Xilinx Does Away With IP Lawyers

By Peter Brown - September 10, 2001

Xilinx Inc. of San Jose wants to make life easier for intellectual property (IP) core makers. The FPGA vendor today will unveil its SignOnce IP license program designed to eliminate the legal aspects of signing and using IP cores along with its FPGA devices. The program is also designed to help free OEMs from the burden of working to form a common license for each and every IP vendor from which they want to use a core.

The program will require that OEMs—such as Cisco Systems Inc. or Nortel Networks Corp.—sign a binding license that will allow the companies to skip having to go through numerous legalities in order to obtain a license to use a certain IP core.

"Now, if an OEM engineer wants to use a core, instead of having to clear it with the company's legal department, they can go directly to the IP vendors that have signed up with the program and obtain that core," said Rich Sevcik, senior vice president and general manager for the AllianceCORE program inside of Xilinx (nasdaq: XLNX). "Payment for the core is a different matter and would be handled accordingly," he added.

According to a report recently released by Gartner Dataquest of San Jose, the No. 1 impediment to a design engineer using an IP core is the contractual problems that go with it. Xilinx is attempting to eliminate this inhibitor by doing the dirty work itself—going into these companies and sorting out the licensing arrangements ahead of time.

"We have had a license agreement in process for the last few years, and when we discovered that companies were not modifying the agreement, we decided to use that as the template for SignOne," said Mark Bowby, AllianceCORE program manager at Xilinx.

The idea for a common license among numerous vendors came about after discovering that Xilinx's free downloadable cores were taking off, namely because they did not require a license, Sevcik said. "We figured we could come up with the same model that works for non-free cores, and that is what you see today with SignOne," Sevcik said.

This type of common license may also be extremely important going forward as Dataquest
sees that the bulk of IP revenue will be coming not from reoccurring licensees, but from new licenses over the next three years or so. Xilinx's program, which took a year-and-a-half to establish, will initially include 21 companies and is open to other IP vendors as well. Sevcik added that Xilinx would even be willing to have its chief competitor, Altera Corp., participate in the consortium if it desired to be a part of it.

The companies that are already part of the SignOne Licensing program include: ARC Cores, CAST, Deltatec, Derivation Systems, Digital Communications Technologies, Digital Core Design, Dolphin Integration, Eureka Technology, iCoding, Loarant, Memec Core, Mentor Graphics, NewLogic Technologies, NMI Electronics, Paxonet Communications, Perigee, Rapid Prototypes, SysOnChip, Virtual IP Group and Xylon.