

Patent Peace

The PTO creates a new office to harmonize the global patent system

In a global economy, patents are a problem.

So far, no good system exists to harmonize the patchwork of international laws and regulations for patent protection worldwide.

While businesses and governments around the world have responded by working on international patent harmonization and expediting claims, there is still work to be done. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office has launched another effort by creating a new Office of International Patent Cooperation to better coordinate the PTO's patent harmonization efforts.

"The USPTO had many successful programs fostering international patent cooperation prior to the formation of this office. However, in the past several years these programs have grown both in number and complexity," says Mark R. Powell, head of the new office and the PTO's deputy commissioner for international patent cooperation.

The new office will consolidate resources, but it has its work cut out for it. There remain significant issues in patent harmonization, including a wide variance in patent office fees. "It is far more expensive to acquire and maintain patents in Europe than in the U.S. The hope is that the OIPC will help reduce that imbalance," says Robert O. Lindefeld, immediate-past chair of the ABA's Section of Intellectual Property Law and general counsel and chief intellectual property counsel for Nantero Inc. in Pittsburgh.

—Steven Seidenberg