

Conference report

IPI-ConfEx Conference and Exposition, Sorrento, Italy, March 2007

Sorrento is an excellent place for both conferences and holidays, and provided a fine location for this year's IPI-ConfEx.

The main sessions of this, the fourth annual IPI-ConfEx event, covered the challenge of data integration*, patent and design searching, patent law considerations*, IP management, vendor presentations, a focus on engineering and electrical areas* and a focus on chemical and biotechnology areas. Panel discussions were included at the end of the sessions marked*.

In addition to the nearly 40 presentations made during three very full days, Stephen Adams gave us another excellent IPI MasterClass™ Presentation, this time on 'The Text, the Whole Text and Nothing but the Text – Some Considerations of Full-Text Databases for the Searcher'. He put this first into its historical perspective – recalling the days of early online searching with ERIC, MEDline and Derwent in the late 1950s and the 1960s, followed by Lexis loading full text of US patents from 1983. He then worked through a number of issues of importance in trying to get good precision and good recall, including title, abstract and claims, in addition to the main text description. He noted that there were various standards in place to improve things in some of these areas, but that they were often not followed in practice. In noting that most retrieval methods still relied on basic Boolean and similar logic, he pointed out that many improvements are needed for good full text searching and that very little progress had so far been made on challenging issues such as the acceptance of information in patents in ways other than by reduction to plain paper and two-dimensional drawings. 'Full text' could increasingly usefully be supplied as 3D chemical structures, holograms and the output of CAD/CAM packages in the engineering field [1,2], for example. Amongst his conclusions, Stephen once again emphasised the need to access and skillfully use multiple sources of information in this field as, in many others, for comprehensive retrieval.

A presentation by Stephen Falk (Rohm and Haas) highlighted the ideal of high quality patents and how this might be achieved and measured. An unusual, but potentially very useful database from Questel.Orbit – DesignFinder – was described by Ricardo Vieira. Design searching itself, and design searching as part of a patent search, has until now been very much limited by both the small amount of

data available electronically and the varying different access modes to what data has been available.

The creation of a patent search department of Philips in Bangalore, India was outlined by Gerard van der Ligt. Despite the many fears of attorneys and others that this would save money, but at an increased risk of errors, in practice the change had been seen as successful, once the initial training period had been completed. In his presentation on 'Patenting of biopharmaceuticals: the world turned upside-down – twice', Peter Steele outlined the history of the creation of pharmaceuticals from natural occurring products in the early days, followed by an extensive period of largely industrially synthesized materials, and a more recent trend back to pharmaceuticals based on natural products. Bernard Gress of Fannie Mae, USA, gave a challenging presentation on the value of analysis of patent citation networks, and some of the mathematical techniques involved.

An interesting presentation by Wolfgang Thielemann of Bayer Healthcare AG focused on the relationship between added-value patent databases and information extracted from full text materials, and asked whether text mining will eventually replace the need for added-value database indexing.

Amongst the many other presentations, those of particular interest were:

- Strategies for the Integration of Information (Ben Gardner, Pfizer).
- Data Integration, Text Mining, and Graphical Exploration Techniques in Patent Mapping and Analysis (Nicolas Grandjean, Novartis Institutes for Biomedical Research).
- How to be Recognized as a Strategic Partner with Senior Management in a Global Company – a Patent Manager's Perspective (Gerhard Fischer, Syngenta).
- Unique approaches to freedom to operate searches (Michael Fuller, Knobbe, Martens, Olson and Bear, USA).
- PDG Celebrates 50 Years of Activity in the Patent Information Field – Past Successes and future Challenges (Minoo Philipp, Henkel, Germany) [3].
- Comparison of patent biosequence information sources – based on a critical evaluation of multiple data sources (Mark Harper, Sanofi-Aventis, France).
- IPC8 – post-implementation analysis of results from a user perspective (Gerold Frers, Siemens, Germany).

- Patent Optimizer™ from LexisNexis® (Brian Elias, USA).
- High quality classification in patent landscaping (Piet van Zanten, Philips).
- How to Search for Synthetic Methods in Patent and Scientific Literature – Integrating Reaction Databases (Marudai Balasubramanian "Balu", Pfizer).
- How Indexing Can Save Your Life (or at least your Search)! (Jim Brown, IFI Patent Intelligence, USA).
- The interlinked and complementary roles of IPI-ConfEx™, Pharma-Bio-Med™ conference, and TPR International (Pallavi Campion, TPR International, USA).
- An Investigation into Analyzing Patents by Chemical Structure (Mark Calcagno, Proctor and Gamble, USA).
- The Outlook for the Patent Information Industry – an Information Business View (David Brown).
- Patent and Non Patent Literature Searching Italian Sources: A Possible Challenge? (Guido Moradei, Studio Moredei, Italy).
- Extracting additional value and intelligence from patent registers (Aalt van de Kuilen, Solvay Pharmaceuticals).

The open discussion session at the end of the engineer/electrical parallel track on how this area might move forward indicated that there was a desire for this track to continue, but that the way in which this might develop was less clear. By means of the section on the IPI Institute website, participants felt that this could be a good way forward in engaging the views and ideas of searchers in these fields.

The format was again a three day conference of plenary sessions, this year held in a spacious lecture theatre style auditorium, between two optional days of workshops. An innovation in the programme this year was the inclusion of sessions specifically directed to (i) the engineering and electrical areas and (ii) chemical and biotechnology areas, in each case running in parallel with opportunities to visit the exhibitor stands.

An important event during the conference was the announcement that Harry Allcock, Vice President, IFI CLAIMS Patent Services, was the winner of the IPI Award¹ for 2007; more details on this will be included in a separate feature.

Exhibition stand holders included Dialog – Thomson Scientific, Technology and Patent Research InternationalSM, LexisNexis, Questel-Orbit, Jouve, IET/Inspec, Trepel Information Solutions BV, FIZ Karlsruhe, European Patent Office, Uppdragshuset, Elsevier MDL[®], Empolis, OmniViz, Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property, Minesoft, Studio Moradei, Temis, and IFI Patent Intelligence.

Over 340 delegates from around 25 countries attended this year's conference, including worldwide representatives covering Europe, Russia, North and South America, The Middle East, and Asia. Germany remained the country

Table 1
Main delegate countries – 2007

Germany	17%
France	13%
UK	11%
The Netherlands	11%
USA	10 %
Italy	6%
Denmark	5%
Sweden	5%
Switzerland	4%
Finland	2%

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with most delegates (17%), while Italy had a strong presence (6%). The main delegate countries are shown in Table 1. Other countries with fewer than 2% each included Saudi Arabia, Spain, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Canada, India, Russia, Japan, Israel and Portugal.

A regular event in the patent information calendar, this year's conference and exposition were again informative, enjoyable and well organized. Nevertheless, the substantial increase in the registration fee for 2006 and again in 2007 (over 15% each time) was noted by a number of delegates who felt that attendance would be hard to justify if further substantial increases were envisaged for 2008 and 2009.

While we appreciate that the vendor presentations are probably essential as a part of the overall financial viability of the conference, the full integration of vendor presentations into plenary sessions was sometimes inappropriate and disrupted the flow of the conference, especially those (who will remain nameless!) who unashamedly gave commercial sales pitches as their presentations.

In one sense, the conference had a somewhat different emphasis from 2006, with more participation of smaller users and vendors, and corresponding less dominance by companies such as Thomson Scientific and Chemical Abstracts. There was also a wide age distribution amongst delegates, which is a healthy sign for the future, but makes it difficult for the organizers in the short term to pitch the level of the presentations to be of benefit to both young, first time patent information attendees and to those who have been involved in this field for many years.

Patent information professionals, especially those based in Europe, will look forward to next year's conference, which is expected to be in Barcelona, Spain, at around the same time of year – more information will be posted at <http://www.ipi-confex.com/> and <http://www.ipi-institute.com/>.

References

- [1] Durack K. Tacit knowledge in patent applications: observations on the value of models to early US Patent Office practice and potential implications for the 21st century. *World Patent Inf* 2004;26 (2):131–6.

¹ See also www.ipi-award.com.

- [2] Adams S. Electronic non-text material in patent applications – some questions for patent offices, applicants and searchers. *World Patent Inf* 2005;27 (2):99–103.
- [3] Philipp M, Appleton B. Half a century of the Patent Documentation Group (PDG) 1957–2007. *World Patent Inf* 2007;29 (2). [doi:10.1016/j.wpi.2006.11.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wpi.2006.11.001).

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