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# Datasheet for the decision
## of 26 July 2022


**Case Number:**            T 0546/18 - 3.5.06

**Application Number:**      11177130.9

**Publication Number:**      2423812

**IPC:**                     G06F9/44, G06F9/445

**Language of the proceedings:**   EN

**Title of invention:**
Device and help server

**Applicant:**
Brother Kogyo Kabushiki Kaisha

**Headword:**
Help information by means of query string/BROTHER

**Relevant legal provisions:**
EPC Art. 54, 56
RPBA 2020 Art. 13(2)

**Keyword:**
Novelty - (yes)
Inventive step - (no)

**Decisions cited:**

**Catchword:**

Case Number: **T 0546/18 - 3.5.06**

D E C I S I O N
of Technical Board of Appeal 3.5.06
of 26 July 2022

| | |
|---|---|
| **Appellant:**<br>(Applicant) | Brother Kogyo Kabushiki Kaisha<br>15-1 Naeshiro-cho,<br>Mizuho-ku<br>Nagoya, Aichi 467-8561 (JP) |
| **Representative:** | J A Kemp LLP<br>80 Turnmill Street<br>London EC1M 5QU (GB) |
| **Decision under appeal:** | **Decision of the Examining Division of the European Patent Office posted on 12 October 2017 refusing European patent application No. 11177130.9 pursuant to Article 97(2) EPC.** |

Composition of the Board:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Chairman** | M. Müller |
| **Members:** | G. Zucka |
| | A. Jimenez |

## Summary of Facts and Submissions

I.      The appeal is against the decision by the examining
        division, dispatched with reasons on 12 October 2017,
        to refuse European patent application 11177130.9, on
        the basis that the subject-matter of independent
        claim 1 of both the main request and auxiliary
        request 1 was not novel, Article 54 EPC, and the
        subject-matter of independent claim 1 of auxiliary
        request 2 was not inventive, Article 56 EPC.

II.     The following documents were cited during the first
        instance procedure:

        D1:  US 6 289 370 B1;
        D2:  US 2003/001875 A1;
        D3:  EP 1 223 722 A2;
        D4:  US 2009/158152 A1.

        The following additional documents were introduced by
        the board:

        D5:  Wikipedia article entitled "Query string", version
        of 6 July 2010 at 22:18, retrieved from the Internet:
        URL:<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?
        title=Query_string&oldid=372110434> [retrieved by the
        board on 2022-05-24];

        D6:  eadvantage: "Client-side state management
        techniques for .NET architects",
        12 March 2003, retrieved from the Internet:
        URL:<https://www.techrepublic.com/article/client-side-
        state-management-techniques-for-net-architects/>
        [retrieved by the board on 2022-05-24].

III.     A notice of appeal was received on 11 December 2017, the appeal fee being paid on the same day. A statement of grounds of appeal was received on 30 January 2018.

IV.     The appellant requested that the decision under appeal be set aside and a patent granted on the basis of a main or one of four auxiliary requests filed with the grounds of appeal. The appellant made a conditional request for oral proceedings.

V.     On 14 January 2022, the board issued a summons to oral proceedings. In an annex to the summons, the board set out its preliminary, negative opinion on the appeal.

VI.     The appellant responded to the summons on 8 April 2022, rebutting the board's arguments and introducing two new auxiliary requests.

VII.     The scheduled oral proceedings were cancelled, and the board issued a new summons on 13 June 2022, introducing documents D5 and D6 and confirming its preliminary, negative opinion on the appeal.

VIII.     The appellant requests that the decision under appeal be set aside and a patent be granted on the basis of the claims of a main request or one of auxiliary requests 1 to 4 filed with the statement of grounds of appeal, or of auxiliary request 5 or 6 filed with letter of 8 April 2022, together with the respective application documents as mentioned in the last communication of the Board.

IX.     Independent claim 1 of the main request reads as follows:

"A device (10) configured to connect to a terminal device (20), the device (10) comprising:

a supply unit (11), which is configured to supply management screen data (50) to the terminal device (20),

the management screen data (50) represents a management screen (60) to be displayed on the terminal device (20) and to include a plurality of display items (61, 62), which are related to the device (10), characterized in that:

at least one of the plurality of display items (61, 62) is a target item (61, 62) for which help information (71, 72) is displayable on the terminal device (20) in response to a help command received by the terminal device (20), the help information (71, 72) being respectively set to correspond to the target item (61, 62),

wherein, in response to the help command (66) received by the terminal device (20), the management screen data (50) includes instructions to control the terminal device (20) to:

acquire the help information (71, 72) corresponding to the target item (61, 62) displayed on the management screen (60) by:

acquiring identification information (ID) of the target item (61, 62);

adding (S203, S404) the identification information (ID) to a string variable;

adding (S204, S408) the string variable as a query to a URL of a server, the server being configured to store help information; and

acquiring the help information (71, 72) corresponding to the target item (61, 62) by using the URL having the query; and

to display a help screen (70) indicating the help information (71, 72)."

X.      The subject-matter of claim 1 of auxiliary request 1 is
        the same as that of the main request.

XI.     Compared to the main request, claim 1 of auxiliary
        request 2 contains the amendment that acquiring the
        help information additionally comprises the steps of
        "determining whether a display mode has been
        designated, wherein the display mode is a display only
        errors mode", "determining if it is determined that a
        display in the errors mode has been designated, whether
        the target item is in an error state", and acquiring
        the identification information "if it is determined
        that the target item is in the error state".

XII.    Compared to auxiliary request 2, claim 1 of auxiliary
        request 3 contains the following additional features:

        If the plurality of the display items includes a
        plurality of the target items to which corresponding
        help information is respectively set, in response to a
        single help command, the terminal device:
            acquires respective identification information of
        the plurality of the target items;
            adds the respective identification information to a
        string variable;
            adds the string variable as a query to a URL; and
            acquires the help information corresponding to the
        plurality of the target items by using the URL having
        the query; and
            displays the help screen indicating the plurality
        of the help information of the plurality of target
        items.

XIII.   Compared to auxiliary request 3, claim 1 of auxiliary
        request 4 contains the additional features that "if
        values input to the device are incorrect, error screen

data representing an error screen is generated, and if
an error screen is displayed, it is determined that an
item for which the error screen is generated is in the
error state".

XIV.     Claim 1 of auxiliary request 5 reads as follows:

"A system comprising a device (10) configured to
connect to a terminal device (20), and a help server
(30) configured to connect to the terminal device;
    the device (10) comprising:
    a supply unit (11), which is configured to supply
management screen data (50) to the terminal device
(20),
    the management screen data (50) represents a
management screen (60) to be displayed on the terminal
device (20) and to include a plurality of display items
(61, 62), which are related to the device (10),
characterized in that:
    at least one of the plurality of display items (61,
62) is a target item (61, 62) for which help
information (71, 72) is displayable on the terminal
device (20) in response to a help command received by
the terminal device (20), the help information (71, 72)
being respectively set to correspond to the target item
(61, 62),
    wherein, in response to the help command (66)
received by the terminal device (20), the management
screen data (50) includes instructions to control the
terminal device (20) to:
    acquire the help information (71, 72) corresponding
to the target item (61, 62) displayed on the management
screen (60) by:
         acquiring identification information (ID) of
    the target item (61, 62);

adding (S203, S404) the identification information (ID) to a string variable;

adding (S204, S408) the string variable as a query to a URL of a server, the server being configured to store help information; and

acquiring the help information (71, 72) corresponding to the target item (61, 62) by using the URL having the query; and

to display a help screen (70) indicating the help information (71, 72)

wherein, if the plurality of the display items (61, 62) includes a plurality of the target items (61, 62) to which corresponding help information (71, 72) is respectively set, the terminal device (20):

acquires the help information (71, 72) corresponding to the plurality of the target items (61, 62); and

displays the help screen (70) indicating the plurality of the help information (71, 72) of the plurality of target items (71, 72) in response to a single help command;

the help server (30) comprising:

a storage unit (34), which stores help information (71, 72) corresponding to the at least one target item (61, 62),

a generation unit (31), which is configured to read out from the storage unit (34) help information (71, 72) corresponding to identification information (ID) received from the terminal device (20), and

which is configured to generate help screen (70) data representing a single help screen (70) when identification information (ID) of at least one target item (61, 62) is received from the terminal device (20), and

a transmission unit (35), which is configured to transmit the generated help screen (70) data to the

terminal device (20) so that the terminal device (20)
receives the generated help screen (70) data."

XV.     Claim 1 of auxiliary request 6 combines the features of
        claim 1 of auxiliary requests 3 and 5.

XVI.    The wording of the other claims, in all requests, is
        irrelevant for the present decision.

XVII.   At the end of the oral proceedings, the chairman
        announced the board's decision.

## Reasons for the Decision

1.      *The invention*

        The application relates to the display of data, e.g.
        help data or settings on a management screen of a
        terminal device connected to a device such as a printer
        (description par. [0003] and [0004]).

        The application aims to solve the problem that if, on
        each management screen, data is provided for the help
        pages on all different terminal devices, a large amount
        of data is required.

        To solve this problem, claim 1 foresees that the
        terminal device is controlled to acquire the help
        information corresponding (specifically) to a target
        item displayed on the management screen by acquiring
        identification information (ID) of the target item,
        adding the ID to a string variable, adding the string
        variable as a query to a URL of a server, the server

being configured to store help information, and
acquiring the help information corresponding to the
target item by using the URL having the query, and to
display a help screen indicating the help information.

As a consequence, unnecessary additional data does not
need to be stored which would otherwise make data
management overly complicated and require the storage
of unnecessary data (see point 3.2.10 in the grounds of
appeal).

2.      *Novelty (Article 54 EPC) - main request*

2.1     D1 discloses (cf. also the decision under appeal,
        point 2.1 of the reasons, until the middle of page 5)

        a device (embedded system, column 2, lines 23-35)
        configured to connect to a terminal device (client
        system, column 2, lines 23-35), the device comprising:
        a supply unit, which is configured to supply management
        screen data to the terminal device (column 2, lines
        28-35 and column 5, line 44 to column 6, line 11),
        the management screen data represents a management
        screen to be displayed on the terminal device and to
        include a plurality of display items, which are related
        to the device (column 5, line 63 to column 6, line 11
        and column 2, lines 35-47),
        at least one of the plurality of display items being a
        target item for which help information is displayable
        on the terminal device in response to a help command
        received by the terminal device, the help information
        being respectively set to correspond to the target item
        (column 6, lines 3-11, the data page received is a
        dialog box requesting settings for timer or clocks,
        which are the plurality of target items. Clicking on
        the help button (this corresponds to the help command)

further information is retrieved for the timers or
clocks being displayed)
wherein, in response to the help command received by
the terminal device, the management screen data
includes instructions to control the terminal device
to:
acquire the help information corresponding to the
target item displayed on the management screen (column
6, line 13 to column 7, line 9).

2.2    D1 also discloses a server (column 6, line 32 to column
       7, line 9), which is configured to store help
       information (column 2, lines 33-35) corresponding to
       the target item (column 4, lines 60-64, column 5, lines
       12-24 and lines 25-31) as well as the display a help
       screen indicating the help information (column 7, lines
       41-45).

2.3    The appellant argued (point 3.2.5 in the grounds of
       appeal) that D1 does not disclose adding identification
       information of the target item to a URL, and more
       specifically that D1 does not disclose the steps of
       acquiring identification information of the target
       item, adding this information to a string variable,
       adding the string variable to a URL as a query and
       acquiring help information using this URL having the
       query.

2.4    In its response of 17 August 2017 to the summons to
       oral proceedings before the first instance, the
       appellant provided a full reasoning why it considered
       that D1 does not disclose said steps (see pages 2 and 3
       of the response).

2.5    As regards the applicant's argument that in D1 the URL
       does not contain identification information for the

target items, the appealed decision (point 2.5) merely
draws the applicant's attention "to column 6, lines 25
to 40 of document D1 and for what stated there the
Applicant's arguments are considered to be not
convincing". The decision does not refute the
applicant's argument (in the middle of page 2 of its
response to the summons) that, "even if it is assumed
that the claimed target item does correspond[] to a
dialog box requesting settings for timer or clocks, the
claimed identification information of the target item
is not set for the dialog box, and therefore, the
"Server Location", "Release Identifier", "IIHTML Topic"
do not correspond [to] the identification information
of the target item".

The appealed decision also does not address the
applicant's reasoning that D1 does not disclose the
steps of adding the string variable to a URL as a query
and acquiring help information using this URL having
the query. The decision merely states that said feature
is disclosed in D1 by making a broad reference to
column 6, line 32 to column 7, line 9 in that document.
The decision does not address the applicant's point
(*ibid.*, middle of page 3) that D1 does not disclose
providing a URL with a query based on the target items
on the page, i.e. corresponding to the target item
displayed on the management screen, which means that in
D1 (in contrast to claim 1), different help pages for
different management screens may be required.

2.6     The board accepts the appellant's arguments and
        therefore holds that the subject-matter of claim 1 of
        the main request is new (Article 54 EPC).

2.7     The following features are not disclosed by D1:

acquiring identification information of the target
item;
       adding this information to a string variable;
       adding the string variable to a URL as a query; and
       acquiring help information using this URL having
the query.

3.      *Inventive step (Article 56 EPC) - main request*

3.1     The board holds that D1 is a suitable starting point
        for the assessment of inventive step.

3.2     According to the grounds of appeal (point 3.2.10), the
        advantage of the above distinguishing features is that
        unnecessary additional data does not need to be stored,
        which would otherwise make data management overly
        complicated and require the storage of unnecessary
        data.

        In particular, the appellant submits (*ibid.*, 3.2.13)
        that the system of D1 requires the provision of a help
        page corresponding to each embedded form.

3.3     According to the appellant's response of 8 April 2022
        (middle of page 3), the indicated difference results in
        fact in a reduction in the processing load whilst also
        improving robustness and versatility.

3.4     According to the board's judgment, the subject-matter
        of claim 1 and the disclosure of D1 differ essentially
        in the following way:

3.4.1   In D1, a specific file on the server is associated with
        each possible help button (see column 2, lines 33-35).
        This means that, if the client system sends an HTTP
        request to obtain the corresponding help page (see

figure 3 and corresponding text in the description), D1 allows the use of a fixed URL. The possibility of using a dynamic URL is not disclosed in D1. Instead, only the use of fixed URL's is shown; see for instance figure 8 and corresponding text in the description. In D1, the URL is most likely known to the system, and it is most likely pre-computed.

3.4.2    In claim 1, on the other hand, where a query string is used, the URL is dynamic; it is generated "on the fly".

3.5      The board holds that the use of a dynamic instead of a static URL constitutes an obvious choice providing no unexpected technical effect.

3.6      According to the appellant (see point 3.2.10 in the grounds of appeal), the advantage of using a query string is that unnecessary additional data does not need to be stored, which would otherwise make data management overly complicated and require the storage of unnecessary data.

         In particular, the appellant submits (*ibid.*, 3.2.13) that the system of D1 requires the provision of a help page corresponding to each embedded form.

         However, the acquisition of help information using a query in itself does not avoid the need to store help pages corresponding to each possible situation. The skilled person should take additional steps to ensure that this advantage is indeed reached. Otherwise, as a rule, the quantity of help information to be stored will most likely be equivalent to that in the system of D1.

It is primarily such additional measures taken by the skilled person which achieve said effect. The effect does not depend on whether query strings or fixed URL's are used. In the latter case, for example, storage space would be saved by the help pages themselves containing content that is dynamic.

3.7     In its response of 8 April 2022 (middle of page 3), the appellant submits that the distinguishing features result in a reduction in the processing load whilst also improving robustness and versatility.

        The board holds that the distinguishing features by themselves do not cause a reduction in the processing load. To achieve this, just like for a reduction in the required storage space (see above), additional measures would need to be taken. The board further notes that terms such as "robustness" and "versatility" are fuzzy and give no indication of a concrete technical effect.

3.8     In summary, the features distinguishing the subject-matter of claim 1 from the disclosure of D1 can only be seen as a mere choice among well-known alternatives of forming a URL address.

        The appellant objected (response of 8 April 2022, paragraph spanning pages 2 and 3) to the board's stating, without citing a document, that the use of a query string instead of a set URL is well-known. The board therefore introduced D5 and D6 to demonstrate this fact.

        D5 discloses that query strings can be used instead of set URLs to increase flexibility (see section entitled "Flexibility vs. security").

D6 gives an example (first paragraph under the section entitled "Query strings") where a query string ("CustomerID=1234") is passed to a page for processing by appending it to the URL of that page. The implication to the skilled person is that there is no need to have a dedicated page for each value of CustomerID.

3.9      The board therefore concludes that the subject-matter of claim 1 of the main request is not inventive (Article 56 EPC).

4.       *Inventive step (Article 56 EPC) - auxiliary request 1*

4.1      The subject-matter of claim 1 of auxiliary request 1 is the same as that of the main request. It is therefore not inventive (Article 56 EPC) for the same reasons as indicated above.

5.       *Inventive step (Article 56 EPC) - auxiliary request 2*

The features added in claim 1 of auxiliary request 2 allegedly (see appellant's response of 8 April 2022, middle of page 3) provide a (further) reduction of the processing load and a (further) improvement of robustness and versatility.

Similarly as written above, the board can see in such features no indication of a concrete technical advantage. Those features should rather be seen as a straightforward manner of implementing a non-technical requirement, i.e. the requirement to deal with an unspecified "error state", which is not further defined and is in particular not tied to any concrete technical "error" situation.

The subject-matter of claim 1 of auxiliary request 2 is therefore also not inventive (Article 56 EPC), for similar reasons as given above.

6.      *Inventive step (Article 56 EPC) - auxiliary request 3*

6.1     For auxiliary request 3, the appellant in its response of 8 April 2022 (middle of page 4) referred *mutatis mutandis* to the arguments it gave for auxiliary request 2, which as indicated above do not convince the board.

6.2     During the oral proceedings, the appellant explained that the amendment in auxiliary request 2 was introduced in view of the argument provided in the board's summons of 14 January 2022, point 5.4, penultimate paragraph, that if there is only one target item, the quantity of help information to be stored in the arrangement of claim 1 would likely be equivalent to that in the system of D1.

        However, the board's reasoning given in point 3.6 above does not depend on the number of target items.

6.3     Further, the board fails to see indications of a synergistic effect between the features added in auxiliary request 3 with the other features of claim 1.

6.4     The subject-matter of claim 1 of auxiliary request 3 is therefore also not considered inventive (Article 56 EPC).

7.      *Inventive step (Article 56 EPC) - auxiliary request 4*

        Claim 1 of auxiliary request 4 is based on that of auxiliary request 3, with additional details on how the

error state is determined. Given that these additional details are non-technical, they do not remedy the inventive step objection raised against auxiliary request 3.

The subject-matter of claim 1 of auxiliary request 4 is therefore also not considered inventive (Article 56 EPC).

8.      *Auxiliary requests 5 and 6*

8.1     The board holds that the fact that auxiliary requests 5 and 6 can be dealt with in substance in a straightforward manner constitutes an exceptional circumstance under Article 13(2) RPBA 2020. The board therefore admits these requests into the procedure.

8.2     Claim 1 of auxiliary requests 5 and 6 includes standard features which the server would be expected to have. These additional features do not remedy the inventive step objection raised against the higher ranking auxiliary requests.

The subject-matter of claim 1 of auxiliary requests 5 and 6 is therefore also not considered inventive (Article 56 EPC).

**Order**

**For these reasons it is decided that:**

The appeal is dismissed.


The Registrar:                           The Chairman:


L. Stridde                               Martin Müller


Decision electronically authenticated