

Software Giant, Microsoft Loses Appeal, Prohibited from Selling Word Products

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Come Jan. 11, 2010, those who find themselves working with Microsoft Office products to get through the work day may begin to experience some headaches. A Federal Court of Appeals ruled against the software giant and has prohibited the sale of Microsoft Word products.

In addition, Microsoft will have to pay \$290 million to a small Canadian software company called i4i, Inc. for violating that company's patent when they created Microsoft Word 2007 and later additions.

Microsoft's troubles began in 2007 after launching Word 2007 when the small company i4i learned that the product was written in code for which it had received an exclusive patent in 1998.

In answer to the court's ruling, Microsoft has pledged to have a new product on the market prior to the Jan. 11, 2010 deadline. Those with computers that already have Word need not worry. Part of the money that Microsoft has to pay i4i is for the products it has already sold. Microsoft is also allowed to continue to support earlier Word users, not affected by the deadline.

However, combining new computer software in offices that have the older versions of Word, may be problematic; much in the same way as the Vista version of Microsoft Word with the extension, '.docx,' were not compatible with older Word versions and Microsoft had to create a converter program.

For those more technically inclined, the problem for Microsoft came when it incorporated code which utilized a method for processing custom XML code, patented in 1998 by i4i, into its Word products, beginning with Microsoft Word 2003. That implementation ultimately caused the courts to rule against Microsoft. i4i's upheld claim is based on how the XML language is implemented within the Office line of products.

The fix promised by Microsoft will not contain any of the ruled upon code in any of its new products. With only three weeks left until the prohibition deadline, Microsoft does not have much time to roll out a new version of the program.

The problem is not limited to offices. Retailers of Microsoft Office products are affected as well. By the deadline, retailers must eliminate all of the violation products from inventories. The same is true for computer manufacturers and suppliers that typically bundle Office products with computers, must also comply with the courts ruling and eliminate the products from offered computers.

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