Current Status and Issues Regarding Protection of Information Under the Patent Law

The Third Subcommittee,
The Second Patent Committee

The Patent Law, as revised in 2002, provides that “programs and the like” are included in “products” and also that “products similar to a program” are included in “program and the like”. Creations of “data having a structure” or “data structure”, which are substantially equivalent to programs, are also acknowledged to be “inventions”. In addition, according to an investigation of patent applications filed in recent years, there is increasing need for information protection under the Patent Law. Now, based on the previous examples of patent registrations, this Sub-committee considered the necessity of protection of “data having a structure” and “data structure” from the standpoint of exercise of rights. It seems necessary to protect data, but it is not clear how data is examined when rights for such data are claimed. For example, there is a question to what extent the requirement of software-related inventions (under the current Examination Guidelines) that there be a relationship with some hardware is necessary in this case. This Subcommittee considered demands on the Patent Office and points to keep in mind when claims for rights are made. In fact, it is not clearly prescribed what sort of data is “products similar to a program” according to the examination practice at the Patent Office. Under these circumstances, it is important for companies to show what properly qualifies as a protected given the innovations in technology and changes in business operation modes, through the objects that it claims to be “data having structure” or “data structure”. It is also important to continue considering the proper form of information protection pursuant to the Patent Law and to inform the Patent Office of companies’ needs.

[This article has been published in “*CHIZAI KANRI*” (Intellectual Property Management), Vol.53 No.9 2003, pp.1425-1434.]

Recent Important Judgements and Practical Points to Consider Regarding “on-sale bar”

— CAFC judgements after Pfaff —

The First International Affairs Committee

After the decision on the Pfaff case made by the supreme court in 1998, a number of CAFC decisions have been made concerning the grounds for unpatentability due to the on-sale bar under Article 102 (b) of the US Patent Law. The on-sale bar issue is still one of the most important issues for the decision on the validity of patents, and the number of specific cases exploiting the “two parts test” of the Pfaff case have been accumulated.

The purpose of this article is to introduce the important decisions made and material issues discussed at the CAFC and to review the specific cases under which the “two parts test” were applied,

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