

Dutch family sues Facebook over 'like' button patent

February 11 2013

The heirs of a Dutch Internet inventor are suing Facebook for allegedly infringing his patents with the US social networking site's "like" and "share" buttons, court documents seen on Monday said.

The family of Jos Van Der Meer, a computer scientist, programmer and inventor who died in 2004, is being represented by patent-[holding company](#) Rembrandt in the suit brought before a US court in Virginia on February 4.

The suit for unspecified damages claims [Facebook's](#) infringement of two related patents filed by Van Der Meer, who is described as "a pioneer in the development of user-friendly web-based technologies", in 1998.

One patent "claimed a [novel technology](#) that gave ordinary people... the ability to create and use what Van Der Meer called a personal diary," court papers said.

The system allowed people to "collect personal information and third-party content, organise the information chronologically on a personalised web page and share the information with a selected group of people, such as the user's friends, through the use of user-settable privacy levels."

The second patent is for technology that enables "the automatic transfer, at a user's request, of third-party content from a [content provider's](#) website to the user's personal diary page"—akin to Facebook's "share" or

"like" buttons.

Van Der Meer set up a company to commercialise his inventions, Aduna, registered the surfbook.com website, and launched a pilot system, but died in 2004.

The inventor's family, including his widow, enlisted the help of Rembrandt, which says it works to help inventors and patent owners enforce their fights against companies that use their inventions without paying for them.

The suit notes that one of Facebook's own patents cited one of Van Der Meer's patents and so the company was aware of the infringement.

"Although [Mark Zuckerberg](#) did not start what became Facebook until 2003, it bears a remarkable resemblance, both in terms of its functionality and technical implementation, to the personal web page diary that Van Der Meer had invented years earlier," court documents said.

The suit also targets AddThis, "one of the largest and most widely used social bookmarking services and an early partner with Facebook", which helps disseminate Facebook's "like" and "share" buttons on third party websites.

Facebook has been targeted by a swathe of lawsuits for alleged intellectual property infringement, but few have been successful.

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Citation: Dutch family sues Facebook over 'like' button patent (2013, February 11) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-02-dutch-family-sues-facebook-button.html>

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