

Dangerous Decision in Oracle v. Google: Federal Circuit Reverses Sensible Lower Court Ruling on APIs

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We're still digesting today's lengthy decision in the Oracle v. Google appeal, but we're disappointed?and worried. The heart of the appeal was whether Oracle can claim a copyright on Java APIs and, if so, whether Google infringed that copyright. According to the Federal Circuit today, the answer to both questions was a qualified yes?with the qualification being that Google may have a fair use defense.

Quick background: When it implemented the Android OS, Google wrote its own version of Java. But in order to allow developers to write their own programs for Android, Google relied on Java APIs. Application Programming Interfaces are, generally speaking, specifications that allow programs to communicate with each other. So when you type a letter in a word processor, and hit the print command, you are using an API that lets the word processor talk to the printer driver, even though they were written by different people.

[4]

[Android Google Legal](#)

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