



SEARCHING FOR PATENTS

 **European Patent Office**
How patent information can help
with your technical, legal and business decisions

Searching for patents

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with your technical, legal and business decisions



Four good reasons to search for patents

- find out what already exists and build on it
- keep track of who's doing what
- avoid infringing other people's patent rights
- improve the quality of your patent application

You can search in patent databases to

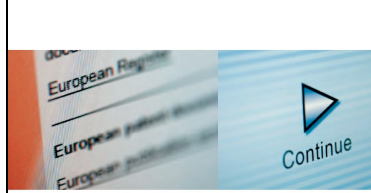
- find out what already exists and build on it
- keep track of who's doing what

If you are faced with a technical problem, there is no better way of finding out what solutions already exist than by searching at patents.

The European Patent Office databases provide free access to more than 10 million patent documents from all over the world.

The technical details of research being carried out by your competitors may well appear first in a patent document, long before the product reaches the marketplace. By monitoring patent documents you can keep an eye on your business competitors, or even locate potential partners.

You can also use patent information to identify patents that are no longer in force and can be freely used. Moreover, by watching patent publications, you can spot trends in technology or the market at an early stage.



European Patent Office

Continue

- avoid infringing other people's patent rights
- improve the quality of your patent applications

Before you put a new product or service on the market, you need to make sure that you will not be infringing someone else's patent. Every patent application is published 18 months after the date on which it was filed, so a search in the EPO's patent databases will give you a pretty accurate picture of which areas are covered by patents.

When you file an application, your patent office will carry out a search for inventions similar to yours. Doing your own search in patent databases before filing will help you to formulate your patent application more precisely and to avoid unpleasant surprises in the patent office's search report.

Legal information

Patent information has an important legal dimension. While the contents of the patent document itself tell you exactly what the invention is that is being legally protected, patent information goes further than that: it can show you where in the world a patent has been applied for, if a patent was in fact granted, if there is still time to challenge it, and whether or not the patent is still in force.

Legal information products from the European Patent Office

The European Patent Register is an online service that allows you to track European patent applications through to grant, and gives you access to all the public documents in the file of a European patent application.

The European Publication Service is the place to obtain official copies of European patent documents.

Legal status information for patents from 45 different countries is provided via the **INPADOC** legal status feature, which appears when you retrieve a document from the Espacenet service.

Literature relating to the European patent system itself – including the European Patent Convention and the database of the decisions of the EPO boards of appeal – can be found on the EPO website. You can also search here for a European patent attorney.



Guido Mondadori
Professor/patent searcher
President of the Italian Association of Patent Documentation (AIDB)

"Some time ago, I was asked by a company to check whether a new product they wanted to launch on the market in Europe would infringe any existing patents.

Searching various databases on the internet, I found four patent documents that might pose problems. Luckily by checking the legal status information provided by the EPO, I was able to establish that one patent application had been withdrawn, and another had been granted but had lapsed because the renewal fees had not been paid. The third case was a European patent application from a direct competitor. I used the EPO's online service to retrieve a copy of the claims as they were going to be granted, and my client was able to make minor amendments to the product so as to avoid infringement. The fourth document was a Japanese granted patent which actually covered the product, but the family information collected by the EPO showed me that no equivalent foreign patents had been filed.

The company were given the green light to start selling their product, but they kept monitoring the patent databases for a period, in case any previously unpublished applications appeared.

Any company can use the publicly available patent databases to get relevant information on the patents in a particular field. Investing in the services of a patent information specialist will help you to avoid expensive conflicts with competitors."

Technical information

Anyone involved in research and development activities needs to be aware of patents. Even if you have not yet reached the stage of filing a patent application, the technology described in the EPO's free databases can be very valuable for you.

The European Patent Office has been collecting patent documents from around the world for over 50 years. The amount of technical information in our patent documentation collection is phenomenal, with data from 1919 up to the present day. Our databases are probably the largest single source of information on technology in the world today.

Technical information products from the European Patent Office

With data on more than 10 million patent documents from around the globe, the Espacenet internet service gives you access to one of the world's biggest technology databases. It is easy to use and free of charge and, with over 25,000 users a day, it is a very popular online product.

Once you have mastered Espacenet, the next step is to take a look at the more advanced options available in the Patent Information Services for Experts. Based on the same data as Espacenet, these offer you further possibilities for searching patents, such as:

- monitoring new patent documents as they appear
- producing regular "patent bulletins" for distribution within your company
- searching more precisely and in more detail
- creating your own in-house patent databases.

Thomas Langford
Product/development manager
Active Tech
Germany

"Active Tech develops and sells pumps for car tyres. The pumps are produced in China. We try to make sure we are aware of developments in our field and one way we do this is to watch out for new patent applications. Each month some five to ten new patent documents appear in our field.

Through this regular monitoring we noticed a Chinese patent application in February 2007 from a company that had produced pumps for us a year before.

The document covered some technology we had been producing and selling for the last few years. We are now in the process of contacting the Chinese authorities through a Chinese patent attorney to take the matter further."



Business information

By looking at large sets of patent data as opposed to individual patents, you can get a better understanding of the "big picture" and take more informed decisions. Analysing patents is also a key element of due diligence procedures in any merger or acquisition where technological companies are involved.

Putting a value on patents and patent portfolios

Tools available on the market can help you get a better picture of the value of patents and patent portfolios. This can be important for:

- Licensing - knowing the value of your patents puts you in a better position to negotiate licensing agreements
- Investment decisions - a detailed analysis of the patents held by a company may be a critical factor for investors in the company or for obtaining public funding

The Espacenet online tool can help you evaluate and manage your patent portfolio. You can download it free of charge from the EPO website.

Patent mapping

Awareness of the importance of data on patents is growing among board members of companies around Europe. For example, by studying your competitors' patenting behaviour, you can spot technical trends in the markets you operate in.


The EPO's **Patent Information Services for Experts** will help you do this, using the visualisation features they offer. Alternatively, there are a range of commercial products on the market for analysing patent sets and presenting the results visually and in a meaningful way.

You can access the business information products mentioned above on our website: www.epo.org/information

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Schuch
Head of the Institute for Systems and Innovation Research
Germany

"The managers of Evonik, a leading company in special chemistry, carry out regular analyses of their patent portfolio to identify their main fields of technical activity by comparing their profile with those of their main competitors. They can identify their strengths and weaknesses and assess whether and where to take action. Their portfolio analyses also enable them to identify patents which are not directly linked to any relevant business activity, thereby helping the company to save money.

For Evonik's management this strategic use of patent information has become indispensable. I have encountered many small and medium-sized enterprises for whom the intelligent extraction of information about their company and its competitors has proven to be crucial to their success."



This poster is derived from the EPO brochure "Searching for patents"