

Are backup costs ruining your IT budget?
Discover a better pricing model

GO

Asigra
Recovery is Everything™



Search Linux Today

Linux News >

Developer

High Performance

Infrastructure

IT Management

Security

Storage

linux today Navigation

Home

Preferences

Contribute

Link to Us

Linux Jobs

REPLAY C



See how you can
control the lifecycle
of your products with
a hybrid cloud.

Get started >



Make the
most of
your data

Download our
eBook
Turning Big Data
Into Useful
Information



Top White Papers and Webcasts

Understand Your Customers or be Left Behind: Leading the Digital Journey



On-Demand Webcast Customers are more empowered and connected than ever, and the customer's journey has grown more complex. Their expectations are growing and trust is

diminishing as they may interact with multiple brands through web, mobile and social channels. Considering 70% of the buying process in a complex sale is already complete before prospects are willing to engage with a live salesperson -- it's critical to understand your customers and anticipate their needs.* However leading consulting firm ...

McAfee Enhances Next Generation Firewall



Threats aimed at corporate entities and enterprises are rapidly evolving, with targeted attacks becoming the norm and advanced persistent threats (APTs) increasing. What's more, APTs have been further fueled by

the rise of advanced evasion techniques (AETs), which help APTs bypass firewalls, security appliances, and endpoint security products. The answer to APTs and AETs is advanced next-generation firewall (NGFW) software. Read this technology review that examines a NGFW software solution that's designed to ...

HAVE AN INVENTION IDEA?

inventmyidea.com

Find Companies That Can Help
Market and Sell Your Invention

Here



Subscribe to Our Daily Newsletter

Current Newswire:

- [Zend Server 8 Delivers Z-Ray Application Insight](#)
- [SUSE Linux Enterprise Server 12 Debuts](#)
- [Apache CloudStack Arrives in New Version, Stays Popular](#)
- [5 Deadly Linux Commands You Should Never Run](#)
- [CompuLab Intense-PC2: An Excellent, Fanless, Mini PC Powered By Intel's i7 Haswell](#)
- [What's Happening above Your Head?](#)
- [Meet Linux kernel 3.17's best new features: Xbox One controller support, laptop 'free fall' protection, and more](#)
- [How GNOME 3.14 is winning back disillusioned Linux users](#)
- [End of the Line for Red Hat Enterprise Linux 5](#)
- [Give new life to old phones and tablets with these tips!](#)

More on LinuxToday

- [Sitemap](#)
- [Feedback](#)

[Not having data governance can hurt your business. Download this eBook to learn how to take control now.](#)

UPDATED: Richard Stallman -- Boycott Amazon!

Dec 22, 1999, 04:22 ([289 Talkback\[s\]](#))

(Other stories by [Richard Stallman](#))



By [Richard Stallman](#)

[The opinions expressed by authors on Linux Today are their own. They speak only for themselves and not for Linux Today.]

Please do not buy from Amazon

Amazon has obtained a US patent (5,960,411) on an important and obvious idea for E-commerce: the idea that your command in a web browser to buy a certain item can carry along information about your identity. (This works by sending back a "cookie", a kind of ID code that your browser received previously from the same server.) Amazon has sued to block the use of this simple idea, showing that they truly intend to monopolize it. This is an attack against the World Wide Web and against E-commerce in general.

The idea in question is that a company can give you something which you can subsequently show them to identify yourself for credit. This is nothing new: a physical credit card does the same job, after all. But the US Patent Office issues patents on obvious and well-known ideas every day. Sometimes the result is a disaster.

Today Amazon is suing one large company. If this were just a dispute between two companies, it would not be an important public issue. But the patent gives Amazon the power over anyone who runs a web site in the US (and any other countries that give them similar patents)--power to control all use of this technique. Although only one company is being sued today, the issue affects the whole Internet.

Amazon is not alone at fault in what is happening. The US Patent Office is to blame for having very low standards, and US courts are to blame for endorsing them. And US patent law is to blame for authorizing patents on computational techniques and patterns of communication--a policy that is harmful in general. (See [lpf.ai.mit.edu](http://pf.ai.mit.edu) for more information about this issue.)

Foolish government policies gave Amazon the opportunity--but an opportunity is not an excuse. Amazon made the

choice to obtain this patent, and the choice to use it in court for aggression. The ultimate moral responsibility for Amazon's actions lies with Amazon's executives.

We can hope that the court will find this patent is legally invalid, Whether they do so will depend on detailed facts and obscure technicalities. The patent uses piles of semirelevant detail to make this "invention" look like something subtle.

But we do not have to wait passively for the court to decide the freedom of E-commerce. There is something we can do right now: we can refuse to do business with Amazon. Please do not buy anything from Amazon until they promise to stop using this patent to threaten or restrict other web sites.

If you are the author of a book sold by Amazon, you can provide powerful help to this campaign by putting this text into the "author comment" about your book, on Amazon's web site. Please send mail to amazon@gnu.org when you do this, and please tell us what happens afterward.

Richard Stallman
President, Free Software Foundation
MacArthur Fellow

Copyright 1999 Richard Stallman Verbatim copying and redistribution of this entire article is permitted provided this notice is preserved.

Reply to Jason Fletcher (December 19, 1999)

Jason Fletcher wrote ('A Dissenting Opinion', see below in talkbacks):

I do not agree with RMS on this issue. First, I think he has misinterpreted the issue. Amazon did not patent cookies. Amazon did not patent the idea of cookies. They patented the idea of One-Click shopping.

That is essentially correct: Amazon did not patent cookies. The patent covers the technique needed to support one-click shopping (which is normally implemented using cookies).

It is precisely for trying to monopolize the feature of one-click shopping that I condemn Amazon, and ask you not to do buy from them.

From what I can tell, their claim rests on the strength of two procedural matters, NOT the underlying technology: (1) the reduction of overhead that might drive a customer away, and (2) the reduction of transmissions of sensitive information and thus providing smaller opportunity for information hijacking in transit.

These are the reasons why one-click shopping is a useful feature. They may be the reasons why Amazon wants a monopoly on the feature; they are definitely the reasons why I condemn Amazon for trying to grab that monopoly.

If the feature of one-click shopping were of no particular benefit, the issue would not be worth paying much attention to.

I chose not to name Barnes and Noble in my announcement because the identity of the current defendant is a side issue, and people should not get sidetracked by it. I have no particular sympathy for Barnes and Noble, and if they were sued for some other reason, I would be unlikely to take their side. The important thing about this patent is that it takes a bite out of your freedom and mine--not just that of Barnes and Noble.

I hope that we are wise enough to value our freedom, and stand up for it, undistracted by the fact that the first victim is a large company with no particular claim to our esteem.

Postscript added by Richard Stallman, December 21, 1999

Amazon's response to people who write about the patent contains a subtle misdirection which is worth analyzing:

The patent system is designed to encourage innovation, and we spent thousands of hours

developing our 1-Click[®] shopping feature.

If they did spend thousands of hours, they surely did not spend it thinking of the general technique that the patent covers. So if they are telling the truth, what did they spend those hours doing?

Perhaps they spent some of the time writing the patent application. That task was surely harder than thinking of the technique. Or perhaps they are talking about the time it took designing, writing, testing, and perfecting the scripts and the web pages to handle one-click shopping. That was surely a substantial job. Looking carefully at their words, it seems the "thousands of hours developing" could include either of these two jobs.

But the issue here is not about the details in their particular scripts (which they do not release to us) and web pages (which are copyrighted anyway). The issue here is the general idea, and whether Amazon should have a monopoly on that idea.

Are you, or I, free to spend the necessary hours writing our own scripts, our own web pages, to provide one-click shopping? Even if we are selling something other than books, are we free to do this? That is the question. Amazon seeks to deny us that freedom, with the eager help of a misguided (or worse) US government.

When Amazon sends out cleverly misleading statements like the one quoted above, it demonstrates something important: they do care what the public thinks of their actions. They must care--they are a retailer. Public disgust can affect their profits.

People have pointed out that the problem of software patents is much bigger than Amazon, that other companies might have acted just the same, and that boycotting Amazon won't directly change patent law. Of course, these are all true. But that is no argument against this boycott!

If we mount the boycott strongly and lastingly, Amazon may eventually make a concession to end it. And even if they do not, the next company which has an outrageous software patent and considers suing someone will realize there can be a price to pay. They may have second thoughts.

The boycott can also indirectly help change patent law--by calling attention to the issue and spreading demand for change. And it is so easy to participate that there is no need to be deterred on that account. If you agree about the issue, why NOT boycott Amazon?

To help spread the word, please put a note about the boycott on your own personal web page, and make a link to <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/amazon.html>. Updated information will be placed there.



Email this article to a colleague



Go to a printable version of this story

289 Talkback[s] ([click to add your comment](#))

Comment Page: 1

[2](#)

[3](#)

[4](#)

[5](#)

[6](#)

[7](#)

[8](#)

[9](#)

[10](#)

[11](#)

[12](#)

[13](#)

[14](#)


[15](#)

[16](#)

[17](#)
[18](#)
[19](#)
[20](#)
[21](#)
[22](#)
[23](#)
[24](#)
[25](#)
[26](#)
[27](#)
[28](#)
[29](#)

By raph Dec 13, 1999, 20:00

As RMS said, US has to change the way they give patents. It is RIDICULOUS giving such a patent. They even often give a patent though there is evidence of previous existence (is it anteriority, I don't know the word in english...). That's a waste of time and money...

 [Reply to this comment](#) By Bake Timmons Dec 13, 1999, 20:04

I have recently done business with Amazon, and now I regret it.
I will certainly boycott them now and will urge others to do so.
Thanks, RMS, for alerting us.

 [Reply to this comment](#) By Anon Dec 13, 1999, 20:12

If you buy a CD and don't like it, you're stuck with it. Not all CD's have samples, not all e-shoppers have sound cards and speakers, and not all music is well-suited for quick samples anyways. And then they have the nerve to keep sending you obnoxious email with all these crummy offers. The sooner they go out of business the better.

 [Reply to this comment](#) By George Mitchell Dec 13, 1999, 20:22


Here is a company that owes its very existence to free software, and has prospered richly via the free software that make up the net, seeking to 'steal' as much of that technology as it can for its private enrichment. Rather amazing!

PS: Borders.com carries almost everything Amazon does at similar prices and I have found their service excellent!

 [Reply to this comment](#) By Kent Dec 13, 1999, 20:25

I bought over \$600 worth of stuff from Amazon in the past. When they do this, I feel like I've been cheated. I want intellectual freedom and don't want patents to restrict my ability to do things. I will NOT buy anything from Amazon. And it's the holiday season ... you guys can try buying it from bn.com.

kent

 [Reply to this comment](#) By Thomas Corriher Dec 13, 1999, 20:32

And don't forget that they are known to some people as SpamAzon.com

I would like to throw a silver dollar between two typical high-tech executives ("suits"), and watch them roll on the floor fighting for it. It would be much more entertaining than professional wrestling.

It's damn sad.

How about everyone here start promoting Barnes & Nobel's web site in your signatures. That will hurt more than any simple boycott would. If 100,000 Linux people advertise for Amazon's competitors (for free)... it will hurt... ouch...

Marketing money can't defeat our numbers.

 [Reply to this comment](#) By Stuart Scharf Dec 13, 1999, 20:35

I found the text of the patent at:

<http://164.195.100.11/netacgi/nph-Parser?Sect1=PTO1&Sect2=HITOFF&d=PALL&p=1&u=/netahtml/srchnum.htm&r=1&f=G&l=50&s1='5960411'.WKU.&OS=PN/5960411&RS=PN/5960411>

 [Reply to this comment](#) By Jeff Rankine Dec 13, 1999, 20:42

The 'word' you are looking for is "prior art".

 [Reply to this comment](#) By jagular Dec 13, 1999, 20:42

Politely - i.e., very politely - send email to feedback@amazon.com and explain to them that you are boycotting them because of this issue.

 [Reply to this comment](#) By Ted Clark Dec 13, 1999, 20:42

If you buy a CD and don't like it, you're stuck with it.

Is there anyone selling CDs on the net that *doesn't* have this policy? The margins on CDs aren't all that big, and it wouldn't take too many dishonest people copying CDs and returning them to make the CD business unprofitable. I can't fault them for this.

I agree with RMS on the "one click" patent, though -- they should be too embarrassed to file for such a simple-minded idea!

 [Reply to this comment](#)

Comment Page: 1

[2](#)

[3](#)

[4](#)

[5](#)

[6](#)

[7](#)

[8](#)

[9](#)

[10](#)

[11](#)

[12](#)

[13](#)

[14](#)

[15](#)

[16](#)

[17](#)

[18](#)

[19](#)

[20](#)

[21](#)

[22](#)

[23](#)

[24](#)


[25](#)

[26](#)

[27](#)

[28](#)

[29](#)

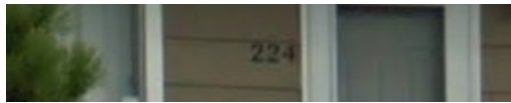
 Comment and Contribute

Your name/nickname

Your email

Your website

(Maximum characters: 4000). You have 4000 characters left.



Type the text

[Privacy & Terms](#)



SELL YOUR IDEA TODAY

We Prepare & Present New Product Ideas to Corporations. Start Here!



Property of Quinstreet Enterprise.

[Terms of Service](#) | [Licensing & Reprints](#) | [About Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Advertise](#)

Copyright 2014 QuinStreet Inc. All Rights Reserved.