**Beware of patent trolls**

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Arbutus, MD - When Jason Cugle, owner of a small business in Maryland, received a letter from a company called “Shipping and Transit LLC” in January claiming that he had infringed upon four different patents, he knew something wasn’t right.

It started with a demand letter that claimed Jason was using patented shipping technology that “Shipping and Transit” owned. However, it turned out this company has since been exposed as a patent troll and has been harassing small businesses like Jason's for some time.

“Patent troll” is a pejorative term used to describe companies that use patents as legal weapons, and they are becoming increasingly common. Some 3,000 intellectual property lawsuits are filed each year in the United States, and the increase in litigation over the past couple of decades is due in large part to these trolls.

These companies will buy up cheap patents, often from floundering companies that want to monetize whatever resources they have left, and build up a significant store of them. The vast majority of these patents are broad, vague, and cover commonplace technology.

The companies, armed with these patents, then seek out smaller businesses and send threatening letters that claim patent infringement. Hundreds of small lawsuits are filed, and then quickly dismissed.

According to the Electronic Frontier Foundation, this isn't uncommon.

“Shipping and Transit offers to settle lawsuits for well below the cost of litigation, allowing it to sue hundreds of small businesses,” the EFF explained. “This appears to be stereotypical patent troll behavior: leveraging the cost of litigation to get money it doesn’t deserve.”

This company isn't the only patent troll in the world, either. A company in Texas is currently suing Apple for “including features such as calling and emailing on iPads and iPhones.”

Apple was reported to be the biggest target for patent trolls like these in 2015, and 2016 is only serving as further proof. Apple is able to ward off these claims with relative ease because of its sheer size and influence, and small businesses are often left to suffer.

But that doesn't mean that small businesses have to comply with the demands of patent trolls. Jason is currently taking “Shipping and Transit” to court over their frivolous claims, and in doing so, he's standing up for small businesses everywhere.

If all goes well, then small companies like Jason's will no longer have to worry about being extorted by patent trolls.