

## **Practical Innovation: Patent Searching**

You've got a great idea for a new and innovative product or process that you are sure is going to be very successful - and you want to protect it by taking out a patent. A good place to start is with a patent search.

A patent search enables you to look through all the patents that have been published to find out if the inventive elements of your idea are already known and to help you find ideas that are similar to yours – whether they have eventually become products or not. Patent searching can save you time, money and disappointment - by finding out early if there are existing patents, you have the opportunity to modify or improve your idea.

When it comes to patent searching, you have several options:

1. Do it largely yourself using an online computer search such as Espacenet.
2. Use the full search services of the Intellectual Property Office's Search and Advisory Service. Options vary and this is a chargeable service.
3. Use a patent agent - but remember to discuss fees first, as this can be an expensive option.

Your Innovation Manager can advise and direct you to the most appropriate option for you, or refer you to one of the specialist Intellectual Property Managers who can provide detailed support and guidance.

Why not start by doing your own initial patent search using the free online patents database, Espacenet at [http://ep.espacenet.com/advancedSEarch?locale=en\\_EP](http://ep.espacenet.com/advancedSEarch?locale=en_EP)

By simply adding search terms into the second keywords box, it is possible to search the titles of millions of patent documents worldwide. The Espacenet assistant offers a number of online tutorials to guide you through the searching process.

Whilst this is not an exhaustive piece of research, it will enable you to find out what ideas and products already exist, may help you solve problems you are trying to tackle and can also provide you with useful technical information to further develop your initial idea.

What information can you find, to help you with your new product development?