

Description

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Every researcher hopes that their work is essential, innovative, and perhaps most importantly, unique. After all, repeating work that others have already done is a waste of valuable time and resources. This is particularly true if you are planning to apply for a patent. Here are a few real-life stories to highlight the problems that can result from failing to carry out a patent search along with the literature review.

> “I worked with a team of top researchers in cutting-edge technology. They developed what they thought was a unique invention. But a quick search found that the invention had already been patented by someone else. Years of research time and funding wasted.”

> “Our invention was unique, but we discovered that a crucial part of it had already been patented. We had to choose between paying to license the technology or starting from scratch.”

> “In my Ph.D. research, I spent months trying to create a particular compound. I then discovered, by chance, that a large company already made it. They gave me some, for free! I could have saved so much time and money if I had known about it sooner.”

Include Patents in your Literature Review

A patent is a way of protecting an invention. It awards rights to the inventor and stops others claiming ownership of the technology. With so much time and money at stake, why do academic researchers

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fail to search for patents before they start their research work?

One reason is that inventions are often registered as patents but never reported in a journal. However, researchers in academia mostly search only the existing literature. After years in a particular field, a researcher might feel very familiar with the work. On the contrary, researchers in the industry rarely publish journal articles due to time and money constraints. Instead, they focus on applying for patents to protect their inventions.

Problems with Patent Searching

Until recently, searching for patents was difficult for most people. Patent offices such as the European Patent Office (EPO) and the US Patent and Trademarks Office (USPTO) offer free access. However, these databases are not easy to search. Only simple search terms can be used, and many patents are written in complicated legal language. Additionally, some patents are recorded in a non-text format; e.g. images or gene sequences. To carry out a proper search, you need to understand how patents are written and organized.

New Ways to Search Patents

Some new services have made searching patents easier for researchers. Google Patents offers free access to data from seven patent offices. This can be searched using complex search strings, and results can be filtered. Some paid services offer more comprehensive ways to search the databases, giving researchers a better chance of discovering relevant patents. One such service is LifeQuest.

Importance of Patent Searching in Academic Research

It is necessary for academic researchers to carry out a patent search before they begin. Here are a few more reasons why you should:

- Save money: Around 30% of R&D budgets go waste on developing inventions that already exist!
- Research Data: Don’t miss relevant data found in patents only, not in journal articles.
- Find better information: Companies patent inventions that they think are valuable, and they do it quickly. So it might be worthwhile for you, too.
- Use inventions for free: Patents expire after 20 years, which means anyone can use the invention. Moreover, even if the patent is still valid, there may be a provision to use it in research.
- Assist in applying for a patent on your research: Searching patents can help you find out what others in your field are doing, and confirm if your work is unique. This is the first step towards filing your patent application.

Need even more information on patents? Find some here. Would you search for patents during the literature survey? Let us know in the comments below.

Category

1. Publishing Research

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2. Understanding Ethics

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