



C. PCT 962
-76.1

December 15, 2003

Madam,
Sir,

This Circular is addressed to your Office in its capacity as a designated/elected Office, International Searching Authority, International Preliminary Examining Authority and/or national Office of a Contracting State of the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT). The Circular provides a report on the effects which the IMPACT Communication System (the “System”) has had on the communication of PCT documents to Offices by the International Bureau (IB). The entry into production of this System was announced by Circular C.PCT 907 of May 9, 2003.

Since the entry into production of the System, the IB’s manual and paper-based methods for communicating PCT documents to Offices have been replaced by an automated system of document scanning and reproduction. As a result, the IB is now able to communicate PCT documents to Offices not only on paper, but also on CD and DVD. Furthermore, the IB will communicate those documents on request only, to each Office which prefers this method of communication (“Communication on Request”), even if the Office requires a high volume of documents.¹

While the System has only been in production internally at the IB since February 2003, it already has yielded the following positive results.

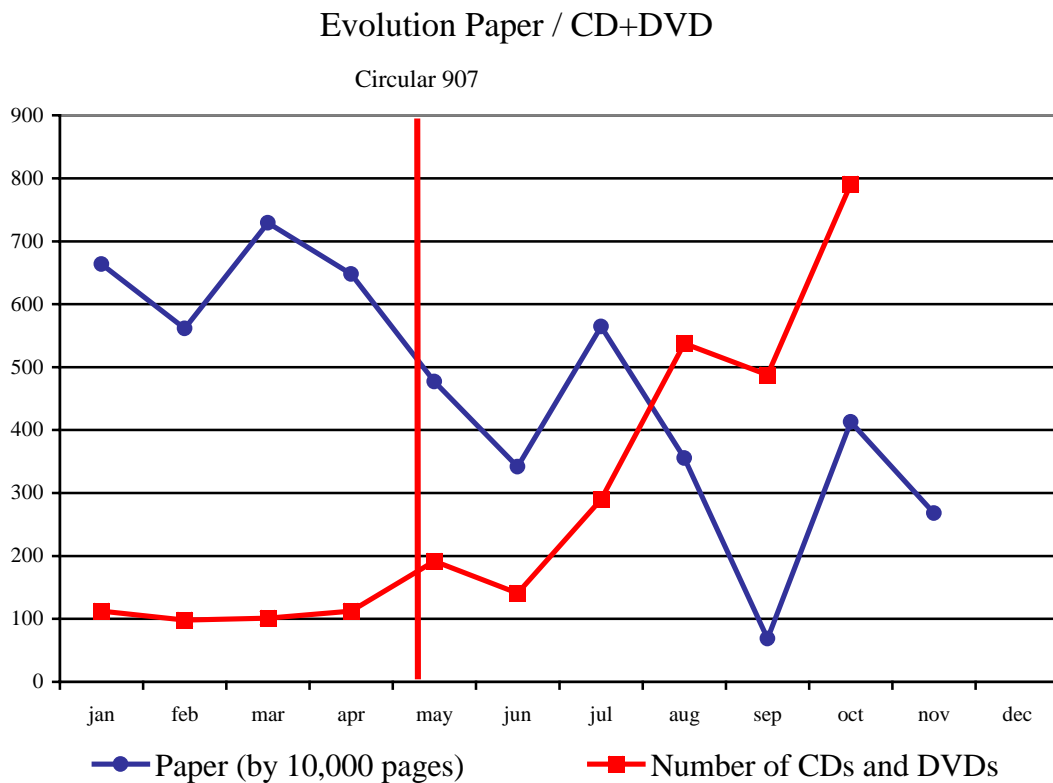
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¹ Prior to the entry into production of the System, the IB was able to transmit PCT documents upon request only to smaller Offices, given the overheads that the paper-based processing of large numbers of individual requests for documents would entail. Other Offices received systematically all PCT documents to which they were entitled and which they had elected to receive (“Systematic Communication”).

Evolution Paper / CD+DVD

Many Offices have taken advantage of the possibility offered by the System of receiving PCT documents on CD/DVD rather than paper. Replies received to the Questionnaire on Office Communication Profiles joined to Circular C.PCT 907 indicate that 72% of Offices have elected CD/DVD as the preferred means of communication. It is clear that this is a positive development, as it will alleviate the considerable logistical burden of having to deal with large volumes of paper, both for the Offices involved, as well as for the IB.

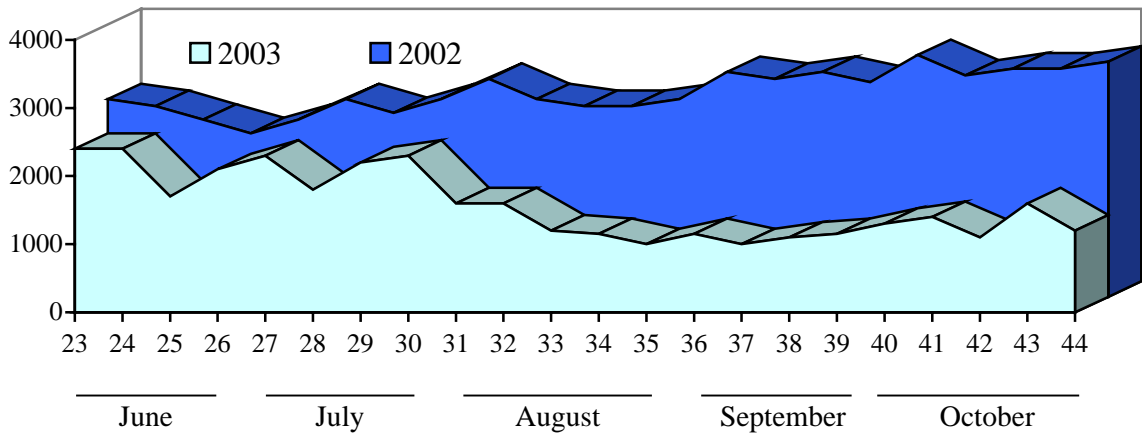
The chart below illustrates the evolution of the relative importance of paper compared to CD/DVD as a means of communicating PCT documents. Clearly, since the issuance of Circular C.PCT 907, reliance on CD/DVD has increased, whereas the importance of paper has diminished.



As a further illustration of the same trend, the chart below compares the evolution of the volume of paper shipped for purposes of the systematic communication of the published International Applications under Rule 87 in 2002 and 2003. Not only is the volume of paper shipped in 2003 consistently lower than in 2002, but the difference also appears to increase over time.

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Volume of Paper Shipped



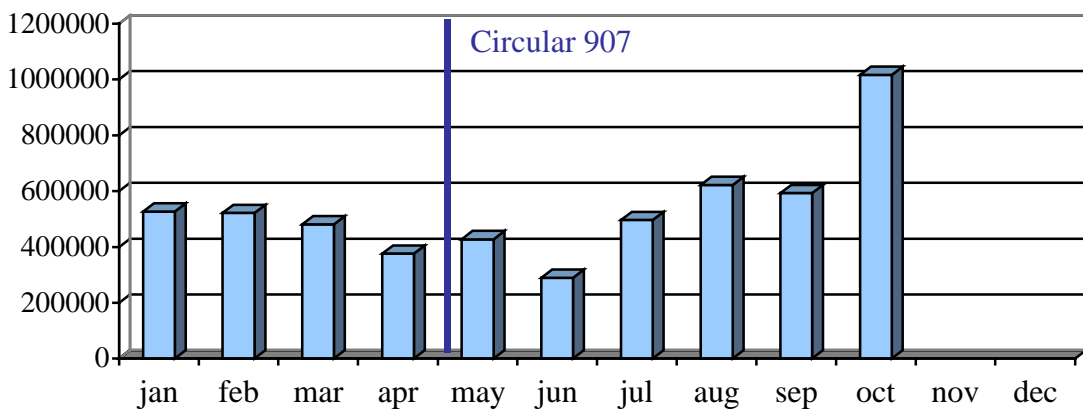
IB Response Time

Due to the fact that it automates to a large degree the document communication process, the System generally has led to a reduction in the time required for the IB to respond to document requests by Offices.

Total PCT Documents Communicated

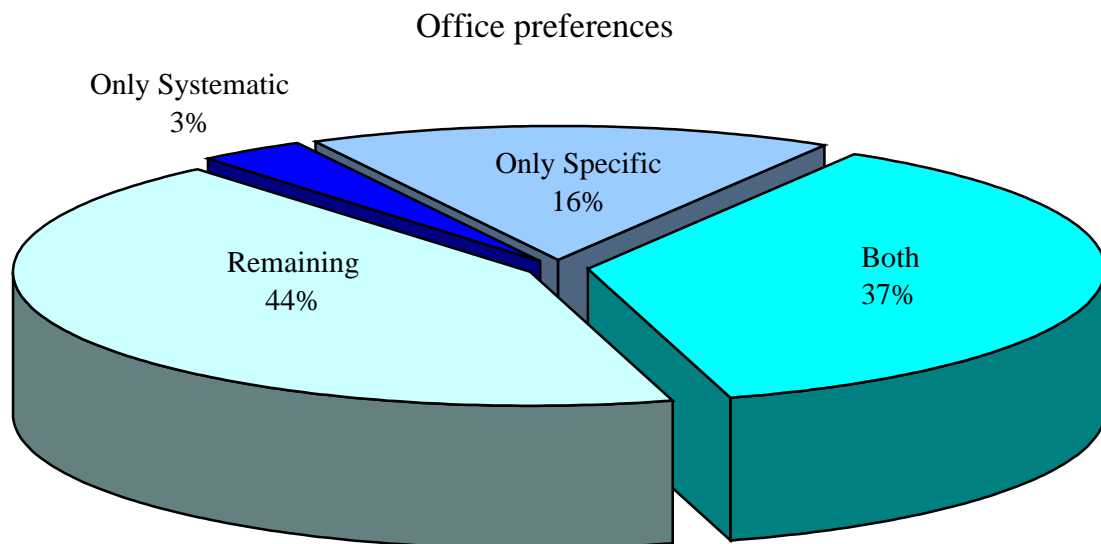
As shown in the chart below, the availability of the System appears also to have led to an increase in the total number of PCT documents requested from the IB by Offices. As the document communication process now is largely automated and the documents can be communicated on CD/DVD, the IB is able to absorb this increased workload without undue difficulty.

Total Documents Communicated



Communication on Request and Systematic Communication

Offices can more flexibly choose whether they wish to receive documents systematically or only upon request. The chart below reflects Office choice with respect to Systematic Communication and Communication on Request based on the replies received by the IB to the questionnaire joined to Circular C.PCT 907 of May 9, 2003. Three percent of the Offices wish to receive all PCT documents systematically, 16% wish to receive PCT documents only on request and 37% wish to receive some documents systematically and some others on request only.



Future Developments

Since the System has been in use for less than one year, the above observations are to be considered as preliminary only. Nonetheless, they are encouraging and underscore the potential benefits to be gained, both for Offices and the IB, from further improvements to the IB's document communication process. The IB's activities in this area will focus on the following in the future:

1. As indicated in Circular C.PCT 907, the System includes functionality allowing Offices to order documents they wish to receive online through an Internet web-based interface. This functionality is currently being tested with a number of Offices in a pilot phase. The IB intends to make this functionality available to a larger number of Offices during 2004.

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2. Several Offices have expressed interest in, and the IB is actively investigating the possibility of, further automating the document communication process by making PCT documents available in real-time on an IB FTP server from which they could be retrieved by the Offices with no, or minimal, human intervention.

Offices will be kept informed by the IB of further developments in this area.

Sincerely yours,



Francis Gurry
Deputy Director General