
Protecting Intellectual Property

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office is one of the most unusual branches of the U.S. Government. The examining staff of about 4,000 is trained in all branches of science and examines thoroughly every application to determine whether a patent may be granted—a task, in these days, involving the most exhaustive research. Not only must the examiners search United States and foreign patents to learn if a similar patent has been issued, but they must study scientific books and publications to discover whether the idea has ever been described. Previous publications, invention, or use prevents a patent from being issued. In addition to issuing patents, the Patent and Trademark Office has, since 1870, been in charge of registering trademarks, the business community's most valuable asset. More than 1,600,000 trademarks have been issued.

In its earlier days, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office had on various occasions the responsibility for administering copyright matters, a task that since 1870 has been administered by the Library of Congress; collecting and publishing agricultural information; and even collecting meteorological data. For some years, it was the custodian not only of the famous old Patent Office models—the delight of visitors to Washington for many years—but of the Declaration of Independence and other historical documents and relics.

By publishing and distributing copies of every U.S. patent, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office has made available to the public the world's greatest scientific and mechanical library.

Patents in Brief

If you plan to file an application, you or your representative should make a search of patents previously granted to make sure that your idea has not already been patented. You may do this at the Public Search Facility of the Patent and Trademark Office, Madison East – 1st Floor, 600 Dulany St., Alexandria, Virginia. Hours are 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Monday through Friday except holidays. More limited searches may be made at Patent and Trademark Depository Libraries located throughout the country. The patent application process can be complex, and the Patent and Trademark Office cannot assist in the preparation of application papers. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office strongly advises prospective applicants to engage the services of a patent attorney or agent. Although the USPTO cannot recommend any particular attorney or agent and does not control their fees, the Office maintains a roster of approximately 31,000 patent attorneys and agents registered to practice before the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. This roster is available for inspection at Patent and Trademark Depository Libraries, for sale by the Superintendent of Documents at the Government Printing Office, or may be accessed on the web (www.uspto.gov).

For complete patent information, visit the web site www.uspto.gov, call 800-786-9199 or 703-308-4357

Print Resources

- Carrow, Robert S. *Put a Fan In Your Hat: Inventions, Contraptions, and Gadgets Kids Can Build*. New York: Learning Triangle Press, 1997.
- Carrow, Robert S. *Turn On the Lights—From Bed: Inventions, Contraptions, and Gadgets Kids Can Build*. New York: Learning Triangle Press, 1997.
- Erlbach, Arlene. *The Kids' Invention Book*. New York: Lerner Publications, 1997.
- Hauser, Jill Frankel. *Gizmos & Gadgets: Creating Science Contraptions That Work & Knowing Why*. New York: Williamson Publishers, 1999.
- Murphy, Jim. *Weird and Wacky Inventions*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1978.
- St. George, Judith, and David Small. *So You Want to Be an Inventor?* New York: Penguin Putnam, 2002.
- Thimmesh, Catherine. *Girls Think of Everything—Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Tomecek, Stephen M. *What a Great Idea! Inventions That Changed the World*. New York: Scholastic, 2003.

For more print resources go to www.bkfk.com/toolkit/print_resources

