

PCT automation project - IMPACT - gathers momentum

tection has increased progressively in recent years. The ten largest users of the Hague system are the Swatch Group, Unilever, Sony, Hermès, Philips Electronics, Moulinex, Siemens, Interior's, Fiat, Braun.

The value of intellectual property rights to a company such as Swatch is also reflected in its use of the other international registration systems administered by WIPO, including the Madrid system for the international registration of marks. Since 1981, the Swatch Group has registered some 39 marks under the Madrid system, which allows a user to obtain protection in up to 64 countries.

Using the Hague system

The Agreement

The Hague Agreement Concerning the International Deposit of Industrial Designs was concluded in 1925. This Agreement has been revised and complemented on a number of occasions since then. The latest revision was adopted at a Diplomatic Conference in June 1999 which resulted in the conclusion of the Geneva Act of the Hague Agreement. This new Act introduced features that will make the system more acceptable to countries which have so far remained outside the system.

A 40-million Swiss Franc project to fully automate the operations of the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) went into full swing in January following the signing of a major contract between WIPO and a consortium of companies.

The project, known by the acronym IMPACT (Information Management for the Patent Cooperation Treaty), is one of the top priorities of WIPO Director General, Dr. Kamil Idris. "We are keen to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by information technology in supporting the Organization's international registration services," Dr. Idris said. "The IMPACT project is the largest single information technology project ever undertaken by WIPO and its success is of the highest priority for this Organization."

The main objectives of the IMPACT Project include:

- to offer further improved services to PCT applicants;
- to prepare the ground for future fee reductions by lowering PCT operating costs;
- to streamline work procedures and establish a more efficient and cost effective operation for the administration of the PCT through the implementation of an automated information and document management system;
- to create and make available to PCT applicants and national offices electronic filing software;
- to improve services for national and regional offices and to establish generalized solutions for electronic data exchange between the office of the PCT and the national and regional offices as well as the PCT International Searching and Preliminary Examining Authorities, including electronic publishing and the dissemination of PCT information.

The overall project is expected to be completed in 3 to 4 years, with the first components of the new system being delivered towards the end of this year.

The rapid expansion of the PCT system - the number of international applications has grown from 2,625 in 1979 to over 70,000 in 1999 - shows the importance of this treaty to the intellectual property community, Dr. Idris pointed out. Automation of the PCT, which implements the concept of a single international patent application that is valid in any of the 106 contracting states, would mean lower costs for applicants who will also benefit from more efficient services. Since international applications contain valuable technical information, the public also stands to gain from this transformation by being able to access more PCT information in electronic and searchable form.

The first part of the contract to develop a comprehensive computer system for managing and administering PCT activities was awarded to a consortium of three companies under the leadership of Xerox Professional Services (XPS) U.K. The other members of the consortium are Cap Gemini (France) and Hewlett Packard (Switzerland). The award of contract for a systems developer resulted from an extensive international tendering process which attracted a total of 35 bids from throughout the world. A rigorous evaluation process, involving face-to-face meetings with five short-listed bidders and an assessment based on over a thousand different criteria, was designed to ensure that the winner will supply the best value-for-money solution to meet the business requirements of

the PCT. The evaluation process involved input from six offices of the PCT, representing the different regions of the world.

Experts from the consortium and a core WIPO team of information technology specialists, responsible for the management and delivery of the system, began work on the analysis and design component of the project in January. The award of the second part of the contract - implementation phase - will hinge on the successful completion of system benchmarking tests to determine the viability of the design. These tests, which will be jointly undertaken by WIPO and the consortium during the first half of this year, will ensure that the proposed technical solution meets the functionality and performance requirements stipulated by WIPO.

Management of the project will remain in the hands of WIPO. The initial approach had been to outsource the entire project to a systems integrator. However, following further analysis and advice from certain member States which had undertaken similar large scale projects, especially in the area of document imaging, the Organization decided to move the responsibility and management of the project in-house. Heavy involvement of PCT operational staff is critical to the success of the project. Key PCT staff have already been moved permanently into the project team and priority has been placed on activities such as training, change management and maintaining good internal communications throughout the project.

