

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MICROBIOLOGICAL PATENTS BY SECONDARY SERVICES

Dear Sir:

Oppenheim and Van Den Ende, in their discussion of coverage of microbiological patents by secondary services,¹ provide a useful addition to the growing literature that emphasizes the importance of patents as information sources. Several points in their paper, however, seem to me to require some discussion.

The first of these is the statement of the bibliographic elements which should ideally be provided with patent abstracts. The authors regard the names of inventors as nonessential and then go on to contradict this statement by making considerable use of inventors' names in developing their own data. In fact, the names of inventors are invaluable in correlating patent and journal publications, identifying patents in which the name of the corporate assignee has been omitted, identifying non-convention equivalents, and in other ways. There seems to be a tendency in Europe to regard inventors' names as superfluous, and indeed names still do not appear on some patents from European countries. Derwent's patent documentation services still do not provide inventors' names in printed products, although those from most countries have been in their online data bases since 1978. As one who has worked intimately with patent information for many years, I would urge any service documenting patents to include the names of all inventors.

Oppenheim and Van Den Ende also seem to regard international patent class (IPC) as "too much information". I could list many patent information studies I have carried out that would have been next to impossible without the availability of IPC as an online search parameter.

The authors then go on to define a *basic* patent as the first of a family to appear anywhere in the world. This is certainly *not* the definition used by Derwent or by the Chemical Abstracts Service. Rather, the *basic* patent for a given secondary service is the first to be covered by that service and is not necessarily the first patent to be published. Derwent's *basic* may differ from CA's for a given patent family.

The authors speculate that it would be interesting to find out if about 50% of all patent families have only one family member, irrespective of subject matter. Surely this speculation can be answered out of hand. If nowhere else, in the mechanical arts there is a very large component of inventions from

private inventors that are not afforded the same broad filing patterns that are found with the chemical and electrical inventions of large, multinational organizations.

The authors further speculate that an invention filed in just one country is not likely to be greatly significant and go on to suggest that a secondary service might limit its coverage to those inventions that appear in two or more countries. Subsequently the authors admit that the assumption is a highly arbitrary one. Indeed it is. In many instances it is true if one looks only at the economic decisions made by a company; major advances will tend to be filed broadly, smaller ones narrowly. But I could provide a lengthy list of information requests that were answered by single-country patents. Each one is still a vital piece of prior art and must not be suppressed by any artificial system. In fact the patenting organization may simply have underestimated the value of their invention!

The tendency for single country filing of Japanese applications is not so very inexplicable. It relates in part to a low filing fee that encourages patent applications and in part to the narrow scope of claims allowed in Japan, which encourages the filing of multiple applications which would be combined in a single case in other countries.

None of these points detracts in any way from the major thesis of the authors: the patent literature, in microbiology as well as in other areas of technology, is an extremely important information source—one which is often undervalued by both the producers of secondary sources as well as by the many information users. The patent literature merits our very careful attention.

- (1) Oppenheim, C.; Van Den Ende, J. "Patent Coverage by Abstracting Services. 4. Coverage of Microbiological Patents". *J. Chem. Inf. Comput. Sci.* 1981, 21, 124-127.

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NEWS AND NOTES

CAS WORKSHOPS

Chemical Abstracts Service has scheduled 13 workshops during the first 6 months of 1982.

Six workshops at the CAS workshop facility in Columbus, OH, will cover how to use CAS ONLINE, the new chemical substance search and display system from CAS. These 2-day workshops scheduled for the second quarter are on April 22-23, May 6-7, and June 17-18.

For the convenience of workshop attendees, three of the CAS ONLINE workshops are scheduled in conjunction with CAS workshops on other subjects. 1-day CA Search workshops on April 21 and May 5 will teach online searchers how to retrieve chemical information from CAS computer files licensed through other vendors. A 1-day nomenclature

workshop on June 16 will introduce searchers to the rules governing the selection and interpretation of index names assigned by CAS to identify substances in printed indexes and computer files.

CAS will also sponsor four workshops in conjunction with national meetings. They are CAS ONLINE, March 28-29, and CA SEARCH, March 29 (prior to the National Online Information Meeting in New York), and CAS ONLINE, June 3-4, and CA SEARCH, June 4 (prior to the Special Libraries Association Meeting in Detroit).

Companies, universities, and professional organizations may also schedule CAS workshops at their own locations. For more information about scheduling a workshop at your location or attending one of the 13 workshops already scheduled, contact the Workshop Coordinator, CAS, P.O. Box 3012, Columbus, OH 43210.