

How to check for existing patents

There are two good reasons why you should conduct a search to see whether a similar invention has already been developed or published, before you apply for or market your invention:

1. Checking both New Zealand and overseas patents can help you decide whether to continue with your invention. There is no point in applying for a patent if your invention is not original or may be seen as an obvious improvement over an existing technology;
2. It can also alert you to the possibility that your invention may infringe an existing patent. The owner of that patent could take legal action against you should you try to use or continue with it.

As well as searching existing and previous patents, you should make a point of searching any relevant journals, magazines or textbooks. They may reveal a similar invention.

Where can I find information on patents and inventions?

- Start by [searching the IPONZ database](#) of New Zealand patents. If you need help please [contact us](#).
- Use Internet search engines to identify international patent databases you can search for overseas patents. For example the [United States Patents and Trade mark Office](#), the [World Intellectual Property Office](#) and the [European Patent Office](#).
- In addition to New Zealand patents, IPONZ offers a range of overseas patent information. See our collection of [New Zealand accession dates for US patent specifications on microfilm](#). Alternatively complete the [online information request form](#) to order publicly available documents that have not been published on our website.
- Contact or visit a library. New Zealand libraries hold a wide range of technical material and trained librarians who can assist you in your search.

Though the database includes the records of all current patents, patents pending application and many ceased patents, most of the records prior to 1983 are not available on this database. A search for these records can be carried out on request by completing the [Information request form](#).

Patent search tips

The search strategies used for patent searching are in most cases the same as those used for trade marks. Here are some basic tips (for more detailed information consult the [Trade Mark Online Searching Training Guide](#)).

The first two sections in the [patent search](#) screen contain the most useful fields for initial searches. They are Search all fields and Basic search fields.

1. Search all fields

Search all fields searches every part of the database.

- Leave the Case Sensitive flag set to “No” unless you specifically want to search for a word(s) in a combination of upper and lower case.
- The “wildcards” * and ? can be used to broaden a search. The * symbol represents zero to any number of characters and the ? symbol represents one character.
- Each wildcard can be placed anywhere in a word to widen the search e.g. f?re* will return patents with titles containing keywords such as fares, forensic, firearms, fire-retardant etc.
- When you enter names such as owner or inventor names, always follow with an asterisk e.g. Smith*.
- The search will be progressively restricted if you enter information in more than one field.

2. Basic search text

This section is useful if you have more information about a patent, such as the owner’s or inventor’s name or the New Zealand number of the patent.

3. Keywords

Use this third section if you have more specific criteria. The Build and Choose buttons on the right help you to construct a search and to learn the search syntax. Each button is unique to the adjacent field.

- To conduct a class search for patents, enter the International Patent Class (IPC) number (or list of numbers, separated by a comma) in the Classes field. Please note a Class Description is NOT required for this search.
- If you are not sure of the exact number, you can enter part of the number (with asterisk preceding or after e.g. *a61k39*) under Search all fields to see all instances where this number string occurs.

For further search assistance see the HELP button in the top right hand corner of the [online services section](#) of our site.