

Dealing With Extensions of Time and Case Management Conference Timelines (HMD Circular No. 4/2010, dated 20 August 2010)

To better manage trade mark opposition, invalidation and revocation proceedings, the Registrar has, at case management conferences (CMC) convened under Rule 81A of the Trade Marks Rules 2008 Rev Ed, been issuing timelines for the filing of evidence by both parties. The primary objectives are to ensure that the parties explore the possibility of a settlement through negotiations and that all parties have the same expectations on the amount of time given to each party for the filing of evidence. This circular sets out the Registrar's practice in relation to extensions of time for filing evidence and the application of CMC timelines.

Fast-Track and Slow-Track CMC Timelines

Timelines issued through CMCs are generally of two types – slow-track and fast-track. Slow-track timelines are issued in cases where parties are already exploring or are intending to explore the possibility of settlement through negotiations. In such cases, the objective of issuing a longer timeline for the party initiating the action to file his evidence is to allow parties sufficient time to negotiate and reach an amicable settlement. In other cases, fast-track timelines will be issued.

This table sets out typical timelines for slow-track and fast-track cases:

	Slow-Track Timelines	Fast-Track Timelines
Evidence of initiating party	14 months from Counter-Statement	8 months from Counter-Statement
Evidence of responding party	6 months from evidence of initiating party	6 months from evidence of initiating party

These CMC timelines represent the maximum extent to which the Registrar will generally exercise her discretion in granting extensions of time to parties and they are predicated on the appropriate requests for extensions of time being made.

Extensions of Time Within CMC Timelines

The Registrar will, as a matter of general practice, grant extensions of time where they fall within the CMC timelines.

Extensions of Time Beyond CMC Timelines

1. Slow-Track Cases

Under the slow-track timelines, as the evidence of the party initiating the action can be filed as late as 14 months from the Counter-Statement, parties effectively have a total of 14 months to reach a settlement. This saves parties unnecessary expense in preparing evidence for the adversarial process while they negotiate. As 14 months would provide parties a reasonable opportunity to reach a settlement in most cases, in exercising the discretionary power under Rule 32(9), the Registrar **will most likely refuse to grant** any further extension of time beyond that timeline unless it is shown to the Registrar's satisfaction that there are good and sufficient reasons to do so as required under Rule 32(9).

Once the filing of evidence has started, again, in exercising the discretionary power under Rule 33(9) or Rule 34(9), the Registrar **will most likely refuse to grant** any further extension of time beyond the CMC timelines unless the Registrar is satisfied that there are good and sufficient reasons to do so as required under Rule 33(9) or Rule 34(9) respectively.

2. Fast-Track Cases

Where initially fast-track timelines applied but subsequently parties require more time to negotiate, they may apply to the Registrar to adjust the timelines for the filing of evidence and provide the Registrar with information as to the specific additional period of time that will be needed for parties to fully explore settlement through negotiations. Again, in exercising the discretionary power under Rule 32(9), Rule 33(9) or Rule 34(9), the Registrar **will most likely refuse to grant** any further extension of time beyond the adjusted timelines unless it is shown to the Registrar's satisfaction that there are good and sufficient reasons to do so.

3. Reasons Supporting Extensions of Time beyond CMC Timelines

The Registrar may, in exceptional cases, and in so far as it is substantiated, consider the non-exhaustive list of circumstances below as justifications for the further extension of time to file evidence beyond the CMC timelines:

- (i) parties are negotiating a world-wide settlement agreement involving many jurisdictions
- (ii) parties are negotiating a settlement agreement involving a few other parties other than the parties themselves
- (iii) parties are awaiting the outcome of relevant court or other proceedings (such as proceedings before another IP office or foreign court or WIPO) that has a material bearing on the settlement agreement or on how the parties wish to proceed
- (iv) significant progress has been made but parties still require a specific period of additional time to complete the negotiations
- (v) one party has had a change of agent shortly before the deadline for him to file his evidence
- (vi) a circumstance has arisen that is beyond one party's control, provided that the party has acted promptly and diligently at all times; for example, corporate changes such as merger and bankruptcy; the party's decision-maker has taken ill or left and the party needs more time to make certain decisions; civil war; declaration of state of emergency.

Whenever an extension of time beyond the CMC timeline is sought, the party must provide the reason and information on the specific additional period of time needed. In addition, except for (v) and (vi) above, the party requesting an extension of time beyond the CMC timeline must also obtain the consent of the other party to the further extension of time. If the Registrar accepts the reason for a further extension of time beyond the CMC timeline, it shall not be possible to request any further extension of time based on the same reason beyond the specific additional period of time indicated by the party.

4. Adjustment of CMC Timelines

Where the Registrar has granted an extension of time beyond the original CMC timeline, the latter may also be adjusted as appropriate, to take into account the new circumstances that have set in.

Concurrent Statutory Deadlines and CMC Timelines

Parties should note that statutory deadlines and CMC timelines run concurrently. CMC timelines and any further extensions of time beyond CMC timelines granted do not negate the need for parties to apply for extensions of time in accordance with the Trade Marks Rules, including, where applicable, filing Form TM 50 and fee.

Typically, the Registrar will grant an extension of not more than 2 months each time for each Form TM 50 filed. To illustrate, if a party has specified an additional period of 4 months in addition to the 8 months given for the filing of his evidence pursuant to the fast track timelines under any of the reasons at (i) to (vi) above, and the Registrar has accepted the reason for extending the deadline for 4 months beyond the CMC timeline, the party would have to file one Form TM 50 for the first extension beyond 6 months from the date of the Counter-Statement and, then, two Form TM 50's for the additional 4 months required.

Conclusion

The Registrar will seek to apply these guidelines consistently and in a fair and reasonable fashion so as to ensure that timelines issued through the CMC process are properly tracked and complied with by both parties. This, in turn, will enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of the hearings process as well as the CMC process. It will also ensure that applications for extensions of time beyond CMC timelines are not made routinely but are the result of and supported by evidence of circumstances that warrant the extension.