



The Insignificant Detail to Catch the Copyists

How did King's Lynn gain that river?

Puzzled ramblers in King's Lynn may have written to the Ordnance Survey over the years to complain about the inaccuracy of their maps.

In an out-of-court settlement with the Automobile Agency (AA), the canny Ordnance Survey admitted that they deliberately make mistakes in elements of their maps to catch plagiarists. Interesting examples included extra stream tributaries, imaginary farm buildings and missing apostrophes in place names.

So what happened to the AA?

The AA was forced to admit that they had copied Ordnance Survey maps without permission, thus depriving the government agency of valuable copyright royalties (the Ordnance Survey annual royalty income is approximately £30 million). The AA agreed to settle for £20 million and, despite the dispute, both parties will continue to print map titles under their joint names.

ACID Advice

Wherever possible, try to incorporate an insignificant but deliberate feature(s) into your design to trap plagiarists. Those who copy will often copy these insignificant details without thinking, enabling the designer to easily prove to the Court that the "copy" is a copy rather than simply being coincidentally similar, as copyists may argue.

This detail can significantly improve the strength of any Court case, and can save a considerable amount in legal costs because the case will be more likely to settle at an early stage, as was the case with the AA, or will be much simpler to prove in Court.



Points to Remember:

ACID Member St Nicholas had included an insignificant detail in their Christmas decoration which came to fruition in a case against Harrods. Their Big Ben hanging decoration showed 3 o' clock; so did Harrods'!

An out of court settlement was reached, all thanks to an insignificant detail.

Have you signed the ACID IP Charter?

Join a growing number of people who are about IP ethics, respect, and compliance.
<https://www.acid.uk.com/become-a-charter-signatory/>

