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A Verdict That Alters an Industry

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The federal court jury’s decision Friday in a smartphone patent lawsuit between Apple and Samsung is expected to alter the dynamics of the highly competitive mobile phone industry.

For Samsung, which lost on almost every count in the closely watched trial in San Jose, Calif., and was ordered to pay more than $1 billion in damages, the implications are more obvious. It will have to be cautious in how it designs products to avoid being accused of imitating Apple.

Other makers may become more cautious, too. Google, which makes the Android software that runs at the core of Samsung phones, will clearly feel an impact through its hardware-making partner. Microsoft, however, which is attempting to enter the market with new software, will feel less of an effect, industry experts said.

Apple has been the smartphone market leader. It defined the category in the way phones look and how users interact with them. Most popular smartphones today are a slab of glass and metal controlled through a touch-screen full of icons arrayed on the screen. Because consumers are familiar with that format, phones from various makers tended to look and behave similarly.

Those similarities might be the first things to change. “Companies in the future are going to have to consider how much they want their product to look and feel like their competitors’ products in terms of shape, size, the way it feels, the way it looks, how the icons are similar, or will the icons be quite dissimilar” said Robert W. Dickerson Jr., a lawyer who is the head of the West Coast intellectual property practice for Dickstein Shapiro, a patent law firm not involved in the Samsung-Apple case.

Microsoft and its main hardware partner Nokia, at the very least, should have an easier time of it. Robert Barr, executive director of the University of California Berkeley’s Center for Law and Technology, said that the user interface — the icons and other features that users see and touch — of the Nokia Windows phones look distinctly different from the iPhone. Nokia, a longtime maker of phones, also has a thick portfolio of patents to protect itself. For Microsoft and Nokia, which are trying to make a comeback in smartphones, this design distinction is a clear advantage in the internecine patent wars sweeping the industry as much as it is a marketing advantage.

Things could get tougher, however, for Google, or any phone maker using its Android software. Android phones are the most common smartphones on the market today. Samsung is the world’s largest maker of smartphones and it has been quickly gaining market share. Collectively, the various Android phones from Samsung and other makers easily outsell Apple’s iPhones.

While Google is not involved in this case, Apple was clearly going after Android all along, said Robert P. Merges, professor of law and technology at University of California Berkeley School of Law. If other handset makers using Android fear that Apple will take them on and win, might they shy away from Android? “There are a lot more players in the Android world who could be involved in the future in litigation,” he said. “And it’s going to raise the cost of everyone in the Android system if the damages stick.”

Shifting to a less popular software system, like Windows or even Research in Motion’s operating system expected to arrive next year, gives Apple an advantage in the marketplace. “It’s not good news for Google,” Mr. Merges said. “Apple’s real target is the Android ecosystem, the Android world, everything having to do with Androids. That’s really what they are targeting here.”