

## PATENTS: LIBRARY SERVICE TO THE INVENTORS

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“Congress shall have power...to promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries.”

U.S. Constitution. Article I, section 8.

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### INTRODUCTION

Americans are an inventive lot, constantly seeking to make their lives more productive and to make better use of labor and capital. Not a few dream of the riches that fall to the next Edison or Westinghouse or the lady who invented white-out. And they come to libraries, large and small; academic, public or school, seeking help in furthering the process to secure those exclusive rights mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. The exciting part of the invention process is done. They need to know how to get the product of their creativity officially recognized and produced.

By definition, a patent is an

agreement that an inventor reaches with a national government to give him or her the exclusive right with a national government to give him or her the exclusive right to exploit a concrete idea. In general, the United States grants a patent for a period of seventeen years. To protect the invention, the inventor must secure a patent with each country that may be relevant, one by one. To secure a patent, the inventor must meet many requirements and provide a great deal of documentation. Time is also very important.

First, however, the patent literature has to be searched carefully to see if the invention is eligible for a patent. After it is decided that the

invention is eligible, has another person already been granted one; or, is a part of the invention already covered by another patent? There are a variety of ways to search the literature, all time consuming and some quite costly. Still, the local library can help to start the inventor on the path to a patent.

### PUBLICATIONS

The Patent Office produces each year a forty page guide to the workings of the Office and what it does and does not do for the inventor and patent process. General Information Concerning Patents contains answers to the most commonly asked questions, providing a good overview of the process. Most depositories have the latest and all libraries should own a copy or two.

The Official Gazette of the United States Patent and Trademark Office comes out each Tuesday in two parts. One part covers patents and the other trademarks. It provides notices that may affect the inventor including lists of patents due to expire for failure to pay maintenance fees, patents available for license or sale, the locations of patent depository libraries such as the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, telephone numbers of the various

patent examining groups and subgroups, and a list of patentees.

The meat is, of course, the section listing the patents granted that week arranged by patent number. These are not the patents themselves, which are published in full they day they are issued; but rather, a sufficiently complete explanation for researchers. They are arranged within the four broad categories: mechanical, chemical, electrical, and design. The entry gives the title of the invention, name or names of the inventors, address, assignors (if any), date of filing, and other pertinent data, followed by a detailed diagram or illustration and legalistic description. Since models are rarely required, the description and illustration must be sufficiently explicit to establish the uniqueness of the invention.

Inventors will profit by surveying issues to better appreciate the post-invention process. Libraries that are not depositories may want to keep an issue or two on hand as examples. An annual index to the various components of the Official Gazette is produced.

### INDIANA RESOURCES

Libraries: As mentioned earlier, the patent depository for Indiana is the Business, Science and

Technology Division of the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, 40 E. St. Clair, Indianapolis 46206 (317-269-1741). Coverage from 1973 to date. Hours are 9-9, Monday - Friday, 9-5 Saturday, and 1-5 Sunday. The best help assistance is obtained during the weekdays. Mark Leggett is the head. Online access is provided to Dialog and the U.S. Patent Classification System. The staff are experienced and skilled in advising of how to search the patent literature. The library, as a depository, can provide patents that the inventor feels are relevant after surveying the Official Gazette.

The State Library, as the regional depository and the various selective depositories will have the Official Gazette and other Patent Office Publications.

Academic: Several colleges have an interest in assisting inventors and are happy to talk. At the least, they can provide referrals. They include:

Ball State University. Center for Entrepreneurial Resources, Carmichael Hall, Muncie 47306 (317-285-1588).

Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Proposal

Assistance, Office of Research, 1825 Riverside Ave., Muncie 47306 (317-285-1600) for help in taking advantage of the Federal SBIR program Indiana Institute of Technology.

McMillen Productivity and Design Center, 1600 E. Washington Blvd., Fort Wayne 46803 (219-422-5561).

Indiana University. Entrepreneur in Residence, School of Business, Bloomington 47405 (812-335-9200).

Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis. Commercial/Industrial Liaison, 355 North Lansing, Indianapolis 46202 (317-264-8285).

Economic Development Administration, University Center, 611 N. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis 46204 (317-262-5083) and, at the same address the NASA/Indianapolis Center for Advanced Research (317-262-5000) which is interested in, among

other areas, software development for engineering and advanced electronics.

Tech Net, EDA University Center at IUPUI, 611 N. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis 46204 (317-262-5003) providing referral for businesses needing help in engineering and technology Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology. Innovators Forum, 5500 E. Wabash Ave., Terre Haute 47803 (812-877-8222) Will use the resources of the school to critique an inventor's idea.

Government: Indiana, like most states wants to promote innovation and business and has offices which can explain state and Federal programs. Many focus on corporate entities but can provide referral for individuals with promising ideas.

Indiana Department of Commerce, One N. Capitol, Indianapolis 46204 (317-232-8800) Can be a good place to start.

Indiana Business Modernization and Technology Corpo-

ration. One North Capitol Ave, Indianapolis 46204 (317-635-3058). It allocates funds for research and development.

## ONLINE TOOLS

Whether the inventor is doing the patent search privately or through an agent or attorney, an online search of the literature is virtually a given. A good manual search may save some of the cost of an automated literature search, but is not a substitute. Again the librarian can help. Many of the major scientific and technical databases have the ability to segment patent literature. Engineering Index or COMPENDEX, Chemical Abstracts or CA Search, Science Citation Index or Scisearch, and INSPEC for physics, electronics and computers, to but name a few, thoroughly cover patent literature. No thorough search of a topic would be complete without examining patent literature for the serious scholar.

Services such as Dialog in its CLAIMS/U.S. PATENT file offers a variety of databases that comprehensively cover patent literature. On an international level, there are dozens of files that may be of interest. Patent databases have the capability of

being extensively manipulated, these files are difficult to search on an intermittent or casual basis. This is particularly true for chemical searching. Because of the costs involved, the searcher needs to carefully review the architecture of the database.

## CONCLUSION

Unlike assisting a user in researching Operation Desert Storm or providing literature on how to install a garage door opener, helping an inventor to begin the patent process is more challenging. The bulk of the resources — either people, printed, or online — are not directly at hand. The librarian's task is often to provide a telephone number, an address, a starting point, some advice. The point is not to discourage the inventor about the process. Innovation is an essential ingredient for guaranteeing the vitality of Indiana in the next century.

## FURTHER READINGS

Jones, Stacy V. The Patent Office. New York: Praeger Pub., 1971.

Provides an overview of how the Patent Office functions.

The lengthy time it takes to hear about an application is more understandable after reading this text.

Levy, Richard C. Inventing and Patenting Sourcebook.

Detroit: Gale Research, 1990. Intended as an annual publication with updates, providing an encyclopedia of Federal forms, advice, lists of patent attorneys, sources of venture capital, etc. Very thorough and convenient.

Schepps, Solomon J., ed. The Complete Guide to Patents, Trademarks, and Copyrights. New York: Bell Pub. Co., 1980.

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Classification Definitions.

Washington: The Office. Provides the changes in classification of patents and information on new and revised classes and sub classes. For those wanting to establish a profile of patent areas they wish to be informed of, this tool provides the classification scheme.

—. General Information Concerning Patents. Washington, DC:

- Government Printing Office, 1990.  
Excellent and inexpensive pamphlet. SuDoc: C 21.26/2.
- . Index to the U.S. Patent Classification. Annual. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.  
Gives and alphabetical listing of the subjects covered in the classes and subclasses.  
SuDoc: C 21.12/2.
- . Manual of Classification. Washington: Government Printing Office. Loose-leaf.  
Lists the numbers assigned to the classes and subclasses with descriptive titles. The inventor, knowing the numbers of interest, can browse the Official Gazette.  
SuDoc: C 21.12.
- . Manual of Patent Examining Procedures. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. Loose-leaf.  
Lets you know what guidelines and practices the examiners are currently using.
- . Official Gazette of the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Weekly in two parts: Patents and Trademarks.  
Annual cumulative index.  
Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.  
SuDoc: C 21.5.
- . The Story of the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988.  
Provides the history of the operation in fifty pages.  
SuDoc: C 21.2:P 27/2.
- [Originally appeared in various ALSA newsletters: Wabash, Stone Hills, Tri-ALSA]
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