STANDING COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

STANDARDS AND DOCUMENTATION WORKING GROUP

Fourth Session
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RECOMMENDED MINIMUM CONTENTS FOR INTELLECTUAL
PROPERTY OFFICES' WEBSITES

Document prepared by the Secretariat

1.   In its letter of August 11, 2003, the Patent Documentation Group (PDG) informed the International Bureau (IB) on the main results of its investigations regarding the implementation of the "Recommended Minimum Contents for Intellectual Property Offices' Websites" (Part 8.5 of the *WIPO Handbook on Industrial Property Information and Documentation*) that was adopted by the Standing Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT) at its fourth Plenary session in December 1999. These investigations by a group of patent information specialists covered Websites of "big" and "small" industrial property offices, including the European Patent Office itself.

2.   The letter of the PDG and Part 8.5 of the WIPO Handbook are reproduced as Annexes I and II to this document.

> *3.   The Standards and Documentation Working Group is invited to take note of the information provided in the above-mentioned letter of the PDG and its attachment, which are reproduced in the two Annexes to this document.*

[Annexes follow]

ANNEX I

Patent Documentation Group

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Date. 11 August 2003   Our ref. PDG11082003_Action152   Encl.
                            Your ref.

Dear Mr. Solanas,

In December 1999 the WIPO Standing Committee on Information Technologies (WIPO SCIT) adopted the recommendation "Recommended Minimum Contents for Intellectual Property Offices' Web Sites". A copy of the recommendation, which has been included in Part 8 of the WIPO Handbook on Industrial Property Information and Documentation, is attached.

The recommendations were based on fruitful discussions among intellectual property offices in the framework of WIPO SCIT. The Patent Documentation Group – a transnational industry organization which is devoted to patent information matters – strongly supports the recommendations. More information about the Patent Documentation Group (PDG) is available on the web site *http://www.pdg-news.net/* .

To get an idea of how the recommendations have found their way into the real world, a handful of volunteering patent information specialists from PDG member companies checked the web sites of a number of IP offices. In doing so, they used a check list which covers the main points given in the WIPO recommendations.

The investigations covered web sites of "big" and "small" IP offices, all being members of the European Patent Organisation, including the EPO itself. On the whole, the results were encouraging, showing that many of the investigated web sites are already more or less in line with the recommendations given by the WIPO.

Features sometimes not included however were

        downloadable forms
        IP law texts
        annual reports / interim reports
- a news section / update index
- patent register and other IP information data
- pages in English

The PDG member companies as heavy users of the globally available IP systems would like to stress the importance of these features.

The online availability of IP forms and IP law texts is of significant value for all users of the IP system, especially for those from small and medium sized companies.

Annual reports contain useful statistical data and further valuable information which might be difficult to find elsewhere. Interim reports can give up-to-date information about current filing statistics and intermediate information about ongoing projects. Why not offer an easy access to this kind of information via the web site?

A news section makes a web site especially attractive to IP professionals and helps them to follow national developments. For "big" web sites an additional update index is needed, so that the regular users can systematically be kept informed about date and type of newly added content.

Dissemination of IP information data is one of the central tasks of an IP office. In the framework of Esp@cenet all investigated offices make use of the internet for the distribution of patent front page information, some of them already enable the easy access to the patent full text. Several offices also give access to the patent register (legal status) or other IP databases (e.g. designs, trademarks) via their web site. Ideally all IP offices should do so for the sake of the users of the IP system.

As recommended in the WIPO paper, an English translation of at least the most important pages should be available. Nowadays each national IP system has users with English literacy from all over the world.
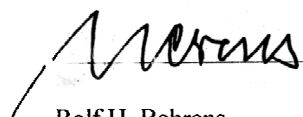
This letter is being sent out to the EPO and all IP offices of the 27 EPC member states and also to the JPO, USPTO, and WIPO for information purposes. The goal is to give some positive feedback on the huge progress already made and to encourage further efforts in the important field of IP information.

Where appropriate, details of the results of our investigation concerning your web site are enclosed.

Please feel free to contact the PDG at any time for further discussions and assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Patent Documentation Group

Ralf H. Behrens
Secretary General

[Annex II follows]

ANNEX II

**RECOMMENDED MINIMUM CONTENTS
FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OFFICES' WEB SITES**

*adopted by the Standing Committee on Information Technologies
at its fourth Plenary session on December 10, 1999*

INTRODUCTION

1.   This document intends to provide guidance to Intellectual Property Offices (IPOs) regarding the presentation and contents of their Web sites made available through the Internet. The recommendations are not limited to patents for inventions but cover all the intellectual property rights dealt with by the respective IPO. If an IPO creates a new Web site or changes the contents/layout thereof, the Office is invited to inform the International Bureau of WIPO of that fact in order for the International Bureau to establish a hyperlink to the individual URL of the IPO. The links are listed under "Site Addresses of IPOs" on the WIPO Web site, http://www.wipo.int.

RECOMMENDED CONTENT FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY WEB SITES

2.   The content of Intellectual Property Web sites should be presented in the language(s) of the national office. At least the homepage and the most important pages (e.g., information on how to apply for intellectual property protection) should also be presented in English.

3.   Intellectual Property Web sites should provide information about the procedures of the national office and other information to assist users of the national system. For example, Intellectual Property Web sites should contain:

- basic information about national IP rights,

- technical documents (e.g., guidelines, classification information),

- legal documents (e.g., treaties, laws),

- downloadable forms,

- fee schedules,

- annual reports (statistics) of the national office,

- links to other Intellectual Property Web sites,

- Intellectual Property information data,

- notices about changes in national intellectual property laws or administration,

- a News Section, or an Update Index, covering at least a six-month time period.

4.   Intellectual Property Web sites should contain information that is helpful to users, especially those who are new to the intellectual property field. For example, Intellectual Property Web sites should contain:

- information about the procedures of the national office in the form of basic facts and frequently asked questions (FAQs);

- descriptions of products and services provided by the national office, including how to obtain them, their cost, and the media in which they are available; and

- references to sources for assistance or information, such as libraries and legal representatives or chambers.

5.   Intellectual Property Web sites should contain navigational aids to assist users in locating information on the site. For example, Intellectual Property Web sites should contain a site search capability and/or a site index. Nevertheless the homepage should contain an overview on the whole Web site as well as an indication on services free of charge and services available only with costs. Furthermore, an indication on the date of the last update should be given on the homepage, or preferably on each page of the Web site.

6.   Intellectual Property Web sites may contain information to allow users to contact designated employees of the national office. For example, the site could contain the e-mail address, mailing address, phone and fax number for the office per se, points of contacts to receive and respond to external inquiries, and an e-mail address for Web-related help consistent with standard web support practices.

7.   To the extent possible, Intellectual Property Web sites should provide searchable databases or a link to databases relating to intellectual property documents of the IPO (such as legal status information). Links to other searchable databases should be included where appropriate.

RECOMMENDED DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY WEB SITES

8.   Intellectual Property Web sites should preferably post contents in HTML 3.2 (HTML 4.0 when the standard stabilizes), and standard browser image file types (e.g., gif, jpg). The second preferred format for posting administrative or informational text-only documents is ASCII text. Large downloadable files may also be made available via FTP.

9.   Web pages should use international standard character sets to encode their content. All web pages shall carry a distinct identifier for the particular international character used for the purpose of assisting users with browsers that may not be configured to display the character set.

10.   Documents used internally, e.g., documents in image formats, should be made available in the format used internally if it is practical to view that format with a browser. If a browser plug-in is required to view such documents (e.g. Adobe PDF or TIFF), the plug-in or a link to the plug-in should be provided.

11.   Web pages should degrade gracefully (i.e., pages containing JavaScript, Java or images should be legible on browsers that cannot deal with JavaScript, Java or images).

12.   Intellectual Property Web sites should be kept simple in order to reduce loading times. The use of images should be minimized.

13.   Intellectual Property Web sites should take extra care if there is a desire to use frames. When frames are used care should be taken not to exclude users with browsers that don't handle frames. The design of sites with frames needs to take into account limitations introduced by viewing the page on a small screen, and testing should be done to ensure the frames do not create navigation difficulties.

14.   Html pages, especially the Home Page, should include the html tags relied upon by WWW search engines for indexing sites (i.e., <TITLE>, <META>, <H1>) whenever possible.

15.   Documents presented as ASCII text should be enclosed within minimal html tags (<HTML>, <HEAD>, <BODY>) and <PRE>…</PRE> tags whenever possible. A <TITLE> tag is also highly desirable.

16.   Intellectual Property Web site servers should use the default HTTP port 80.

17.   Intellectual Property Web sites should have a high degree of accessibility in order to provide information to the widest possible audience and enable usability for individuals with disabilities. For example, Intellectual Property Web sites could provide:

        —   alternative text (<ALT>) for all images,

        —   alternative text for imagemap hot spots,

        —   captioned audio,

        —   text to describe video, and

        —   alternative access to frames or scripts.

ADVANCED SERVICES FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY WEB SITES

18.   It is recognized that in order to support applications, such as e-commerce, image display, electronic filing, and encryption, the system requirements of the user's web browser may be higher. As an example, many Intellectual Property Web sites already offer full-text searching of their databases with retrieval of images stored in the TIFF format. Newer or more feature-full browsers support the use of plug-ins (TIFF is not a browser standard) that would enable the IPO to offer their content without modification. Intellectual Property Web sites should clearly indicate to the user the minimum system/browser requirements, including links to any plug-ins.

19.   Intellectual Property Web sites should be tested by the publishing office for compatibility with such browsers as may be used in their national environment and in the international community.

[End of Annex II and of document]