

University of Arkansas Microelectronics-Photonics Graduate Program

PhD Candidacy Exam – Environmental Topic – March 13, 2009

PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED

According to Forbes Magazine (April 24, 2006), the food industry annually discards \$35 billion worth of spoiled goods including fresh fruits and related farm grown produce. This is a major global problem in building sustainable fresh produce supply chain, provide food to growing global population and reduce waste in the land fill.

For instance, fresh fruit waste is caused by the uncontrolled rate of natural ripening, in addition to other human and equipment factors, across the supply chain. A typical global supply chain for providing bananas to a retail store in Fairbanks, Alaska includes transportation links from farms in El Salvador, to a sea port in Miami, to distribution centers in Arkansas and Utah, to a sea port in Seattle, and finally to delivery to Fairbanks, Alaska.

The spoilage of bananas occurs largely in transportation due to various environmental factors and physical damage. Known major environmental factors affecting ripening are ethylene emitted by fruit, ambient temperature and humidity, and microbes.

Your CEO is interested in becoming the industry leader in developing an environmentally friendly solution to this problem of banana spoilage, one that also factors in the value of the carbon footprint of the supply chain.

Your proposed system is expected to gather and analyze data affecting banana spoilage, and to then automatically implement remediation strategies to extend the life of bananas. Remediation efforts may include local and/or global approaches, and may address any or all of the supply chain from farm to consumer.

YOUR DELIVERABLE

Your task is to write an internal proposal for your corporate officers describing your approach to this issue. The proposal should include the following:

- Executive summary (one page)
- Risk assessment roadmap form (one page)
- Full proposal (15 pages maximum)
- Appendix A: Bibliography (no page limit)
- Appendix B: Ranked list of intellectual property documents examined (no page limit)

Be sure you address at least all of the following:

Current Science and Technologies - What is already being done in this area by other researchers, companies and governmental institutions? The current state-of-the-art for both the

science and the implementation should be described, making use of diverse resources such as science literature, journals, conference proceedings, the internet, patents or other sources of existing public knowledge. **Be sure to cite all references that you use and to quote any word-for-word transfer to your report.**

Your Design Approach – What is the basis for your chosen design approach to the problem? Address why your product is better than the existing product solutions and what product attribute(s) allow suitable market penetration for profitability. Be sure to address both the scientific and engineering issues of the question.

Testing and Qualification - Describe a set of tests and demonstrations that you will use to demonstrate the effectiveness of your approach and to give confidence that the implementation of the solution will launch successfully.

Cost Analysis – Detail the cost and market issues that will impact the pricing strategy of the solution you have proposed. Because the CEO is concerned with potential IP leakage if a device is built outside of the company, subcontracting of the manufacturing or assembly of any proprietary component outside of the company is discouraged.

For instance, your analysis could include such things as the major cost items that would impact the implementation, which elements of your implementation solution would be handled in-house versus externally-sourced, major risk elements that could drive up costs if the primary path item fails, costs of IP licensing needed, etc. For anything you address, be sure to include not just the “what”, but also the justification and/or reasoning behind your decisions. Remember, the marketing team needs a good manufacturing cost estimate for the total system as the product reaches mature product stage in order to determine potential market size.

Intellectual Property - List in rank order of importance all commercial, academic, and governmental IP sources that were consulted while formulating the answer, including key important reference data, in Appendix B. For instance, if the IP source is a patent, include the patent number; title; inventor name; and assignee name. The three that are the most significant threats to your solution should be discussed within the 15-page document, making comparisons of strengths and weaknesses of these approaches relative to your own. Include your recommendations on how these IP threats should be handled.

Most importantly - this is just a minimum list of issues you might consider. There may be many more. The point is that your report ***should contain the evidence*** needed to make an effective and compelling case to your CEO in order to insure that she makes the right decision.

Hint - Your report should read like a story – one logical step followed by another. This will help you stay focused! Re-read along the way to be sure that you have one logical step followed by another.