



Patent landscaping: the road to success

by Joanne van Harmelen

Patent landscaping analysis, or patent mapping, involves the electronic search and analysis of the vast amount of available online published patent data in order to extract meaningful and valuable technical, business and legal information.

For any entity that involved in research and development or that plans to invest in a technology, from start-ups to large corporates, academic institutions or investors, this information can vastly improve its ability to make decisions relating to intellectual asset management, including relating to project planning, the direction of basic research and development, intellectual property (“IP”) protection, management and enforcement and investment into projects and products.

Interestingly, certain sources have stated that around 80% of science and technology information contained in patents is not published anywhere else. This means that if merely non-patent literature such as scientific articles is considered in a search strategy, only a small amount of the relevant information can be obtained. Because of this, the European Commission estimates that up to 30% of research and development activity is wasted on existing technical solutions already developed.

The results generated from a patent landscaping search provide a wealth of information including:

- gaining a current awareness of the existing technologies (“state of the art”) that will allow for the development, improvement or modification of technology
- an understanding of what research and development has already been undertaken in a particular technology field so as to avoid “reinventing the wheel”
- identification of risks and pitfalls in technology development have been experienced by others, so that these can be avoided or solutions identified
- identification of which areas in a field of technology are “hot spots” for research and development and/or where “patent thickets” exist, resulting in a quagmire of possible patent infringement in that space
- on the other hand, it is possible to identify possible “white space” gaps in the landscape where there are opportunities for research and development
- identification of patent owners or assignees in various technology fields allows for possible collaboration through open innovation, possible acquisition of technology or businesses of interest, and for investment
- an understanding of who the competitors are in the space and by analysing the patent filing trends of competitors in the market, together with market research, it is possible to identify the commercial phase of the technology (early stage, mature or declining)
- identification of possible inventors in the technology space that might be recruited to an organisation
- information that will allow government policy makers to consider areas for research and development funding.

It is important to keep up-to-date with developments in science and technology. A useful way to do this is through a patent watch service in order to monitor changes to the patent landscape once the relevant results have been identified and analysed (we would recommend quarterly updates in order to best make informed decisions on current information).

Detailed, high-quality patent landscaping search can be structured by the type of search that is to be performed so that one is chosen that is affordable for a business. An understanding of the patent landscape is key to save research and development costs and is likely reduce time to market for products developed. The money saved can then be applied to other aspects of the business.

ENSafrica's patent attorneys are highly experienced in their fields and are able to assist with an array of possible patent landscaping searches using the proprietary database Questel Orbit® to suit your needs and cost structure.

For assistance, or any further information regarding patent landscaping searches, please don't hesitate to contact us.



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