Search for existing patents

Searching for an existing patent before making an application is a good idea. It can save you time and money, and can also provide inspiration or historical information.

Search patent cases

The Search Patent Cases screen is used throughout our case management facility to:

- perform general searches for patents that are granted or have been granted in New Zealand, using any of the queries that you enter into the search page,
- search for a case you have an interest in, if you want to conduct business with us concerning a patent application or registration. Once you have selected from the menu what it is you want to do, you'll be presented with a Search Patent Cases screen to search for and identify the patents of interest.

Search results

If the search finds:

- only one case, the screen for that case relevant to the context of the search will be displayed,
- more than one case, a list of search results will be displayed beneath the search query. Select the underlined case number to display the details of a case.

Is your patent already registered?

Before you start a new application, you should check that your invention has not already been patented.

Searching for an existing patent is a good way to:

- find out whether your invention is new or if the problem it tackles has been solved another way,
- see what inventions your competitors have protected, or applied to protect,
- get an idea of how to draft your specification,
- discover how technology has evolved over time, and
- find out whether your invention infringes an existing patent. If you market an invention that already has a patent the owner of that patent can take legal action against you.

How to search for patents

How you search for patent information will depend on your goals and what you know already. Your search could be focussed on the relevant technology, the markets you are interested in, or perhaps what your competitors have protected.

For example, researching an invention can involve keyword or classification searches on different databases. This type of research can take time and be complex. In contrast, searching for an existing patent can be simple if you know the country and have a reference number.
Patent classification

To make searching easier, every patent is classified by its subject matter. Patent classification schemes have a tree-like structure, and every level of classification has a unique reference code. Inventions are grouped into technologies (eg engineering), divided into classes (eg mechanical engineering), and then into subclasses (eg machines or equipment for baking).

The two main classification schemes used by patent offices worldwide are:

- The International Patent Classification (IPC). There are approximately 70,000 different IPC codes. You can browse the class headings and conduct keyword searches on the WIPO website IPC page. We use this classification system.
- The Cooperative Patent Classification (CPC) is an extension of the IPC. It’s jointly managed by the European Patent Office and the United States Trademark and Patent Office.

Searching using classification codes

Classification codes can be a useful tool when researching inventions. Keyword searches alone (for example) can lead to very large numbers of results. Using classification codes together with keyword searches can help you focus results to a more manageable level.

Typically, searchers will prepare a list of keywords that describe the invention and identify relevant classification codes. Top level classifications are useful when the same term can be used to describe an invention in different technology areas (eg a computer mouse versus a mouse trap). Lower order classifications can be useful to narrow a search where a large number of documents are retrieved (eg selecting a subclass code to find electric powered mouse traps).

Where to search for patents

Existing patents

Information about existing patents can be found in a number of places, including libraries, government registries and subscriber databases. For free online searching, patent office databases are a good place to start.

National and multi-national patent collections include:

- AusPat, which is supported by IP Australia and contains the Australian Patent Register.
- Espacenet, which is supported by the European Patent Office and contains a number of patent office collections.
- Patentscope, which is supported by WIPO and provides access to Patent Cooperation Treaty applications.
- PatFT and AppFT, which is supported by the United States Patent and Trademark Office. The US Register is divided into patent and application databases.
- SIPO database, which provides access to patents issued in the People's Republic of China. The database includes English translations.

For more patent office databases, see the WIPO list of Patent Office databases.

Note: Search results become outdated quickly, as new applications are constantly being published and new patents are granted. We recommend that you update searches before filing an application or launching products into a new market area.

Historic patents
Archives New Zealand has a collection of historic patent, trade mark and design documents sourced from the New Zealand government:

- [Archives New Zealand National Office and Regional Reading Rooms](#)
- [Archives New Zealand Archway search engine](#)

Contact Archives New Zealand if you wish to access the collection of patent records from 1861 through to 50 years before today.

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### Searching the New Zealand Patent Register

We provide an online tool to search the New Zealand Patent Register and our collection of published New Zealand patent abstracts or IPONZ summary information dating back to 1861 (excluding the period from 1880 to 1890).

**Help with your search**

The patent search allows you to construct search strings and search a wider range of parameters/fields. Information on the range of operators and wildcards you can use to do this is included in the [Search Guide](#). We recommend you read this guide before starting your search.

If you’re searching the New Zealand Patent Register for archived patents, see [Searching for archived NZ patents - Pre 1980](#).

### Information open for public inspection in New Zealand

All patents, and some patent applications, are published by IPONZ. The names and contact details for the owner, inventor, appointed agent and title of the invention are published on our website when the application is made.

Generally the description of the invention and examination reports will be viewable 18 months from the earliest priority date under the Patents Act 2013. Published patent specifications will be marked with a code that indicates the type of publication.

For applications made under the Patents Act 1953, the specification of the invention is available online after the application has been accepted and notified in the IPONZ Journal.