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Apple vs Samsung: the verdict

Earlier this month, a US court ruled that Samsung had infringed Apple patents for mobile devices. The six patents were mainly connected with appearance and design. The South Korean company were ordered to pay \$1 billion in compensation. Unsurprisingly, Samsung will be appealing the court ruling.

Some consider this is one of the most significant rulings in any global intellectual property battle. After all, between them, Apple and Samsung sell more than half of the world's smartphones and tablet computers. Among the most obvious immediate effects were a rise in price of Apple shares, and a corresponding fall in Samsung shares.

In the Apple camp, the behaviour of their rival was criticised. The court decision was applauded as giving the simple message: "stealing isn't right". To Apple, the victory was all about values.

In the Samsung camp, the ruling was seen as the manipulation of patent law "to give one company a monopoly over rectangles with rounded corners"! In the eyes of the Korean giant, Apple's ideas were heavily influenced by Sony. To Samsung, the decision will lead to fewer choices, less innovation, and potentially higher prices. In other words, "the loser will be the consumer".

Decisions in cases of intellectual property theft are notoriously difficult. How original is any idea? I remembered loving the George Harrison song 'My sweet Lord'. It was a shock to learn that he was accused of ripping off the tune of a song by the Chiffons - "Some fine day". Did my musical hero do it consciously? Did he do it unconsciously? Was the song the same or similar?

Business practice is littered with copied products and ideas, from the video recorder to the Walkman. It must be said that the idea of the tablet computer did not originate with Apple. They did not even invent touch-screen technology.

What happens next will be of great interest to mobile phone users around the world, with the arrival of 4G and the continuing battle for dominance between rival phone companies and rival mobile phone systems. One thing is sure: this is unlikely to be the last case of accusations of copyright theft.

Areas to discuss with your students:

Which make of phone do you own? Why did you choose this make?
Do you agree with the court ruling?
Do you have another example of copying a product or intellectual property?

Sites you may wish to visit:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-19377383>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/19388450>