



Apple unveiled its personal iPhone assistant, Siri, in 2011. A Scottsdale company says it patented the key technology two years earlier.

[Rachel Clarke/flickr](#)

Siri, Did Apple Steal Your Technology From a Scottsdale Company?

JOSEPH FLAHERTY | JULY 11, 2018 | 1:27PM

Apple founder Steve Jobs once **repeated** a phrase attributed to Picasso: "Good artists copy; great artists steal."

That was in 1996. Now, an Arizona company has set out to prove that the company Jobs founded stole intellectual property when Apple rolled out a voice-activated iPhone assistant named **Siri** in 2011.

According to a complaint filed on July 3 in U.S. District Court in Arizona, Scottsdale-based Advanced Voice Recognition Systems alleges that Apple has infringed on patented voice-recognition technology owned by AVRS.

The patent infringement claim hinges on the way disparate devices link up to a voice-recognition engine.

Voice-recognition and transcription programs were still in their infancy during the 1990s. But at the time, a trio of inventors in Arizona behind the contested AVRS patent were working on a novel way for voice-recognition systems to interface with many different devices.

The rigid speech recognition and transcription systems that existed then typically lived on a single device, wherever the user had installed the program. In an attempt to improve voice-recognition engines, Arizona inventors Douglas Holt, Michael K. Davis, and Joseph Miglietta developed a patent for a more flexible system.

In their patent, the speech recognition engine would be decoupled from the user's device and stored on a centralized server application, a peer-to-peer network, or a cloud computing network. The inventors developed an adapter system that would serve as a bridge between unique devices – iOS, Android, and Mac systems, for example – and the speech recognition software, according to the complaint.

The U.S. Patent Office granted a patent (No. 7,558,730) for the technology in question to the three inventors in 2009. Since then, Holt has died; Davis and Miglietta still work in Arizona.

AVRS claims that when Siri cheerily informs you of the weather or lists nearby restaurants in response to a voice request, Apple is relying on the same patented technology depicted in the '730 patent.

Eric Buether, a Dallas-based intellectual property lawyer representing AVRS, says that the company reached out to Apple in 2016 to see if they would be willing to purchase a license for the patent. Apple declined, Buether said, so they're suing the Silicon Valley giant.

"We feel confident that Apple is using the technology covered by the AVRS patent without compensating us for it. And so under the law, they're supposed to provide reasonable compensation for using somebody else's patented technology, and they aren't," Buether told *Phoenix New Times*.

AVRS is a publicly traded company with a tangled corporate history going back to the 1990s. The company now holds the '730 patent in what has become a family of patents. These days, the company mostly makes money by licensing these patents, according to Buether.

Calls for comment to Apple were not returned.

In a news **release** on Tuesday, AVRS President and CEO Walter Geldenhuys said, "We believe our patents are among the most valuable of our assets and we intend to vigorously enforce our rights."

Whether an unknown Scottsdale voice-recognition shop will succeed in taking on Apple, a company **worth** nearly \$1 trillion with essentially unlimited legal resources, is unclear.

But Buether says that the lawsuit is not frivolous. In a world dominated by virtual assistants like Alexa and Siri, speech-recognition technology might seem unremarkable, but at the time, AVRS found a solution no one else had discovered, he explained.

Buether expects Apple to pay AVRS for its reliance on the patent-protected tech as a result.

"Apple has admitted that Siri is a significant driver of demand for its products, so we would consider the reasonable compensation that AVRS is entitled to is substantial," Buether said. "What that number would be, I don't want to speculate."

Read the complaint filed by Advanced Voice Recognition Systems below.

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