In a previous article, I have mentioned the use of patents as a way of generating revenue. As I wrote earlier, “Companies who receive or buy patents on commonly-used high-technology principles or protocols sue victims with deep pockets for large sums.” I previously mentioned a company that sues large companies on this basis as a method of making money. Today I present a company that sues little companies.

PanIP, LLC <http://www.panip.com> describes itself as follows in its company background page: “PanIP, LLC is a technology development company that holds a number of United States and Canadian high-impact patents directed to Information Appliances, including multimedia public kiosks, personal computers, TV Set Top Boxes, TV video game consoles, and various workstations, as well as systems employed in such industries as E-Commerce, interactive financial transactions, and database search systems. There is also applicability to various methods for distributing, marketing or selling products and services where multiple search paths (i.e. - textual and graphical) are provided for retrieving information about the products or services that are to be sold or distributed. Several additional E-Commerce related patent applications are pending.”

A detailed list of patents owned by this company is available at <http://www.panip.com/patents.htm>. On the whole, one can reasonable say that the patents cover methods of using information transmission and retrieval systems applicable to electronic commerce. In particular, the Canadian patent known as “Automatic Information, Goods, and Services Dispensing System (Canada ’216)” whose complete text is available at <http://patents1.ic.gc.ca/details?patent_number=1236216&language=EN_CA> specifically addresses, “A system for automatically dispensing information, goods and services to a customer on a self-service basis including a central data processing centre in which information on services offered by various institutions in a particular industry is stored. One or more self-service information and sales terminals are remotely linked to the central data processing centre and are programmed to gather information from prospective customers on goods and services desired, to transmit to customers information on the desired goods or services from the central data processing centre, to take orders for goods or services from customers and transmit them for processing to the central data processing centre, to accept payment, and to deliver goods or services in the form of documents to the customer when orders are completed. The central data processing centre is also remotely linked to terminals of the various institutions serviced by the system, so that each institution can be kept up-dated on completed sales of services offered by that institution.” [Note that Canadian spelling is used above.]

Think about this patent: does it not remind you unavoidably of what you did the last time you ordered a book on Amazon or bought something on e-Bay? Or any other commercial transaction on the Web?

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In the next article in this series, we’ll look at what PanIP has been doing with its patents. In the meantime, start thinking about your own organization’s uses of intellectual property to which PanIP may claim the rights.

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M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP is Associate Professor in the Department of Computer Information Systems at Norwich University in Northfield, VT. Mich can be reached by e-mail at <mkabay@norwich.edu>; Web site at <http://www.mekabay.com/index.htm>.

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