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Unified Patents, backed by Google, takes fight to patent trolls

The organization is looking to bring both small and large technology companies together to stop patent trolls from launching lawsuits and ultimately hurting member companies.

BY DON REISINGER / APRIL 8, 2013 9:44 AM PDT



A new front has been opened in the ongoing battle between patent trolls and their targets.

A startup, called Unified Patents and formed by former Intuit intellectual property litigation chief Kevin Jakel, attempts to take aim

at companies that collect patents and target other businesses for licensing fees or lawsuits. Unified Patents, which made its presence known in a Wall Street Journal profile yesterday, believes that it can achieve its goal by showing strength in numbers. It's currently in the process of recruiting several companies to join the organization and the fight.

According to the Journal, Unified Patents has already signed up Google and data-storage hardware maker NetApp. The upstart is asking that both major technology companies and small startups join the cause, since in many cases, patent companies will bully smaller businesses, thinking they can quickly generate revenue without fear of too much reprisal. With larger companies on the sides of those smaller ones, however, that might change.



Still, patent trolls, as they've come to be known, have gone after both large and small companies. They generate revenue by buying patents at a relatively cheap fee and then seek out companies that might in some way be violating them. In some cases, they go after companies and quickly license the patents. In others, they fight it out in court.

According to Jakel, Unified Patents is trying to reduce the number of companies that want to go after the smaller businesses. It'll do that, in some cases, by encouraging its larger member companies to acquire the small patents that patent trolls might be trying to add to their portfolios. The organization will also ask the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on a frequent basis to question whether the patents a patent troll brings up in lawsuits are valid. The ultimate goal? Make it far more risky and expensive for patent trolls to do their bidding.

Unified Patents has not said how much it will charge member companies, but did say that larger businesses will pay more than smaller ones.

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