

## **Business & Media: Business: Inventor sues Electrolux over 'theft' of his design**

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A BRITISH inventor and his backers could be awarded up to \$1 billion in damages over claims that Electrolux, the world's biggest electric appliance manufacturer 'stole' his design for a vacuum cleaner.

John North, 67, says executives from the giant Swedish manufacturer conspired to defraud him after he had a series of meetings with the company.

A trial in El Paso, Texas, now in its third week, has heard allegations that the Norwich-based engineer's invention was manufactured by Electrolux without his knowledge. Since going on sale in August 2000, the new vacuum cleaner has sold nearly three million units, amassing profits in excess of \$100 million. North's design enables the vacuum cleaner to exert greater downward force on a surface than any other device has been able to do so far, thus giving a deeper clean.

North said it took him 10 years to come up with his design and claims that Electrolux signed non-disclosure contracts with him.

'I'm claiming all of their profits,' he said from El Paso. 'It's theft. On top of that, punitive damages which could be anything from \$300m to \$1 billion.'

North has persuaded Davis Law Firm, a top US practice, to represent him on a no-win, no-fee basis. Electrolux has not made a provision for potential losses in its accounts even though the dispute dates back four years. Electrolux firmly rejects North's charges. The case continues. There could be a verdict next week.