Searching for patents
How patent information can help with your technical, legal and business decisions
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 Server 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.

All these online services are free of charge.

You can access all the legal information products mentioned above on our website: www.epo.org/searching
“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checking the legal status information provided by the EPO, I was able to establish that one patent application had been withdrawn, and another had been granted but had lapsed because the renewal fees had not been paid.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 was 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.”