
Who Uses Patent Information?

- Independent inventors
- Business and industry
- Scientists and researchers
- Educators and students
- Legal professionals, e.g. patent attorneys and agents
- Patent searchers and paralegals
- Commercial database producers
- Government agencies, particularly departments involved in economic planning and development, industrial property activities or licensing
- Librarians and technical library administrators
- Historians, social scientists, and other scholars
- Collectors and antiquarians
- Journalists
- General public

Patent Facts

The first U.S. patent was issued on July 31, 1790 to Samuel Hopkins of Philadelphia.

In 1790, the U.S. issued just three patents.

In 2001, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office issued 182,223 patents.

The practice of numbering patents began in 1836. Patent No. 1 was granted to John Ruggles of Maine on July 13, 1836.

The U.S. has issued over 6.5 million patents since 1790.

The three types of patents are utility, design and plant.

The four criteria for patents are novelty, usefulness, unobviousness and full disclosure.

The terms of utility and plant patents are twenty years. Design patents have fourteen-year terms.



Patent and Trademark Depository Library Program
U.S. Patent and Trademark Office
Washington, D.C. 20231
(703) 308-5558 / fax: (703) 306-2654
<http://www.uspto.gov>



Patents

The Collection for all
Reasons

Innovation
Business
Research
Law
Education
Culture
History

January 2002

Why a Patent Collection?

A Unique Resource

The U.S. patent file spans over 200 years. From corn planters to clones, it tells the story of world science and technology since 1790. But it also bears witness to the evolution of society. Fashion or sports, nutrition or entertainment, patents document every aspect of life. As such, patent history mirrors that of humanity; patent trends reflect the rise and ebb of society's ever changing interests, habits, concerns, fads and foibles.

There is much more to a patent collection than the obvious connection to inventions and technology. No other collection offers so much to so many and satisfies such a variety of information needs.



A Powerful Tool

Comprehensive

With over 6,500,000 patent documents, the U.S. patent file is the most complete and compact collection of technological information in the world.

Unique

Patent documents contain technical information not published elsewhere.

Accessible

This priceless repository of information is freely accessible to the public on the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office Web site and its search facilities in Arlington, Virginia and in Patent and Trademark Depository Libraries located around the country.

Multipurpose

Beyond research and development, patent document collections are valuable planning and forecasting tools as well as legal, educational and scholarly resources.



The Many Reasons to Use It

As a result, no other collection answers the needs as diversified as those of engineers, historians, lawyers, social scientists, business and industry, educators, students of all ages, government agencies, inventors, entrepreneurs, or the public at large.

Patentability

Conduct a preliminary patent search to assess novelty of an invention.

Research and Development

Evaluate a technology state of the art, develop new--or improve upon existing--products and processes.

Technical

Solve specific problems, locate sources of expertise, and identify alternate technology.

Economic

Survey markets, monitor and forecast activities of competitors or industries.

Financial

Avoid duplicating costly research; judge an alleged innovation prior to venturing capital.

Legal

Conduct infringement or opposition proceedings; identify licensing opportunities.

Historical

Study a time period, the history of technology, or social changes.

Educational

Research thesis or science projects, pursue scientific academic programs and studies, teach inventive and creative thinking skills.

Marketing

Compile mailing lists and databases, locate the addresses of inventors or manufacturers.

Informational

Satisfy lifelong-learning curiosity.

Genealogy

Research and document family ancestors and accomplishments.

