"LANPAR" – LANguage for Programming Arrays at Random is the world’s first electronic spreadsheet.

Co-invented and developed by Rene Pardo and Remy Landau this software was created in 1969 and its use sold to the Plant Budgeting Divisions of Bell Canada, AT&T and the 18 Operating Telephone Companies across the U.S. and Long Lines- in addition to General Motors in Warren Michigan.

It was invented at the time because Bell Canada and AT&T had the problem that in changing the 2000 cells in their budgeting forms, the lead time for the MIS groups to re-write the software in Fortran was 6 months to 2 years.

Pardo and Landau felt strongly that programming should be in the hands of the users rather than the MIS group.

Using LANPAR, Mr. Art Smith at Bell Canada was able to program the calculations of the entire application by himself over a weekend.
In 1969, LANPAR already foresaw and included the features which are the cornerstone of the modern spreadsheet – namely Forward Referencing & Natural Order Recalculation.

LANPAR operated on the General Electric 400 On-Line Time Sharing Series on several computers in North America.
Some 10 years later on personal computers, the subsequent popular spreadsheets VisiCalc, TKSolver, and Supercalc did not allow for forward referencing or natural order recalc. The user had to click on the “manual recalc” function key to refresh the screen sufficient times until the cell values no longer changed indicating that there were no more forward references of cells.

LANPAR features also included sophisticated mathematical function capability within cells as well as True/False decision making calculations affecting the calculations to be performed in cells.

Pardo & Landau were among the first to obtain a software patent, following a decade of appeals in the U.S. courts.

They lost their case, heavily influenced by Lotus’ attorneys hiring as their expert witness the patent lawyer Gale Rhodes who Pardo & Landau had fired in 1971 as they pursued the case on their own for the next 10 years. The judge believed the testimony of Mr. Rhodes who testified against his former client, rather than that of Pardo & Landau. There was no prior art identified as the invention was over 10 years preceding popular spreadsheets on personal computers; there was established patent validity by the CCPA (Predecessor Court of the Federal Circuit – Custom Court of Patent Appeals), and proof of after 8 years of research into terminology and a study of manufacturing costs. The Pardo & Landau patent was not well publicized and it was not as well understood as the Lotus spreadsheet patent.

The Patent Problems

In August 1982, after a two-year legal battle, Ron Pardo and Henry Landau secured a major hurdle in defending Apple’s spreadsheet product, Lotus 1-2-3 — LaParc Technologies v. Apple Computer in the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, where Apple was the defendant in the case. This was the same company Apple had purchased in 1994. The outcome was not what Pardo & Landau had hoped for as they had been granted the patent in 1973, but the validity had been in doubt after Apple introduced a competing product. This case is often cited as an example of the patent law in the United States, illustrating that computer software is not patentable. This case was the first successful challenge to a software patent in the United States, setting a precedent for the future. The case was appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit and the United States Supreme Court.

In the meantime, Pardo had not noticed a significant change in spreadsheet software developers. A few years ago, people used to copy without regard for piracy. Now, people are thinking more carefully. We could get into troubles, "as a company that provides a service for life. When you pay for something, you expect to be looked after for the rest of your life. That’s what we thought."
infringement. Pardo, Landau and their litigation attorneys were not aware at the time of the lawsuit against Lotus of other criticisms by the Law Society against Gale Rhodes. Mr. Pardo’s conclusion regarding patents and the legal system is that “You can be right and lose – and wrong and win. Perception is reality.”