

By Paul Belleflamme, 11 November 2010

What to think of 'patent trolls'?



Early October this year, Apple was condemned by a US court to pay \$625.5 million damages to a small company, *Mirror Worlds LLC*, for infringing three patents related to how files are displayed on several Apple's products (iPhone, iPod and Macbooks). Apple is currently challenging this verdict (see [here](#) for more).

A question that has been frequently asked in relation to this litigation is whether Mirror Worlds can be assimilated to a "patent troll". The objective of this post is not to answer this question but to shed some light on the debate surrounding patent trolls.

Opponents of patent trolls accuse them of acquiring patents with the primary purpose of making patent infringement claims and, thereby, to stifle innovation. It is because it fears this kind of strategies that the [FFII](#) (Foundation for a Free Information Infrastructure) has battled against software patents in Europe. Here is a [video](#) that presents their opinion about software patents.

However, patent trolls also have their *proponents*, i.e., people who see nothing wrong in the behaviour of these companies. Here is another [video](#) that aims at debunking the myth of the patent troll.

Comparing the arguments presented in these two videos should help you form your own opinion about patent trolls. While doing so, bear in mind that the views expressed in these videos are far from neutral: the first video emanates from the *FFII*, a lobbying group related to the open source movement, and the second from *General Patent Corporation*, a company that provides IP enforcement and licensing services with the aim "to help inventors, scientists and authors realize the fruits of their creative genius".