variation of it, so there is a measure of uniformity among the state laws. In addition to state law causes of action, the Defend Trade Secrets Act of 2016 provides a federal cause of action for trade secret misappropriation.

The statutory language creates a foundation for patents and trade secrets, but the law continues to evolve through case law as courts interpret legal terms and concepts.

1.2 Grant Procedure

The US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) conducts the patent approval process and grants any resulting patents. Applicants file either a provisional or non-provisional patent application with the USPTO.

Provisional applications provide a quick and inexpensive way for inventors to establish a US filing date for their invention, which can be claimed in a non-provisional application that is filed later. A provisional application must contain a description of the invention and may include drawings necessary to understand the invention. A provisional application has fewer requirements than a non-provisional application but cannot develop into a patent without a corresponding non-provisional application filed within 12 months.

A non-provisional patent application must include both a description of the invention and claims describing the scope of the protections sought in the patent. A non-provisional application may be filed without a prior provisional application. However, a non-provisional application may gain the benefit of the earlier filing date of a corresponding provisional application if filed within 12 months of the provisional application.

Non-provisional applications undergo substantive examination by the USPTO to ensure compliance with the legal requirements for a patent. As a preliminary matter, a patent must claim patent-eligible subject matter. At a minimum, the US Supreme Court has stated that laws of nature, natural phenomena and abstract ideas are not patentable. Patents must also describe an invention that is novel and non-obvious with sufficient detail and clarity that a person of ordinary skill in the art of the invention can make and

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use the invention without undue experimentation.

Patent Prosecution

The interaction between patent applicants (or their representatives) and the USPTO is called patent prosecution. During patent prosecution, an examiner at the USPTO will review the patent application and information already available to the public to determine whether the patent application meets the requirements for patenting based on the laws found in Title 35 of the US Code, the regulations listed in Title 37 of the Code of Federal Regulations and the guidance provided in the USPTO Manual of Patent Examining Procedure. If the examiner finds evidence that the invention has already been publicly disclosed or discovers another reason that the application does not comply with the patent requirements, the examiner may issue a rejection describing the deficiencies of the patent application. The applicant has an opportunity to respond to the rejection, which may include amending the claims in the application, having a phone conference with the examiner and presenting arguments that the rejection was improper. This process may be repeated until the examiner issues a final rejection or allows the application. If the patent application is allowed, the USPTO issues a patent creating enforceable rights for the patentee.

Trade Secrets

By their nature, trade secrets are not disclosed publicly or registered with any agency. Information becomes a trade secret when the holder takes affirmative action to keep the information secret. This can include physical protection of the information, use of non-disclosure agreements or lawsuits to recover for misappropriation of the trade secrets.

1.3 Timeline for Grant Procedure

The time required to obtain a patent can vary greatly depending on many factors, including the subject matter of a patent, the number of rejections and appeals during patent prosecution and the type of USPTO examination programme. The USPTO has several patent application initiatives that can expedite patent applications meeting the respective programme requirements. For example, applications qualifying for Accelerated Examination may have a final disposition within 12 months. According to statistics provided by the USPTO, the average time for a final decision on a patent application is about two years, but some take several years.

Patent applicants are not obliged to be represented by a lawyer. However, the USPTO cautions that the patent application process is an undertaking requiring knowledge of patent law and rules, USPTO practices and procedures, as well as knowledge of the scientific or technical matters involved in the particular invention. Because of the complexities involved, most inventors employ the services of registered patent lawyers or patent agents.

The cost associated with obtaining a patent varies based on many factors. Administrative fees imposed by the USPTO depend on the type of entity (large, small or micro), the number of claims in the application, the amount of time taken to respond to the USPTO rejections, the use of patent application initiative programmes and other procedural details. Lawyers' fees in connection to the application may also vary depending on the complexity of the application and patent prosecution.

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1.4 Term of Each Intellectual Property Right

Generally, a patent expires 20 years after its filing date, but this term can vary depending on the timing of the patent application and patent prosecution. Patents issued and applications filed before 8 June 1995 expire either 20 years from filing or 17 years from issue, whichever is later.

Patent applications filed after 8 June 1995 expire 20 years after the earliest effective US filing date. This may be earlier than the filing date of the patent application if it claims priority to an earlier non-provisional or international application.

Under limited circumstances, a patent term may be extended to account for administrative delays when acquiring the patent. For example, if the USPTO does not issue a patent within three years after its filing date, the patent holder may obtain an extension of patent term equal to the period in excess of three years. For certain drug products and medical devices, a patent may be extended for up to five years to account for the regulatory review conducted by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

1.5 Rights and Obligations of Owners of Intellectual Property Rights

The USPTO website provides general information about all US patents. Furthermore, the FDA maintains publications identifying patents applicable to certain approved pharmaceutical products. For drug products, the FDA publication is Approved Drug Products with Therapeutic Equivalence Evaluations (more commonly known as the “Orange Book”). Similarly, the FDA has the List of Licensed Biological Products with Reference Product Exclusivity and Biosimilarity or Interchangeability Evaluations (known as the “Purple Book”) with information about approved biological products. The FDA maintains elec-

tronic databases on its website with the information contained in both the Orange Book and Purple Book.

A patent gives its owner the right to exclude others from making, using, selling and importing the patented invention. To maintain the enforceability of a utility patent, the USPTO must receive maintenance fees for the patent, due 3.5, 7.5 and 11.5 years after the date of issue. Design and plant patents do not require maintenance fees.

The remedies available to the patent holder vary depending on the chosen forum of enforcement. In a district court, a patent holder may seek equitable remedies in the form of a preliminary or permanent injunction and may seek monetary damages for both past and future infringement.

At the US International Trade Commission (ITC), a patent holder may seek cease-and-desist orders and exclusion orders to prevent the importation of patent-infringing goods. The exclusion orders direct US Customs and Border Protection to exclude articles from entry into the USA. A limited exclusion order prevents specified entities from importing the articles and a general exclusion order prevents any entity from importing the articles. The ITC cease-and-desist orders can direct infringers to stop importing infringing articles and to stop sales of infringing articles in US inventory. The ITC cannot award monetary damages.

1.6 Further Protection After Lapse of the Maximum Term

The USA allows certain extensions of patent terms for administrative delays. Delays by the USPTO in the issue of patents can lead to patent-term compensating for the time of the delay (commonly referred to as “Patent Term Adjust-

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ment” or “PTA”) for the time of the delay. This extension does not apply to delays resulting from the patent applicant’s actions, including requests for continued examination or appeals. The possible extension for USPTO delays is unlimited.

Certain drug products and medical devices can receive annual patent term extensions if the product is undergoing administrative review by the FDA (commonly referred to as “Patent Term Extension” or “PTE”). These extensions are renewable for up to five years.

1.7 Third-Party Rights to Participate in Grant Proceedings

Any third party may submit patents, published patent applications or other printed publications as part of a third-party preissuance submission. The submission must include a concise description of the asserted relevance of each submitted document. These submissions may be made online at the USPTO website. Submissions must be made before the later of six months after publication of the patent application or the date of a USPTO communication rejecting any claims in the application. However, a notice of allowance for the patent application immediately terminates the timeframe for third-party submissions.

1.8 Remedies Against Refusal to Grant an Intellectual Property Right

During patent prosecution, the USPTO may issue a final rejection of the patent claims. If the applicant wishes to challenge the final rejection, the applicant may request continued examination or may file an appeal to the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB). The applicant may appeal PTAB decisions to the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. Further review may be sought from the US Supreme Court through a petition for a writ of certiorari.

1.9 Consequences of Failure to Pay Annual Fees

Patent holders must pay maintenance fees to keep patents in force. The payments are due 3.5, 7.5 and 11.5 years after the date of issue. The USPTO allows payment of each fee six months before the due date but does not allow any other pre-payment of the maintenance fees. Payments that are less than six months past the due date have a surcharge of USD100–500 in addition to the normal fee.

Under some circumstances, a patent can be reinstated after not paying the maintenance fee in a timely manner. The USPTO requires a statement that the delay in payment was unintentional and submission of a petition fee of USD420–2,100 in addition to the required maintenance fees.

1.10 Post-Grant Proceedings Available to Owners of Intellectual Property Rights

During some post-grant proceedings before the USPTO, the patent holder can amend claims of an issued patent. During *ex parte* re-examination, the patent holder may amend claims to respond to the USPTO’s findings of substantial new questions of patentability. In an *inter partes* review (IPR) proceeding, if the challenged claims are determined to be invalid, the patent owner may seek to add substitute claims.

At any time before the expiration of the patent, a patent holder may seek reissue of the patent to correct certain errors, such as errors in the drawings or specification, or errors in the claimed scope of the invention. No new matter can be added during a reissue. If the reissue is sought within two years of the grant of the original patent, the scope of the claims can be narrowed or enlarged. Otherwise, only amendments that narrow the scope of the claims are permitted.

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2. Initiating a Lawsuit

2.1 Actions Available Against Infringement

A patent holder has several options when seeking enforcement of patent rights. District court litigation can provide injunctions, monetary remedies for infringement and declaratory judgments. As discussed at **1.5 Rights and Obligations of Owners of Intellectual Property Rights**, the ITC can issue exclusion orders and cease-and-desist orders. If an applicable contract provides for alternative dispute resolution proceedings, such as mediation or arbitration, or the parties agree to alternative dispute resolution proceedings, they may be used in lieu of litigation. Alternative dispute resolution proceedings can allow more flexible solutions and a final resolution can often be reached faster and less expensively. Additionally, the ITC and many courts offer mediation programmes.

2.2 Third-Party Remedies to Remove the Effects of Intellectual Property

A third party may challenge the validity of an issued patent through district court litigation or through post-grant proceedings at the USPTO. A party with standing may seek a declaratory judgment of patent invalidity in a district court. As a defendant in a patent infringement lawsuit, a party may argue patent invalidity as a counterclaim or affirmative defence. Patent invalidity may also be raised as a defence in an ITC investigation.

Challenges to patent validity at the USPTO take the form of post-grant review (PGR), IPR, ex parte re-examination and covered business method review (CBM). The timing and type of patent affect which of these proceedings is available to a third party.

PGR

PGR is available during the first nine months after the issue of a patent. Any party that is not the patent holder and has not challenged the patent validity in a civil action may request PGR. PGR allows the broadest grounds for challenging patent validity.

IPR

After the nine-month window of PGR, a third party may challenge validity through an IPR proceeding. As is the case with PGR, the IPR petitioner must not be the patent holder and must not have challenged the patent in civil litigation, but there is an additional requirement that the petitioner must not have been served a complaint alleging infringement more than one year prior to the IPR petition. The IPR also has more limited grounds to challenge patent invalidity, only allowing arguments of obviousness and lack of novelty based on patents and printed publications.

CBM

A CBM review has the most restrictive requirements: at least nine months must have elapsed since the patent was issued; the patent must be a financial product or service patent, excluding technological inventions; the CBM petitioner must have been sued or charged with patent infringement; and the CBM review petition must have been filed before 16 September 2020. The grounds for challenging patent validity in a CBM review are similar to those of PGR.

There are no actions available in the USA for a compulsory licence.

2.3 Courts With Jurisdiction

Federal district courts have original jurisdiction over patent matters. Parties may appeal district court decisions to the US Court of Appeals for

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the Federal Circuit. Decisions of the Federal Circuit are subject to discretionary appeal to the US Supreme Court through a petition for certiorari.

In certain circumstances involving importation of patent-infringing articles, the ITC may have jurisdiction. In an ITC investigation, an administrative law judge makes an initial determination on liability. A party may petition the ITC to review the administrative law judge's initial determination. After the ITC's final decision, a party may appeal the decision to the Federal Circuit, with further discretionary appeal to the US Supreme Court.

2.4 Specialised Bodies/Organisations for the Resolution of Disputes

Two administrative agencies provide a review of patents before administrative law judges. The USPTO has the PTAB, which provides a review of patent application rejections and several post-grant proceedings discussed above. The ITC conducts investigations related to importation of patent-infringing articles. Both PTAB and ITC decisions may be appealed to the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, with further review available from the US Supreme Court.

2.5 Prerequisites to Filing a Lawsuit

There are no prerequisites to filing a lawsuit in a district court, unless the parties' contract provides otherwise. Lack of pre-filing notice may, however, limit recovery of monetary damages in certain instances.

2.6 Legal Representation

While individuals are not required to be represented by a lawyer, all federal courts require corporations to have legal representation. It is generally viewed as exceedingly unwise for an individual to pursue patent litigation without experienced counsel. In proceedings before the

PTAB, at least one representative of each party must be a registered practitioner of the USPTO.

2.7 Interim Injunctions

A patent holder may seek a preliminary injunction to protect the rights of the parties while litigation is pending. Preliminary injunctions require a demonstration:

- of a reasonable likelihood of success on the merits;
- of irreparable harm to the party if the preliminary injunction is denied;
- that the balance of the hardships favours issuing a preliminary injunction; and
- that the impact on the public interest favours the party bringing the motion.

If a court determines that a preliminary injunction is appropriate, such an order will only be issued if the party seeking it posts a bond in an amount that the court considers proper to compensate the other party should the injunction be determined to have been improperly granted.

Although rarely granted, a patent holder could seek earlier relief through a temporary restraining order. In addition to meeting the requirements for a preliminary injunction, the patent holder must demonstrate that immediate and irreparable injury will result to the movant before the adverse party can be heard in opposition, and certify in writing any efforts made to give notice and the reasons why it should not be required. An ex parte temporary restraining order may be granted only in the very limited circumstances where providing notice will itself prevent, or interfere with, the ability to obtain relief.

2.8 Protection for Potential Opponents

The potential opponent may oppose the preliminary injunction by arguing against the fac-

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tors described above for granting a preliminary injunction – most particularly that monetary relief at the end of the case will adequately compensate the plaintiff for any injury it incurs. Alternatively, a potential infringer could seek a declaratory judgment of patent invalidity or non-infringement in a federal district court. A party could also seek to challenge patent validity through one of the post-grant proceedings available through the USPTO.

2.9 Special Limitation Provisions

US law limits patent infringement damages to six years prior to the filing of the complaint or counterclaim for infringement. Additionally, the patent holder cannot recover damages for infringement prior to the point the infringer had notice of the infringement. Filing the lawsuit is notice of infringement, but the infringer could have earlier notice based on communications from the patent holder detailing the infringement, or from constructive notice by marking the patented articles with their patent numbers. Injunctive relief is available for any period the court finds appropriate up to the expiration of the patent rights.

2.10 Mechanisms to Obtain Evidence and Information

In general, a party cannot obtain relevant information and evidence from another party or any third parties before commencing a proceeding in a district court. However, once a lawsuit has commenced, the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure require the parties to exchange initial disclosures of information, including:

- the identity of each individual likely to have discoverable information;
- copies of all documents a party may use to support its case;
- a computation of claimed damages; and

- any insurance agreement that may satisfy all or part of a judgment.

Parties may then obtain non-privileged information that is relevant to any party's claim or defence and is proportional to the needs of the case, considering:

- the importance of the issues at stake in the action;
- the amount in controversy;
- the parties' relative access to relevant information;
- the parties' resources;
- the importance of the discovery in resolving the issues; and
- whether the burden or expense of the proposed discovery outweighs its likely benefit.

Parties may obtain discoverable information through depositions, requests for production of documents, written interrogatories or requests for admission.

Parties may subpoena third parties to provide discoverable information in the form of depositions or production of documents. Procedures are also available to obtain discovery from third parties located outside the USA through applicable treaties or letters rogatory (formal requests for assistance sent to foreign courts).

A party or any person from whom discoverable information is sought may seek a protective order from the court to limit the scope or use of the information.

2.11 Initial Pleading Standards

Patent litigation follows the same pleading standards as other civil cases. A complaint filed in district court must allege facts that state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face. At a mini-

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mum, a patent infringement complaint should identify the patent holder, the relevant patent(s), the accused infringer and the requested relief sought. For claims of indirect infringement, more details are typically required. Preferably, the complaint will provide additional information about the accused infringement, including the claims and elements infringed.

The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure govern amended and supplemental pleadings. A party may amend its pleadings once as a matter of course within 21 days of serving. Other amendments require the opposing party's written consent or the court's permission. To account for occurrences after a pleading, a party may supplement its pleadings with the court's permission.

2.12 Representative or Collective Action

There are no class actions available in intellectual property cases. However, a patent holder may join multiple accused infringers in a single federal lawsuit if the actions arise out of the same transaction, occurrence or series of transactions. It is not sufficient to have unrelated defendants infringe the same patent.

In situations where joining all defendants in a single case is not possible, there are other options to gain the advantages of consolidated actions. Cases across several districts that share a common question of fact may be co-ordinated for pre-trial proceedings before a Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation. Similarly, multiple cases in the same district may be consolidated to promote judicial efficiency when there is a common question of law or fact.

ITC investigations of patent-infringing articles often involve multiple respondents. Because the ITC only needs jurisdiction over the imported

articles and not the infringers, it can be easier for a patent holder to proceed against multiple infringers simultaneously.

2.13 Restrictions on Assertion of an Intellectual Property Right

Some patent holder actions can limit the ability to enforce a patent against others. Under patent exhaustion – also referred to as the first-sale doctrine – the patent holder's right to control an individual article ends after an authorised sale. If the patent was procured through improper conduct before the USPTO, it could be unenforceable under the doctrine of inequitable conduct. A patent holder that expands its rights beyond the statutory patent grant may commit patent misuse. Finally, when the patent holder uses its patent impermissibly to gain market share or engages in other anti-competitive behaviour, antitrust laws may limit the enforceability of the patent.

3. Infringement

3.1 Necessary Parties to an Action for Infringement

Generally, the party bringing an infringement action must be the patent holder, although an exclusive licensee that owns "all substantial rights" in the patent may bring an infringement action in its own name without joining the patent holder. An ITC investigation requires the party filing the petition to have an interest in the patent and an injury to a domestic industry.

3.2 Direct and Indirect Infringement

Direct infringement occurs when a person makes, uses, offers to sell, sells or imports in the USA a patented invention without authority. Usually, the patent holder demonstrates this by showing every claim element, or its equivalent, is

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present in the accused article. When more than one party infringes the patent, there can still be direct infringement if one party directs or controls the actions of another.

A party induces infringement when it actively and knowingly aids and abets another's direct infringement. The inducer must have knowledge of the patent and actively encourage the acts that result in direct infringement. Induced infringement can result in both parties being jointly and severally liable for the infringement.

Contributory infringement involves supplying a component of a patented invention to another party that performs the direct infringement. The component must not be a staple article or commodity of commerce suitable for non-infringing use, nor can it have substantial non-infringing uses.

There are also rules primarily directed to the pharmaceutical industry. A party may engage in activities (such as testing) to support an Abbreviated New Drug Application (ANDA) for a generic version of an FDA-approved drug or a Biologics License Application (BLA) for a biosimilar of an FDA-approved biologic – even if that drug or biologic is patented – without incurring patent infringement liability. However, filing an ANDA or BLA is considered an act of “artificial” infringement if the ANDA or BLA applicant seeks approval to engage in the commercial manufacture, use or sale before the patent expiration.

The available remedies for patent infringement are discussed in **6. Remedies**.

3.3 Process Patents

An additional potential form of infringement applies to process patents. If a person makes, uses, offers to sell, sells or imports in the USA a

product made by a process patented in the USA during the term of the patent, the person commits infringement under 35 U.S.C. § 271(g). This includes instances where the patented process occurs outside of the USA.

3.4 Scope of Protection for an Intellectual Property Right

The scope of protection of a patent is determined by its claims, which describe the extent of the protection sought in a patent application. Often, significant dispute arises when determining the precise meaning of terms or phrases in the patent claims.

In 2018, the standard for claim interpretation became more uniform, whether in a district court, the ITC or in a post-grant proceeding at the USPTO. The “Phillips” standard seeks to interpret the claims from the perspective of a person having skill in the relevant art of the invention based on intrinsic and extrinsic evidence. Intrinsic evidence includes the patent's description of the invention, including the claims themselves, and the patent prosecution history. This means arguments and statements made to the USPTO during patent prosecution may limit how claims are interpreted later. Extrinsic evidence includes dictionaries, treatises and expert testimony. Extrinsic evidence can aid the decision-maker's understanding of how a skilled person would have understood the claims at the time of the invention.

During patent prosecution, the USPTO uses a slightly different standard for analysing patent application claims. Generally, the USPTO uses the same types of information described above, but seeks to determine the “broadest reasonable interpretation” of the claims for purposes of issuing patents.

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3.5 Defences Against Infringement

An accused patent infringer may seek to avoid liability by proving that no infringement occurred, the patent is invalid or the patent is unenforceable.

Several defences to patent infringement do not require challenging the patent itself, either by showing the accused article does not infringe or showing the use of the patent was lawful. For example, direct infringement requires all the elements of the patent claim be present, so demonstrating missing elements in the article can avoid liability by direct infringement. Showing an implied or express licence can negate the infringement requirement of unauthorised use of a patented invention. In the medical field, gathering data to support an ANDA for a generic version of a patented and FDA-approved drug does not create patent infringement liability – although the filing of the ANDA may. The courts also recognise a more general experimental use exception to liability, but it is a very narrow exception, requiring no business motive in the experimental use. Under certain circumstances, prior commercial use of an invention occurring more than a year before the patent application can avoid infringement liability. Finally, infringement damages are limited by law to the six years prior to the filing of the complaint, so infringement before this period would not incur liability.

The accused infringer may also challenge the validity of the patent because there will be no liability for an invalid patent. The grounds for challenging the patent may include lack of patent-eligible subject matter, lack of novelty, lack of enablement or written disclosure, obviousness of the invention, public knowledge or prior offers to sell.

The patent holder's actions can also be the basis of a defence against infringement. Inequitable conduct can result from improper conduct before the USPTO. Relying on a patent holder's conduct and representations may create equitable estoppel if the patent holder later acts inconsistently with the reliance. A patent holder that impermissibly expands its rights beyond the statutory patent grant may commit patent misuse. Under patent exhaustion – also referred to as the first sale doctrine – the patent holder's right to control an individual article ends after an authorised sale. In some circumstances, a patent holder's failure to keep patents together that are subject to a terminal disclaimer may be used as a defence to patent infringement.

That an accused infringer has its own patent does not, by itself, provide a defence to an infringement claim.

Standard-Essential Patents

Some patent holders may have standard-essential patents (SEPs). An SEP is a patent that covers technology that is considered essential to an industry standard. These SEP holders generally have an obligation to license these patents on fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory (FRAND) terms. If the SEP holder fails to offer a potential infringer FRAND terms, the accused infringer can assert the breach of FRAND obligations as an affirmative defence in a subsequent infringement action.

3.6 Role of Experts

Parties may submit expert reports in connection with the claim construction process to assist the court in construing disputed terms. Parties almost always rely on expert reports and expert testimony in connection with infringement, invalidity and damages issues. Experts are especially effective when a case involves a jury because a

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good expert can explain complicated information in a clear and understandable fashion.

Under the Federal Rules of Evidence, the court has authority to appoint an expert witness. However, this rule is rarely invoked. Generally, a party relying on expert testimony chooses and retains its own expert. In rare cases a district court judge faced with a technology with which they are unfamiliar, may appoint their own expert (the cost of which is typically split between the parties) to assist the court in understanding the technology. When this happens, it is often in the context of claim construction proceedings.

3.7 Procedure for Construing the Terms of the Patent's Claim

Courts use specialised claim construction hearings called “Markman” hearings to examine evidence from the parties on the appropriate meaning of the relevant terms in a patent claim. In a district court, patent claim interpretation is performed by the judge, even if there is a jury trial.

3.8 Procedure for Third-Party Opinions

Amicus briefs are very rarely (almost never) submitted at the trial court (district court) level. It is extraordinarily rare for a district court judge to solicit amicus participation in a patent case. Amicus participation at the Federal Circuit level is more common. A third party (typically an industry organisation, public interest group or group of academics) may seek permission from the court to submit an amicus brief, and such permission is typically granted. Once a patent case reaches the US Supreme Court, amicus participation is the rule rather than the exception. In addition, the Supreme Court will often ask the Office of the Solicitor General (which represents the interests of the US government before the Supreme Court) to file a brief with its views either as to whether the Supreme Court

should hear the appeal at all or, if the Supreme Court has already accepted the case for appeal, on the merits.

4. Revocation/Cancellation

4.1 Reasons and Remedies for Revocation/Cancellation

In the federal court system, a final judgment of invalidity effectively revokes the invalidated claims of the patent. A decision that the patent holder committed some other actions that prevents liability for patent infringement, such as equitable estoppel or antitrust violations, may make a patent unenforceable.

The ITC makes similar decisions about patents, but its decisions are not binding on district courts. For example, an ITC decision of patent invalidity does not require a district court to treat the patent as invalid, but the district court may reach the same decision based on the persuasive influence of the ITC decision.

In post-grant proceedings, the USPTO may cancel some or all of the claims of a patent. A party challenging a patent in a post-grant proceeding does not need to have the standing necessary in a federal court. However, the ability to appeal the USPTO's decision to the Federal Circuit may be limited by a lack of standing.

4.2 Partial Revocation/Cancellation

Patent invalidity is examined on a claim-by-claim basis. The remaining claims of a patent remain valid, even if some claims are found invalid.

4.3 Amendments in Revocation/Cancellation Proceedings

During some post-grant proceedings before the USPTO, the patent holder can amend claims but

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may not enlarge the scope of the claims. During *ex parte* re-examination, the patent holder may amend claims to respond to the USPTO's findings of substantial new questions of patentability. In the adversarial proceedings – IPR, PGR and CBM – the patent-owner may file a motion to amend claims.

4.4 Revocation/Cancellation and Infringement

In district court actions, patent infringement claims and defences may be heard together. Courts have broad discretion to control proceedings to promote judicial efficiency and avoid prejudice to the parties, so some issues may be “stayed”. Typically, a judge rather than a jury will determine equitable defences such as inequitable conduct or laches.

ITC investigations hear all infringement and defences together. The ITC has a shorter timeline than district courts and no juries to consider.

Proceedings challenging patent validity must be heard separately from infringement claims at the USPTO because the USPTO does not determine infringement. Often, there is a related district court case claiming infringement during post-grant proceedings at the USPTO. The district court may stay its proceeding to await the patent invalidity decision of the USPTO.

5. Trial and Settlement

5.1 Special Procedural Provisions for Intellectual Property Rights

In district court proceedings, patent litigation is subject to the same rules as other civil litigation: the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the Federal Rules of Evidence. Most district courts (and some individual judges) that hear a large

number of patent cases, such as the District of Delaware or the Northern District of California, have their own supplemental procedures that apply in patent cases.

The time to resolve patent litigation in district court varies widely and may take several years. Courts that are unusually efficient in getting cases to trial are often referred to as having “rocket dockets”. Examples of such courts are the Eastern and Western Districts of Texas, the Eastern District of Virginia, and the Western District of Wisconsin. Courts have broad discretion to control proceedings to promote judicial efficiency and avoid prejudice to the parties, and a case may be presented as a single trial or be bifurcated or staged to have successive trials on issues such as infringement, wilfulness or damages. However, it is extremely rare for a patent case in front of a jury (almost all patent cases involving claims for money damages) to be bifurcated. Witnesses (fact and expert) presenting testimony in a hearing (eg, on claim construction or preliminary injunction motions) are subject to questioning by the judge and cross-examination by the opposing party.

Unless the issue of damages has been bifurcated by the court (which is rare), infringement, validity and damages are typically decided at the end of a single trial by the jury or by the judge (in a bench trial). Injunctive relief is typically determined later, and that issue is always decided by the judge.

ITC

ITC investigations have their own procedures, but many of the rules are similar to those in district courts. One notable exception is the right to a jury. Unlike district court proceedings, there is no jury at the ITC or the USPTO. ITC investigations are almost always faster than district court

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proceedings, with trial-like evidentiary hearings taking place within nine to twelve months from the filing of a complaint. Witnesses at an ITC trial are subject to cross-examination by the opposing party, and by the judge.

IPR

IPR proceedings are quicker than district court litigation and follow a more regimented schedule. The process begins with the filing of an IPR petition that includes the patent claims challenged and the supporting evidence. Following this, the patent owner may optionally provide a preliminary response within three months. No more than three months following the patent owner preliminary response, the PTAB will make an institution decision on the IPR petition. If instituted, the IPR proceeds and the patent owner has three months to file its response and any motion to amend the patent claims. The petitioner has three months to reply to the patent owner response and oppose the claim amendments. The patent owner has an additional month to file a sur-reply. After the completion of briefing, an oral hearing is scheduled and the PTAB issues a final written decision no more than 12 months after the institution decision (except the PTAB may extend the time up to an additional six months for good cause).

In an IPR proceeding, direct witness testimony, including expert testimony, is presented in the form of an affidavit or declaration. The party presenting the witness will need to make the witness available for cross-examination by the opposing side, usually in the form of a deposition. Live testimony during the oral hearing is exceedingly rare, but the PTAB may permit it when the demeanour of the witness is critical to assessing credibility.

5.2 Decision-Makers

With respect to federal district court litigation, beyond choosing the particular forum in which to file suit, parties have little ability to influence who will be the decision-maker – unless they agree to waive their rights to a jury trial (which patentees almost never do). In a district court, unless a judge decides an issue in a pre-trial (eg, a summary judgment) or post-trial motion, issues of infringement, invalidity and damages are decided by a jury. Juries do not have technical expertise. There is no requirement that a judge have a technical background to preside over a patent case in district court, and most district court judges do not have technical backgrounds.

In 2011, 14 district courts began a ten-year Patent Pilot Program to enhance expertise in patent cases. New patent cases in those districts were assigned to a random judge. If the randomly assigned judge was not a designated judge in the Program, the judge could transfer the case to a participating judge in the district. The Patent Pilot Program concluded in July 2021.

ITC investigations proceed before an administrative law judge. Because a large proportion of ITC investigations involve patents, many administrative law judges have developed substantial experience with patent cases, and many also have technical expertise. The ITC randomly assigns an administrative law judge to new investigations, and assignment is not based on any particular technical background of the administrative law judge.

The USPTO has administrative patent judges. These judges are typically experienced patent lawyers with technical backgrounds. If possible, the USPTO assigns cases to judges based on their technical background.

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Appeals from all patent cases at the district courts, ITC or USPTO go to the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. The judges in the Federal Circuit have significant patent law experience from the many patent-related appeals, but do not necessarily have a technical background.

5.3 Settling the Case

Settlement of patent disputes is quite common (except in certain types of pharmaceutical patent cases, where antitrust consideration can make settlement difficult or impossible). Parties may reach a settlement through a variety of possibilities, such as negotiation, alternative dispute resolution or mediation. Some courts require parties to attempt a resolution before proceeding with a trial. Settlement agreements can terminate the proceedings in a district court, usually without disclosure of the settlement details to the court.

The ITC has a non-mandatory mediation programme to aid resolution of disputes before pursuing a full investigation. After the investigation begins, parties may request termination of the investigation upon reaching a settlement, but a copy of any agreement will be submitted to the ITC in the process. Procedures are available to protect information within the settlement from public disclosure.

Post-grant proceedings before the USPTO follow similar settlement disclosure procedures as the ITC when seeking termination of a trial. The USPTO may continue a proceeding despite the parties' settlement agreement. This is more likely if the proceeding is nearly completed when the settlement occurs.

5.4 Other Court Proceedings

Federal courts have inherent authority to control their dockets, including the power to stay proceedings when there are co-pending mat-

ters in another forum. The courts may consider several factors when deciding to stay, including the progress of the court proceeding, whether the stay will simplify issues before the court or whether a stay would unduly prejudice a party. When there is a co-pending post-grant proceeding (such as an IPR), courts are more likely to stay proceedings if the USPTO proceeding has been instituted.

Generally, decisions reached in different fora are not binding on each other, except when a patent has been cancelled by the PTO in a post-grant proceeding or where a final, non-appealable judgment of invalidity has been entered in the district court litigation. This means a district court is not obliged to agree with a USPTO decision on patent validity, but the court may find the USPTO decision very persuasive because of its perceived expertise on patents. Similarly, the USPTO may consider the progress and findings of district court litigation or ITC investigations in its own proceedings. The law regarding the effect of a foreign anti-suit injunction is still unsettled and the decision in a particular case is likely to turn on the particular facts (and timing) involved.

6. Remedies

6.1 Remedies for the Patentee

In federal district courts, the patent holder may seek damages for patent infringement and injunctions to prevent ongoing infringement. By statute, damages for infringement should be adequate to compensate for the infringement, but not less than a reasonable royalty. A jury verdict will typically include a damages award, which is then reviewed by the district court judge (if a party files a motion requesting such a review) for compliance with certain legal

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standards regarding damages. Patent damages are limited to no more than six years before commencement of the lawsuit. In cases of wilful infringement, the courts may award three times the damages. Generally, each party pays its own lawyers' fees, but in "exceptional" cases, courts may impose fee-shifting to the losing party. In addition to monetary damages, a party may seek an injunction to prevent continued infringement.

Primary responsibility for enforcing a district court judgment lies with the patent owner, who has at its disposal a wide array of enforcement mechanisms, including seeking to execute the judgment against the debtor's assets. If a party fails to comply with an injunction, the other party may seek sanctions from the district court originally ordering the injunction.

The ITC cannot impose monetary damages for infringement, but can issue exclusion and cease-and-desist orders. The exclusion orders direct US Customs and Border Protection to exclude infringing articles from entry into the US. The ITC cease-and-desist orders can direct infringers to stop importing infringing articles and to stop sales of infringing articles in US inventory. The ITC retains broad authority to enforce any of its orders and a complainant in the original investigation can request a formal enforcement proceeding.

6.2 Rights of Prevailing Defendants

In the US legal system, each party typically pays its own lawyers' fees and costs. Similar to the description in **6.1 Remedies for the Patentee** for successful patent holders, a prevailing defendant may request lawyers' fees and costs if the case is determined to be "exceptional". Under US Supreme Court precedent, "an 'exceptional' case is simply one that stands out from others with respect to the substantive strength of a

party's litigating position (considering both the governing law and the facts of the case) or the unreasonable manner in which the case was litigated".

6.3 Types of Remedies

The available remedies do not vary based on the technical area of a patent.

6.4 Injunctions Pending Appeal

A successful patent holder in an infringement proceeding does not automatically get an injunction against the infringing party. Similarly, if the district court issues an injunction, its effect is not automatically stayed during appeal. Ordinarily, a permanent injunction is effective upon issue, but a court has broad equitable authority to modify relief. The defendant may seek a stay of the injunction by filing a motion with the issuing court or the appellate court – the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. In the absence of a stay, the injunction is enforceable pending appeal. When deciding to stay an injunction, the courts balance the likelihood of success on the merits against the equities of the parties and the public.

7. Appeal

7.1 Special Provisions for Intellectual Property Proceedings

The appellate procedure for patent litigation is the same as for other civil litigation, except that all appeals in patent cases go to the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. This includes patent cases from district courts, ITC investigations and USPTO proceedings.

7.2 Type of Review

The Federal Circuit can review factual and legal determinations of the proceedings in a lower

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court, if the errors were properly preserved in its record. The level of deference given to the decision-maker in a lower court varies depending on the type of error. For purely legal issues, such as statutory interpretations and judgments as a matter of law, the Federal Circuit applies a “de novo” standard where the court examines the record to form its own opinion, with no deference to the previous decision-maker. Factual determinations receive more deference, either “clearly erroneous” if the judge made factual determinations, or “substantial evidence” if the jury was the fact-finder. Equitable determinations, such as inequitable conduct, injunctions, or lawyers’ fees, are left to the discretion of the trial court judge, so a review of these decisions gets the highest deference, only being reversed for “abuse of discretion”.

8. Costs

8.1 Costs Before Filing a Lawsuit

Pre-litigation costs vary depending on the complexity of the issues and the amount in controversy between the parties. A patent holder may require legal and technical research for claim charts, warning letters to potential infringers and analysis of potential enforcement options. An accused infringer may accrue legal fees to weigh its options for challenging the alleged infringement through an affirmative defence in a lawsuit, a declaratory judgment of invalidity or non-infringement, or a USPTO proceeding challenging patent validity.

8.2 Calculation of Court Fees

In district courts, the fee for filing a federal civil complaint is fixed by statute, but the Judicial Conference of the United States may prescribe additional fees. Currently, the filing fee is USD350, plus a USD52 administrative fee.

The fee to file an IPR (including up to 20 claims) at the USPTO is USD41,500, and a PGR or CBM request (including up to 20 claims) is USD47,500.

8.3 Responsibility for Paying the Costs of Litigation

The traditional rule in the USA is that each party bears its own costs, but there are limited exceptions to this default rule. The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure allow a party to seek reasonable expenses, including lawyers’ fees, incurred when an opposing party makes improper representations to the court or commits discovery misconduct. These sanctions do not award all costs and lawyers’ fees, only the expenses associated with the violation. In patent litigation, a court may award all costs and reasonable lawyers’ fees to the prevailing party if the case is determined to be “exceptional”, that is “one that stands out from others with respect to the substantive strength of a party’s litigating position (considering both the governing law and the facts of the case) or the unreasonable manner in which the case was litigated.”

9. Alternative Dispute Resolution

9.1 Type of Actions for Intellectual Property

Alternative dispute resolution is common in civil cases, and its use in intellectual property disputes is becoming increasingly common. Parties may use alternative dispute resolution as an alternative to litigation either by mutual agreement, contractual agreement or court order (although a court cannot force the parties to agree to a mediator’s ruling). Some courts offer mediation or special masters for settlement purposes. Parties may prefer alternative dispute resolution to take advantage of its greater flexibility, confidentiality and cost effectiveness.

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Additionally, a patent owner can avoid the risk of a court's judgment of patent invalidity.

10. Assignment and Licensing

10.1 Requirements or Restrictions for Assignment of Intellectual Property Rights

Assignment of all or part of the rights in a patent must be in writing. The assignee or assignor may record the assignment with the USPTO, but recordation is not required to enforce the assignment.

10.2 Procedure for Assigning an Intellectual Property Right

Generally, the procedure to assign patent rights involves the same type of negotiations as other contract rights. The parties negotiate the terms of the agreement and execute a written assignment contract. An employer's employment contract may require its employees to assign rights to the employer for inventions developed during employment. Although not required, any assignments should be recorded with the USPTO.

10.3 Requirements or Restrictions to License an Intellectual Property Right

An intellectual property licence must describe the terms of the licence agreement in writing and clearly identify all parties and the intellectual property involved. The licence may be exclusive or non-exclusive. In an exclusive licence, the licensee receives all rights in the patent except ownership of title. This allows an exclusive licensee broader rights, such as the ability to sue for patent infringement. A non-exclusive licence can be granted to more than one party, but a licensee cannot enforce the patent against others. For public policy reasons, a patent licence cannot require payment of royalties beyond the term of the patent. The USPTO allows recording of licences, but recording is not required for a licence to be valid. No approval from the USPTO is necessary for a licence.

10.4 Procedure for Licensing an Intellectual Property Right

Licence agreements are contractual rights; the parties agree to the terms and execute the agreement in writing. Unlike an assignment of a patent, the rights assigned by licence revert to the licensor after the agreed time period.

Trends and Developments

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Rothwell, Figg, Ernst & Manbeck PC brings to every patent litigation a team of seasoned, strategic, and highly successful litigators who are skilled in the law, have deep technical expertise, and consistently prevail when faced with some of the biggest firms in the country. The firm devotes over half of its work to intricate, multi-party patent litigation involving complex scientific and legal issues in district courts, the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, and before the International Trade Commission

and the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB). Rothwell Figg sees patent litigation not just as a legal challenge, but also as business and strategic tests. Through an approach that addresses all three angles, it provides clients with representation that minimises risk, maximises opportunities, and firmly represents their interests. In addition to patent litigation, Rothwell Figg provides a comprehensive range of IP, litigation, and technology services for US and international clients in jurisdictions across the globe.

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Developments for AI-Related Inventions

With the development and launch of generative artificial intelligence (AI) platforms such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, Copilot and Firefly, the field of AI remains a primary focus of U.S. intellectual property law. Specifically, this year, the U.S. patent world saw several new AI-related developments including the issuance of updated patent eligibility guidance by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) and the filing of several patent infringement lawsuits involving AI-related inventions.

The USPTO granted over 324,000 patents in 2024 – a 3.8% increase compared to last year. See [2024 Trends and Insights, IFI Claims Patent Services](#). There were over 430,000 patent applications filed in 2024 at the USPTO, with over 8,7000 applications relating to machine learning (see id). While the number of AI applications for machine learning saw declined slightly from the previous year, applications for machine learning and other technologies surrounding AI continue to be popular areas for patent filings (see id). In July, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) reported that, in a study covering 2014-2023, there were over 6,300 U.S. patent family

publications for generative AI – see [WIPO 2024, Generative Artificial Intelligence Patent Landscape Report, Geneva](#): WIPO p. 40. The WIPO reported that over 25% of all generative AI patent family publications worldwide were published in 2023 alone (see id. at 45). The majority of patent applications are in areas such as machine learning, neural networks, speech recognition procedures, natural language processing and vision, but there have also been more AI-related patent filings in life sciences, security, business solutions and transportation.

With the increase in AI-related patent filings came the need for further clarification on the scope of patentability for AI-related inventions. On 17 July 2024, the USPTO issued updated guidance on the subject-matter eligibility of inventions incorporating AI systems (see 2024 Guidance Update on Patent Subject Matter Eligibility, Including on Artificial Intelligence, 89 Fed. Reg. 58, 128 (17 July 2024)). While the USPTO did not alter the patentability analysis to be applied by when assessing AI-related claims, it provided clarity on the framework, and included three hypothetical examples.

In one example, the USPTO applied the eligibility analysis to claims reciting AI-based methods for analysing speech signals and separating out desired speech from extraneous speech. It determined that the claims recited an abstract idea, but found at least one claim patent eligible because it included limitations “directed to creating a new speech signal that no longer contains extraneous speech signals from unwanted sources.” See [USPTO July 2024 Subject Matter Eligibility Examples](#), p. 24. Those limitations turned the abstract idea into a practical application. The new examples not only help clarify how the eligibility analysis applies in the AI context but also provide insight into the types of AI-related inventions that will be more susceptible to eligibility challenges.

With respect to litigation, U.S. district courts began to see the filing of patent infringement lawsuits involving AI-related technology. For example, at the beginning of 2024, FriendliAI Inc. (“FriendliAI”) filed a first amended complaint against Hugging Face, Inc., alleging infringement of two patents directed to techniques for executing batches of requests on an inference system using a transformer neural network model. (See *FriendliAI Inc. v Hugging Face, Inc.*, No. 23-cv-816, Dkt. 27 (D. Del. 8 January 2024)). The patents relate to batching with iteration-level scheduling (also called dynamic batching) which allows an AI model to process multiple requests at once. FriendliAI alleges that Hugging Face’s Text Generation Inference, a server for large language models, contains the patented dynamic batching feature and infringes its patents. The court held a claim construction hearing but before the court issued an opinion the parties settled the lawsuit – see *FriendliAI Inc.*, Dkt. 136 (D. Del. 10 January 2025).

In June, ParTec AG and BF exaQC AG filed a patent infringement lawsuit against Microsoft Corporation, alleging that Microsoft’s Azure AI system infringes three patents directed to computer cluster-booster systems for processing computation tasks and methods for operating such systems – see *ParTec AG et al v Microsoft Corp.*, No. 24-cv-00433 (E.D. Tex. 10 June 2024).

In September, Xockets, Inc. filed a federal lawsuit against NVIDIA Corporation, Microsoft Corporation, and RPX Corporation, alleging that the defendants violated antitrust laws and are infringing seven of its patents – see *Xockets, Inc. v NVIDIA Corp.*, No. 24-cv-00453, Dkt. 7 (W.D. Tex. 5 September 2024). The asserted patents are directed to semiconductor technology that uses a computing architecture in a data processing unit (DPU) to offload, accelerate and isolate data-intensive computing tasks associated with AI, such as those used in cloud infrastructure services and analytics applications used in training large language models for AI. Xockets alleges that NVIDIA and Microsoft are directly and indirectly infringing its patents through their use of NVIDIA’s Hopper and Blackwell server computer systems which contain three DPUs – the BlueField, ConnectX, and NVLink Switch DPUs – for different data-intensive tasks. Xockets argues that NVIDIA’s cloud computing systems enable “its industry-leading, high-performance training of AI large language models, including by enabling accelerated computing and AI in data centers.” (See *id.* at 73.) Xockets seeks an injunction preventing NVIDIA from using or selling its Blackwell systems and enjoining Microsoft’s use of those systems for its generative AI platforms (*id.* at 186).

These two pending lawsuits – both of which are in the early stages – will present important early

indicia of how U.S. courts are dealing with concepts such as patent eligibility (abstractness) in the context of AI-related systems. Parties and patent professionals should monitor the progress of these lawsuits as any issued decisions may provide important insights on how district courts will interpret and apply patent principles to AI-related inventions moving forward.

While there has been a rise in the number of patent infringement lawsuits involving AI-related inventions, that number pales in comparison to the number of AI-related copyright infringement actions. For example, at the end of last year, The New York Times filed a federal lawsuit against Microsoft Corp. and OpenAI for copyright infringement and trademark dilution, alleging that OpenAI used millions of articles published by The New York Times to train automated chatbots that compete with the New York Times as a source for reliable information. See *The New York Times v Microsoft Corp.*, et al. No. 23-cv-11195, Dkt. 1 (S.D.N.Y. Dec. 27, 2023).

That lawsuit was one of many copyright-related lawsuits filed in the year against companies such as Google, Perplexity AI, OpenAI, Microsoft and Meta over the use of their respective generative AI platforms. See, for example, *The Daily News, LP v Microsoft Corp.*, et al., No. 24-3285 (S.D.N.Y. 2024); *Zhang v Google LLC* et al., No. 24-cv-2531, Dkt. 1 (N.D. Cal. 26 April 2024) (alleging copyright infringement against Google and Alphabet, Inc. for copying the plaintiffs' copyrighted images to train an AI powered image generator called Imagen); see also *Dow Jones & Co., Inc., v Perplexity AI, Inc.*, No. 24-cv-7984 (S.D.N.Y. 11 December 2024) (asserting claims for copyright infringement, false designation of origin and trademark dilution where Perplexity allegedly scraped copyrighted content from the news outlets).

The low number of patent infringement cases being filed thus far may be a result of parties prioritising other forms of intellectual property protection, such as copyrights and trade secrets, over patents. Due to the uncertainties surrounding the patentability of certain AI-related inventions, parties may find trade secret protections more advantageous because those protections can attach to information and concepts that historically have not been patentable, such as mathematical concepts or data used to train AI platforms. Parties may also be opting not to file patent infringement lawsuits because of the challenges they face in investigating and proving patent infringement.

In our view, patent infringement lawsuits in this area will become more prevalent over the next few years as parties continue to build their AI-related patent portfolios. Thus, as AI technology continues to progress and parties develop new ways for tracking AI usage, patentees should work closely with their counsel to determine ways for protecting and enforcing their rights.

Design Patents – Out With the Old Obviousness Standard and in With the New

This year, in a landmark en banc decision, *LKQ Corporation v GM Global Technology Operations LLC*, 102 F.4th 1280 (Fed. Cir. 2024), the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit adopted a new approach for assessing obviousness of design patents under 35 U.S.C. § 103, with the intention that the approach be more flexible and consistent with the standard applied to utility patents.

This issue arose on appeal from an inter partes review proceeding where the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB) upheld GM's design patent for a vehicle's front fender under the original obviousness standard. LKQ Corp. argued

that the test was inconsistent with the Supreme Court's precedent in *KSR International Co. v Teleflex Inc.*, 550 U.S. 398 (2007), but the Federal Circuit panel disagreed and affirmed the PTAB's decision. Subsequently, the Federal Circuit granted rehearing en banc and vacated the panel's opinion.

The "old" obviousness standard applied to design patents (commonly referred to as the "Rosen-Durling test") was a two-step test. Before combining prior art designs, a patent challenger needed to identify a single primary reference with design characteristics that are "basically the same" as the challenged design claim. See *In re Rosen*, 673 F.2d 388, 391 (C.C.P.A. 1982). If no reference was found, the patent was considered nonobvious and the inquiry ended without moving to step two. If a primary reference was found, then at step two, other references could be used to modify the primary reference "to create a design that has the same overall visual appearance as the claimed design." See *LKQ Corp.*, 102 F.4th at 1289 (quoting *Durling v Spectrum Furniture Co., Inc.*, 101 F.3d 100, 103 (Fed. Cir. 1996)). To be obvious, the secondary references must be "'so related' to the primary reference that features in one would suggest application of those features to the other." (Id. at 1287).

In its en banc decision, the Federal Circuit deemed the Rosen-Durling test to be "improperly rigid" and overturned it in favour of a "more flexible approach" that better aligned with the "expansive" and "broad standard" applied by the Supreme Court in *KSR*, *Graham v John Deere Co. of Kansas City*, 383 U.S. 1 (1966), and *Smith v Whitman Saddle Co.*, 148 U.S. 674 (1893). Id. at 1293-94. The Federal Circuit concluded that the same obviousness standard should apply equally to both utility patents and design pat-

ents. See *LKQ Corp.*, 102 F.4th at 1287. Consequently, the Federal Circuit adopted the same Graham factors, for evaluating obviousness of design patents, but with a few variations:

- *Scope and content of prior art*- the fact finder should consider "the scope and content of the prior art within the knowledge of an ordinary designer in the field of the design." Id. at 1295-96. In doing so, a primary reference must be identified but the reference need only be "something in existence—not... something that might be brought into existence by selecting individual features from prior art and combining them, particularly where combining them would require modification of every individual feature." Id. at 1298 (quoting *In re Jennings*, 182 F.2d 207, 208 (CCPA 1950)). Each reference must be analogous to the claimed design which for design patents includes "art from the same field of endeavor as the article of manufacture of the claimed design". Id. at 1297.
- *Differences between the claimed design and the prior art* – when determining the differences, a fact finder compares the "visual appearance of the claimed design with prior art designs" from the perspective of one of ordinary skill in the art. Id.
- *Level of ordinary skill in the art* – the level of ordinary skill in the art looks to the "knowledge of a designer of ordinary skill who designs articles of the type involved." Id. at 1299 (internal quotations omitted).
- *Secondary considerations* – the fact finder assesses the secondary considerations of non-obviousness, such as commercial success, industry praise or copying.

After considering the above factors, the fact finder determines "whether an ordinary designer in the field to which the claimed design pertains

would have been motivated to modify the prior art design to create the same overall visual appearance as the claimed design.” Id. at 1299 (quoting in part *Campbell Soup, Co. v Gamon Plus, Inc.*, 10 F.4th 1268, 1275 (Fed. Cir. 2021)).

In the LKQ case, the Federal Circuit vacated the PTAB’s determination of non-obviousness and remanded the case to the PTAB to assess non-obviousness of GM’s design patent under the new standard.

The Federal Circuit’s decision to overturn the Rosen-Durling test marks a pivotal change in design patent law that reverberates not only in district court litigation but also to prosecution. Shortly after this decision, the USPTO issued [Updated Guidance and Examination Instructions for Making a Determination of Obviousness in Designs](#), which incorporates the Federal Circuit’s standard.

The Graham approach encourages fact-specific analyses and allows courts and examiners to better consider the knowledge of an ordinary designer.

On the other hand, by lowering the standard and removing the “basically the same” requirement, the Federal Circuit drastically broadened the field of potentially invalidating prior art. As a result, there will likely be heightened scrutiny by examiners during the prosecution process. The new standard will likely make it more difficult for companies to obtain and enforce design patents. It will also be easier for patent challengers to invalidate design patent claims at the district court. Design patentees and applicants should closely consider their enforcement strategies moving forward and assess the strength of any design patents under the new obviousness standard.

Trends in Biologic-Biosimilar Litigations

In the last two years, the U.S. has seen a dramatic increase in patent litigation under the United States Biologics Price Competition and Innovation Act of 2009 (BPCIA). From mid-2022 to the present, a total of nineteen new BPCIA suits have been filed against biosimilars. Seventeen of those lawsuits involve six new innovator biologics that had not previously been litigated:

- Denosumab;
- Aflibercept;
- Eculizumab;
- Ustekinumab;
- Natalizumab; and
- Tocilizumab.

In comparison, in the eight years from late 2014 through mid-2022, there were a total of only forty BPCIA litigations filed against biosimilars – all of which involved one of nine other innovator biologics. These new lawsuits provide further insight into the trends that patent professionals can glean from BPCIA litigations.

Accelerated Schedules and Quick Resolutions

Thus far, most BPCIA litigations have reached early resolutions and few have made it past the discovery stage. Only a small handful of cases have proceeded to trial. Those cases include *Amgen Inc. v Hospira, Inc.*, No. 15-cv-839 (D. Del.), which proceeded to a jury trial where the jury found that Hospira’s epoetin alfa biosimilar infringed Amgen’s patent covering its Epoprostenol product. See Dkt. 326. In *Immunex Corporation et al. v Sandoz Inc.*, No. 16-cv-1118 (D.N.J.), the court held a bench trial on validity and upheld both of Immunex’s two asserted patents. In *Amgen Inc. v Apotex Inc.*, Nos. 15-cv-61631, 15-cv-62081 (S.D. Fla.), the court held a bench trial and ruled that Apotex’s process for

manufacturing its biosimilars of Amgen's Neulasta (Pegfilgrastim) and Neupogen (Filgrastim) products did not infringe the asserted claims of Amgen's patent and that Apotex had not established that Amgen's patent was invalid.

Preliminary Injunctions

BPCIA litigations have also seen a recent uptick in preliminary injunction proceedings. Prior to mid-2022, motions for preliminary injunctions in BPCIA cases were not particularly common. In fact, prior to mid-2022, preliminary injunction motions had only been filed in six cases with only one motion having been granted. That motion related more towards regulatory compliance than typical patent-based injunctive relief. The court in *Amgen Inc. v Apotex Inc.*, No. 15-cv-61631, Dkt. 71 (S.D. Fla. 9 December 2015), granted Amgen's motion for a preliminary injunction, preventing Apotex from marketing its biosimilar until 180 days after Apotex had notified Amgen that the FDA approved its biosimilar and that Apotex intends to begin commercially marketing its product. Further, parties can no longer be granted injunctive relief in that type of situation because FDA approval is no longer required to trigger the 180-day notice of commercial marketing. The U.S. Supreme Court in *Sandoz Inc. v Amgen Inc.*, 582 U.S. 1, 19-21 (2017) held that a biosimilar applicant must provide notice at least 180 days prior to marketing its biosimilar but such notice may be provided either before or after receiving FDA approval.

Since mid-2022, patent professionals saw a slew of preliminary injunction decisions handed down in litigations involving aflibercept, natalizumab and eculizumab. See *Biogen Inc. v Sandoz Inc.*, No. 22-cv-1190, Dkt. 270 (D. Del. 29 June 2023)

(denying motion for a preliminary injunction seeking to prohibit defendant from releasing its natalizumab biosimilar). In May 2024, the U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware denied Alexion Pharmaceuticals, Inc.'s motion for a preliminary injunction against Samsung Bioepis Co., Ltd. in connection with Samsung's biosimilar of Alexion's Soliris (eculizumab) product. See *Alexion Pharms., Inc. v Samsung Bioepis Co. Ltd.*, No. 24-cv-5, Dkt. 57 (D. Del. 6 May 2024). The Court held that there was a substantial question as to the validity of the asserted patent because the PTAB had instituted inter partes review against the patent.

In June 2024, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of West Virginia granted Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc.'s preliminary injunction motions against Celltrion, Inc., Formycon AG and Samsung Bioepis Co., Ltd., preventing those companies from marketing or selling their biosimilar versions of Regeneron's Eylea (aflibercept) product. See *In Re: Aflibercept Patent Litig.*, No. 24-md-3101, Dkts. 171, 193, 215 (N.D. W. Va.). The Court granted preliminary injunctive relief based on those companies' alleged infringement of Regeneron's U.S. Patent No. 11,084,865, a formulation patent. That court also granted Regeneron's motion for a permanent injunction against Mylan Pharmaceuticals Inc. in connection with its aflibercept biosimilar after the court held a bench trial and concluded that Mylan infringed Regeneron's formulation patent. See Dkt. 162. By contrast, in September 2024, the district court denied Regeneron's preliminary injunction motion against Amgen, finding that Amgen's aflibercept biosimilar was unlikely to infringe Regeneron's formulation patent. See Dkt. 343.

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