

OHIM embraces mark owners in administrative shake-up

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The Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market (OHIM) has opened up its meetings to brand owners and trademark attorneys.

In a move that will increase transparency at the office, users of the Community trademark (CTM) system will be invited to attend meetings of the Administrative Board of OHIM. This is made up of representatives from the European Commission and every national trademark office from across the European Union. Under plans announced today, representatives from industry groups BusinessEurope, the European Communities Trademark Association, the International Trademark Association and MARQUES will be invited to attend the meetings as observers.

"This is a very special moment for us," said Tove Graulund, a former chairman of MARQUES and the acting director of trademarks and legal at Zacco. "We sent a letter in February 2008 proposing that users were accepted as observers. The decision to invite observers shows that the Administrative Board wants to take the wishes and needs of brand owners very seriously."

The move comes as OHIM prepares to enact fee reductions agreed in a compromise solution in September 2008 (see "Deal to cut Community trademark registration fees agreed"). "We don't necessarily like all aspects of the compromise solution," said Graulund. "In fact we disagree with parts of it. But in a compromise everyone has to give a little so that we may gain more together. We supported the compromise and will continue to support it. Now the time has come to build up trust and to work together for improvements and new initiatives."

António Campinos, head of the Administrative Board, was also optimistic. He praised the outcome of the extraordinary meeting in December 2008 at which the board members agreed on closer engagement with mark owners. "The meeting resulted in a compromise solution and a call from member states for a higher engagement and involvement of users, particularly in what concerns the cooperation fund to be created and on the question of the remaining surplus," said Campinos. "So inviting users to participate at the board meetings as observers seems only natural."

Jane Collins, chairman of MARQUES, is committed to developing a stronger relationship with OHIM. "Now the time has come to build up trust and to work together for improvements and new initiatives," she said.