Patent Misuse

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Patent Misuse

• History:
  – Origins in equitable doctrine of unclean hands
  – Gradually becomes increasingly associated with antitrust analysis
  – Corresponding incomplete transition from “fairness” criterion to “efficiency” criterion
  – Large fluctuations in its scope
    • From *Henry* (1912) to *Mercoid* (1944)
  – Stabilized somewhat by adoption of §271(d) in 1952 and its amendment in 1988
Patent Misuse

• Source of the Turmoil = Fundamental Contradiction:
  – Merits of Monopoly vs. Merits of Competition
  – Patent vs. Antitrust
  – Contributory Infringement vs. Patent Misuse
    • See Dawson Chemical: doctrines rest on “antithetical underpinnings”
Patent Misuse

• Patentee has “impermissibly broadened the ‘physical or temporal scope’ of the patent grant with anticompetitive effect”
  – Windsurfing Int’l (CAFC 1986)
  – Princo (CAFC 2010 en banc)

• Remedy:
  – Patent is unenforceable until effects of the misuse have been “purged” (practice abandoned and adverse impact dissipated)
  – Anyone can raise the defense
Patent Misuse Problems

a) Patent suppression
b) Selective Refusal to License
c) Demand that licensees purchase supplies only from patentee
d) Limits on sale prices of products made with the patent
e) Geographically discriminatory royalty structure
f) Limits on the regions in which products made with the patent are sold
g) Metered licenses
h) Nonmetered licenses
i) Grantback licenses
j) In negotiating a patent license with L, Patentee persuade[s] the holder of the patent on a separate, competitive technology not to grant a license to L
(a) Patent Suppression

• Contexts:
  – P suppresses the invention entirely
  – Foreign patentee refuses to “work” the invention domestically

• Doctrinal Options
  – Patent Suppression is Fine
    • Rare option to refuse injunctive relief
  – Patent Suppression (violation of “working requirement”) triggers compulsory license
  – Patent Suppression is Patent Misuse

USA

Most countries

---TRIPS 27.1 issue
No patent owner otherwise entitled to relief for infringement or contributory infringement of a patent shall be denied relief or deemed guilty of misuse or illegal extension of the patent right by reason of his having done one or more of the following:

1. derived revenue from acts which if performed by another without his consent would constitute contributory infringement of the patent;

2. licensed or authorized another to perform acts which if performed without his consent would constitute contributory infringement of the patent;

3. sought to enforce his patent rights against infringement or contributory infringement;

4. refused to license or use any rights to the patent; or

5. conditioned the license of any rights to the patent or the sale of the patented product on the acquisition of a license to rights in another patent or purchase of a separate product, unless, in view of the circumstances, the patent owner has market power in the relevant market for the patent or patented product on which the license or sale is conditioned.
(b) Selective Refusal to License

- Background: *Aspen Skiing* – refusal to deal can give rise to AT violation
- Refusal to sell patented parts to independent service organizations
  - *Kodak* (SCt 1992): might give rise to AT violation
  - *ISO II* (CAFC 2000): in absence of a tying arrangement, no AT violation; motivation of patentee irrelevant
Licensee agrees to buy unpatented material only from patent owner
§271(c)

Whoever offers to sell or sells within the United States or imports into the United States a component of a patented machine, manufacture, combination or composition, or a material or apparatus for use in practicing a patented process, constituting a material part of the invention, knowing the same to be especially made or especially adapted for use in an infringement of such patent, and not a staple article or commodity of commerce suitable for substantial noninfringing use, shall be liable as a contributory infringer.
Dawson Chemical (1980)

- 5/4
- Tying license of the right to practice a patented process to an agreement to purchase from the patentee an unpatented but nonstaple product (used in conjunction with the process) is not patent misuse
Licensee agrees to buy unpatented material only from patent owner.
No patent owner otherwise entitled to relief for infringement or contributory infringement of a patent shall be denied relief or deemed guilty of misuse or illegal extension of the patent right by reason of his having done one or more of the following:

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(4) refused to license or use any rights to the patent; or

(5) conditioned the license of any rights to the patent or the sale of the patented product on the acquisition of a license to rights in another patent or purchase of a separate product, unless, in view of the circumstances, the patent owner has market power in the relevant market for the patent or patented product on which the license or sale is conditioned.
"The use of the term [']in view of the circumstances['], is again designed to give the courts the requisite flexibility to exercise their equitable powers. See 35 U.S.C. section 283. This phrase is designed, in part, to allow the courts to assess the potentially competitive or anticompetitive effects of the tie-in practice. In making this assessment the courts may wish to look at whether the tied product is a staple or a nonstaple. In the case of tying a patented product to a nonstaple the net effect of such an arrangement may serve to expand the economic rights of the patent owner. This result, however, is generally appropriate because in most situations involving high technology the market for the nonstaple product would not exist but for the existence of the patented product."
"On the other hand, courts that apply a rule of reason analysis to the tie-in of a patented product involving a staple may evaluate it in a slightly different manner. The ability of a party with a patented product to require that the purchaser or the licensee of that product to use a particular staple could have an anticompetitive effect. Thus, for cases involving the tie-in of staple products, the courts should be sensitive to the potential anticompetitive burden on commerce such a practice may have if the maker of a competing staple has its market substantially diminished as a result of the tie-in." Cong. Rec. H 10648 (Oct. 20, 1988).
(e) Price-Restricted Licenses

• Suppose three firms (A, B, C) are currently producing and selling a unpatented product (e.g., shredded wheat)

• An employee of firm A invents and patents a process that reduces the cost of producing shredded wheat

• What should we permit A to do?
Demand for unpatented product

Marginal Cost of producing the product, without using patented process

Firm A  Firm B  Firm C
Demand for unpatented product

Marginal Cost of producing the product, with the patented process

Firm A  Firm B  Firm C
Demand for unpatented product

Marginal Cost of producing the product, with the patented process

Firm A

A could lower the price on the product and drive B & C out of business
Demand for unpatented product

Marginal Cost of producing the product, with the patented process

Firm A

A could lower the price on the product and drive B & C out of business
Demand for unpatented product
Marginal Cost of producing the product, with the patented process

Patentee (Firm A) could charge this much for license

A’s profit

Demand for unpatented product

Marginal Cost of producing the product, with the patented process

Firm A  B  C

A could maintain price; license B & C to use the process
Marginal Cost of producing the product, with the patented process

Patentee (Firm A) could charge this much for license

A could license B & C to use the process -- and require them to raise the price
Marginal Cost of producing the product, with the patented process

Patentee (Firm A) could charge this much for license

A could license B & C to use the process -- and charge high license fees
Price-Restricted Licenses

What’s the Purpose of the P-R License?

1) Protect Patentees’ market (and associated profits) against erosion by competitors
   Socially desirable but unlikely

2) Facilitate cartelization
   Socially undesirable likely

3) Maintain quality of repairs and service
   Socially desirable?
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j) In negotiating a patent license with L, Patentee persuades the holder of the patent on a separate, competitive technology not to grant a license to L