

CASE DOSSIER: FORM VS. FUNCTION

The MagSafe Ring Dispute

A visual analysis of functional design
and trademark use.

Based on: Intellectual Property and Commercial Court, 2023
Min Shang Su Zi No. 40 Civil Judgment (Date: 2024-02-01).

The Combatants

THE PLAINTIFF: RHINOSHIELD

✓ **Role:** Global phone protective case manufacturer.



✓ **Action:** Engineered phone cases with a specific internal magnetic ring design to support wireless charging compatibility.



THE DEFENDANT: O-ONE

✓ **Role:** Trademark registrant.



✓ **Action:** Registered the specific ring and dash design as a trademark and dispatched **aggressive warning letters** to the Plaintiff's retail network demanding immediate product takedowns.

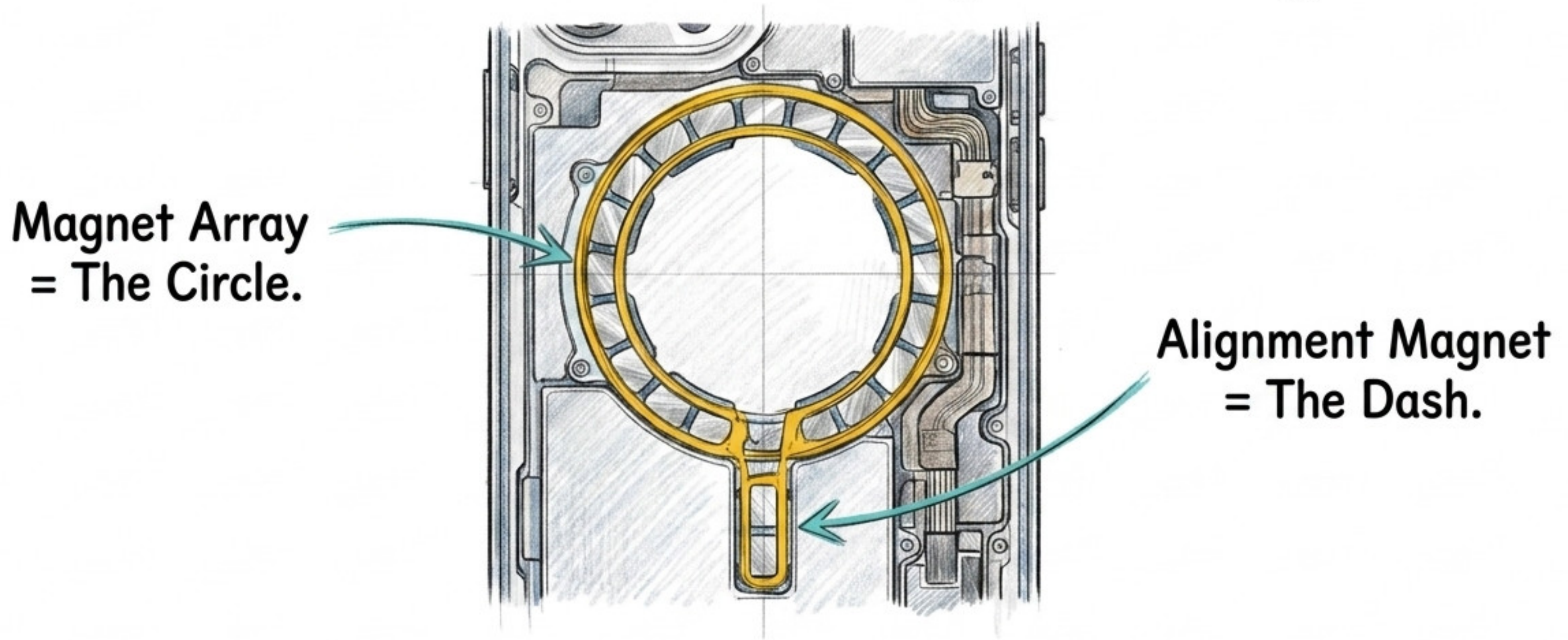


Exhibit A: The Registered Marks



The Claim: The Defendant asserts exclusive commercial rights to this specific Circle and Dash visual geometry on the backing of any phone case.

Exhibit B: The Anatomy of MagSafe



Apple introduced this precise internal magnetic architecture in 2020 to solve the physics problem of misaligned wireless charging. The geometry is dictated purely by magnetic function, not brand aesthetics.

The Chronology of Registration



2020

The Launch.

Apple officially releases the iPhone 12 series, introducing the MagSafe magnetic array geometry to the global market.

Mid 2021 - Late 2022

The Anomaly.

Defendant files and successfully registers Trademark No. 02202378 and No. 02268370 for phone cases, long after the technology was public.

Early 2023

The Attack.

Defendant initiates aggressive legal action, sending warning letters to Plaintiff's retail distributors.

Seeking Legal Clarity



Facing severe threats to its retail and distributor network, the Plaintiff could not afford to wait to be sued. They seized the initiative.

A binding judgment from a court defining the precise legal relationship between parties and their respective rights, utilized to instantly resolve a state of paralyzing legal uncertainty.

Issue I: The Threshold of Standing

Did the Defendant cause active legal uncertainty?

Yes — proven by the dispatched warning letters. ✓



Is the Plaintiff's private law status in imminent danger?

Yes — distributor business actively disrupted. ✓



Can a definitive court ruling remove this present danger?

Yes. ✓



The court officially affirms the Plaintiff possesses valid legal standing to pursue a Declaratory Judgment.

Issue II: The Core Legal Question

Is the Plaintiff's printing of the precise circle and dash on their phone cases legally considered Trademark Use?

The Trademark Act defines use as utilizing a mark specifically for marketing purposes, intending to identify the source of goods or services directly to consumers.

The Defense: Function, Not Brand



Necessity: The exact geometry is a strict functional requirement to optimize MagSafe alignment and magnetic efficiency.

Placement: The design is strictly internal or hidden inside non-transparent cases. It is often entirely invisible to the external observer.

Packaging: The exterior retail packaging distinctly and exclusively features the Plaintiff's own established brand (RHINOSHIELD), never utilizing the disputed ring design as a logo.

The Defendant's Rebuttal

Even if the shape is highly functional, the Plaintiff could engineer alternative methods to achieve wireless charging without visibly displaying this specific, registered design on the physical case.



The Court's Ruling on Functionality

- **Apple launched the technology and defined this precise geometric layout in 2020.**
- **The Defendant did not invent, nor did they first use, this technical shape.**
- **A trademark registrant cannot legally force competitors to hide, alter, or abandon an industry-standard, highly functional technical design that pre-dates the trademark's very registration.**

The Statutory Shield



The Law

Trademark Act Article 36(1)(1) dictates that a person is not bound by another's trademark rights if they use the mark in accordance with honest commercial practices strictly to describe the nature, characteristics, or utility of their own goods.

The Application

The court found the Plaintiff used the ring strictly as descriptive Fair Use to indicate MagSafe Compatibility (a utility/characteristic), with zero intent to deceive consumers regarding the manufacturer.



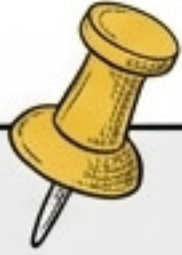
The Final Judgment Non-Infringement Affirmed.

The court officially **grants the Declaratory Judgment entirely in favor** of the Plaintiff.

The Defendant's claims for financial damages, removal of alleged infringement, and prevention of future infringement are comprehensively rejected.

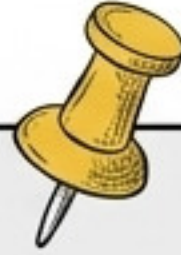
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Summary & Strategic Insights



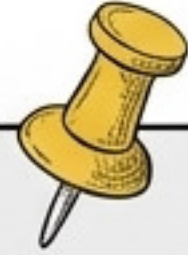
Descriptive Fair Use.

Utilizing an industry-standard, purely functional shape (like the MagSafe array) specifically to indicate technological compatibility constitutes descriptive fair use, not Trademark Use.



The Declaratory Strike.

Companies facing aggressive, unfounded warning letters do not have to wait to be sued. Utilizing a Declaratory Judgment can clear legal clouds and actively protect vital distributor networks.



Function Over Form.

An entity cannot successfully monopolize a pre-existing, purely functional technical geometry through late trademark registration in an attempt to stifle market competition.