Samsung targets iPhone 4S sales ban in France, Italy

Samsung Electronics said it will file patent-infringement claims in France and Italy to ban the sale of Apple's new iPhone less than a day after it was unveiled, intensifying a legal battle between the two top brands.

It will also file legal cases in other countries to stop the sale of the iPhone 4S after further review, the South Korean maker of Galaxy smartphones and tablets said in a statement.

Samsung has emerged as a credible challenger to Apple's mobile devices and the two companies are battling over patents in courtrooms around the world. They have sued each other in 10 countries involving more than 20 cases since April.

The latest salvo from Samsung comes hours after Apple's newest iPhone launch left investors and Apple fans wishing for more than a souped-up version of its previous device introduced more than a year ago. Apple shares fell as much as 5 percent before recovering to close down 0.6 percent on Tuesday.

"Apple has continued to flagrantly violate our intellectual property rights and free-ride on our technology," the South Korean firm said in a statement. "We will steadfastly protect our intellectual property."

Samsung said preliminary injunction requests for a ban on iPhone 4S sales will be filed on Wednesday and each case involves two patent infringements related to its wireless technology.

Under French and Italian laws, companies can seek and courts can order a ban on sales of a product even before it hits the market, Samsung spokesman James Chung told Reuters.

Apple and Samsung are vying for the top spot in the global smartphone market.

But the intensifying legal battle with Apple threatens to derail Samsung's telecoms and component businesses. Apple is Samsung's biggest customer, buying mainly chips and displays.

On Tuesday, Apple rejected an offer from Samsung to settle a tablet computer dispute in Australia, possibly killing off the commercial viability of the new Galaxy tablet in that market.

Samsung is set to report sharply lower quarterly earnings on Friday on persistent declines in chip prices, while investors look for signs its telecom business can sustain its booming growth.

LEGAL BATTLE

Samsung's intensifying attack comes after a series of setbacks in Europe and Australia.

Apple and Samsung are due to meet again in courtrooms in the United States, the Netherlands and South Korea next week.

Apple says Samsung's Galaxy line of mobile phones and tablets "slavishly" copied its iPhone and iPad.

Samsung, widely expected to overtake Apple as the world's No.1 smartphone vendor in unit terms in the third quarter, rejects the claims.

Samsung accused Apple of not paying licensing fees for some of its patents before it started selling iPhones in 2007. Apple argues Samsung never demanded a license fee until 2010 and before that Samsung remained silent because Apple is an important customer.

The iPhone 4S adds to Apple's iPhone 3G, 3GS, iPhone 4 and iPad 2 products that Samsung claims infringed its wireless-technology patents.

Samsung's latest Galaxy tablets, powered by Google's Android operating system, have already been blocked in Germany. So too have some smartphone models in the Netherlands.

Shares in Samsung closed up 1.7 percent on Wednesday after the new iPhone failed to wow fans and investors, leaving Android rivals better placed to grab market share.

(Reporting by Miyoung Kim; Editing by Vinu Pilakkott)

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