



Introduction

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The issues surrounding Intellectual Property (IP) are quite complex and constantly evolving. The year 2000 saw some large IP lawsuits in the United States (e.g., the Napster website, algorithm patents, domain names and trademarks), which brought some of these issues into the arena of the common human being.

One reason that IP is so complex is that it encompasses so many different specialties including copyrights, patents, trademarks, and trade secrets. While these topics may seem abstract and unrelated to you as a student in information technology, they hit closer to home than you realize. One very simple example is the content on your personal homepage. Did you copy images from anywhere? Were those images copyrighted? Did you get permission to have them on your page? How about that game CD you copied last week? Or that MP3 file?

IP will become an even hotter issue as lawsuits flesh out the law code. I am positive that many universities will begin to offer a course about IP, just as they offer courses about software engineering. Kenneth Nichols says, "Just as a literate programmer reads journal articles, design documents, and source code, so should he or she be able to evaluate software patents. This ability is fast becoming a competitive necessity, for economic as well as legal reasons" [1, pp 55].

It is quite possible that the subject of intellectual property rights will intrigue you enough that you'll consider combining your information technology training with a law degree to become an expert witness or an IP attorney. There are several law schools in the United States that have created a specialty institute offering a law degree focused on IP.

Whatever your journey in information technology, it is quite certain that you are only just beginning to hear the sounds of the intellectual property rights war.

References

1. Kenneth Nichols. *Inventing Software*. Quorum Books. 1998.