

POPA Proposes Much-Needed IFW Changes

USPTO Deputy Director Steve Pinkos welcomed POPA representatives October 21 to discuss the Image File Wrapper system. POPA came to the meeting prepared with resolutions to current IFW problems that waste time and money and cause major headaches for examiners striving for high quality and high production.

POPA's list of solutions included:

■ **Improve Contractor Scanning Services.** Examiners' greatest complaints with IFW, by far, relate to the multitude of scanning errors that create documents improperly entered in the file record, amendments and office actions entered days, weeks, or months late, documents filed under the wrong tabs, and more.

POPA suggested that some of these problems could be fixed with better training for the scanning contractors, while other scanning troubles needed procedural solutions or new hardware and software.

For example, to more quickly turn around problem images, POPA recommended putting scanners at the warehouse so that corrections can be done without waiting for paper files to be located and sent to Crystal City or Carlyle. To more speedily notify examiners of the receipt and scanning of documents—especially time-sensitive documents such as submissions after final rejection or allowance—the agency should program the electronic Desktop Application Navigator (eDAN) to automatically forward applications to examiners and automatically message them when papers have been scanned and entered. The USPTO could program eDAN to do what computers do best—recognize

predetermined input codes and automatically notify examiners, much the same as computers send automated “out-of-office” e-mails.

Sometimes examiners need to have papers, e.g., received faxes, scanned and entered in IFW right away. For this USPTO would establish “scan on demand” services in each technology center, allowing examiners to come to a scanning office for imaging that's needed pronto.

■ **Cached Hot-Docket Images and a Hard-Drive Version of eDAN.** The USPTO could avoid significant losses of examining time if it invested in programming eDAN to enable examiners to continue working from their hard drives when the main IFW system is not functioning properly.

The eDAN software lists all of an examiner's cases, from which the examiner can place the ones most important for a biweek in a to-do list known as a “hot docket.” When an examiner places an application on his or her hot docket, the improved network version of eDAN would automatically store all the images of each application in each examiner's hot docket on his or her desktop workstation.

With the individualized hot dockets stored on examiners' computers, a local version of eDAN would allow examiners to continue to work even if IFW or the entire network crashed. When a case on the hot docket is finished, i.e., turned in for a count or otherwise removed from the hot docket, eDAN would automatically delete the cached images of that case from the examiner's hard drive to conserve workstation storage space.

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Technology Center 1600 employees indicate their feelings for the so-called “security” measures used at the USPTO's Carlyle campus. They purchased and wore the personalized prison costumes to their end-of-fiscal-year Halloween luncheon.



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■ **Improve Handling of Non-Patent Literature (NPL) and Foreign Patents.** The USPTO can improve examiner access to NPL and foreign patents, thereby improving production and quality, by: 1) identifying each NPL by first author; 2) entering each NPL into IFW in the order that the NPL is entered on the applicant's NPL list (USPTO Form 1449), which is part of the application record; 3) identifying each foreign patent by its country/serial number; and 4) increasing the eDAN annotation field to allow more notes.

■ **Allow Display of Multiple Documents in a Readable Size.** This means providing each examiner with a second desktop monitor.

Examiners now have beautiful flat screen monitors to allow large clear images, but because eDAN displays multiple windows, each document appears on the screen so small that most examiners must print all of the documents to read them. If examiners have two monitors—for example, one in portrait mode and one landscape—the USPTO could increase examiner efficiency by reducing time spent printing or switching between windows and significantly reduce paper and toner costs.

Because monitor prices have dropped significantly since IFW was implemented, the advantages and the benefits to other USPTO software programs—such as the Examiner Automated Search Tool (EAST), the Web-based Examiner Search Tool (WEST), and the Office Action Correspondence System (OACS)—make second monitors worth the cost.

■ **Improve IFW Printing Features.** Relatively simple programming solutions would reduce the number of mouse clicks and functions now necessary to print each document. When examiners have to print scores or hundreds of documents, these software fixes would reduce time and repetitive motion injuries. They would also ease document handling.

For example, adding a header to each printed document that includes at least the serial number and document-filing date would more easily identify documents. On the print menu, “print current document” would be the default setting, cutting several mouse clicks.

Examiners would select multiple documents for printing if the program allowed using the shift and control keys to highlight the relevant documents. Examiners need additional print options, available in all windows, to allow printing of a specified entire application or only documents new since the last office action.

■ **Program eDAN to Refresh all Dockets as Necessary.** Currently examiners manually refresh each docket, which wastes time when the computer can be programmed to do this work.

■ **Provide File Storage Furniture.** The USPTO offered to provide examiners with printed “working folders,” which contain a bare-bones number of documents that examiners can add to. But many examiners have not been supplied any file furniture in which to store them.

■ **Improve Optical Character Recognition (OCR) or Supply a Searchable Text File.** These would allow examiners to readily search the specifications and other documents for relevant terms, and “cut and paste” relevant information from applications into office actions. The enhanced system would enable OCR of an entire document while maintaining reasonable formatting. Using commercial-off-the-shelf OCR software on examiners' desktops would allow exporting of a whole document.

In addition, examiners overwhelmingly express a desire to be able to search text by using keywords, something not readily available with image files.

■ **Better Document Tracking.** By adding a data field to show the date that the contractors actually scanned and entered a document, eDAN would enable the USPTO to actually measure the contractor's performance. Now eDAN only tracks the filing date of the paper document. If a paper document was filed Nov. 3 but scanned on Dec. 3, only the Nov. 3 date shows up on the eDAN file. Because eDAN doesn't track who scanned the paper and when, the USPTO has no way to track the quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the contractor's work.

■ **Establish a Pilot Program for Voice-Activated Software.** When an examiner using IFW was disabled by a repetitive motion injury and filed a workers' compensation claim, the USPTO responded by bringing in software engineers to make eDAN compliant with handicap accessibility regulations and allow use of voice-activated dictation software. With eDAN's capability to support voice-activated software the agency can now offer that ability to other examiners who prefer it to test its benefits with eDAN and OACS. A pilot program could ultimately determine long-term cost savings for the agency.

Illness Prompts Leave Requests

Elizabeth Bolden, an examiner and POPA member in Art Unit 1755, has been in the leave donor program since she was diagnosed with breast cancer in April 2004. While she has finished chemotherapy, she will be unable to work for approximately a month due to cancer surgery in mid-November. She also faces almost weekly doctors' appointments, tests, and additional surgeries in 2005.

To donate leave, contact Veronica Faison, Remsen 9D28, phone 571-272-1366.

Sudhaker B. Patel, an examiner in Art Unit 1624, underwent radical prostate cancer surgery on Sept. 30. His doctor advised a recovery period of 7-8 weeks off from work. At press time he had nearly exhausted all of his available leave and needed annual leave donations to offset the time required for his complete recovery. To donate, fax completed leave donation forms to Stacy Hoffman at 703-746-8495.

Leave donation forms for both employees can be downloaded from <http://ptoweb/ptointranet/ohr/library/forms/cd505.pdf>.

