

Obtaining protection for your intellectual property can be expensive, and patent costs increase with time. Lone inventors and start-up companies usually need to find financial backers, and the ideal time to approach these is in the first year after filing the patent. The filed patent makes it difficult for others to steal your idea and shows that you are serious. After the first year the costs start to escalate. Government funding may be available for start-up companies but some forms of help can have “strings attached”. For example, you may have to share some of your profits or set up a business within a defined geographical area. There are also firms known as Invention Promoters who offer to help evaluate, develop and market your idea, usually for a large fee. Be very careful about using the services of such companies, or you may find you have made a costly mistake.

Conversations with professional advisers such as patent attorneys, solicitors or patent office staff are usually confidential as these professions have a legal duty of confidentiality, but make sure you have an appropriate confidentiality agreement before disclosing your idea to anyone else. Even with professional advisors it is worth checking that they do actually owe you a legal duty of confidentiality!

## Conclusions

This chapter provides an introduction to intellectual property, together with some pointers to help you find more information. The four key points to remember are:

- 1 An idea may be patentable, but that doesn't mean that it has any commercial value.
- 2 Obtain competent professional legal advice in good time and certainly before disclosing your “great idea” to people not bound by confidentiality.
- 3 You need to consider a range of protection tools, not just patents.
- 4 Infringing other people's rights or missing an opportunity to protect your new product could weaken or even destroy your business.

## References

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## Appendix: Useful web addresses

Web addresses can change, but the following list was correct at time of writing. If the address has changed, the new address should be possible to find by using an internet search engine.

- United Kingdom Intellectual Property Office: [www.ipo.gov.uk](http://www.ipo.gov.uk)
- European Patent Office: [www.epo.org](http://www.epo.org)
- United States Patent and Trademark Office: [www.uspto.gov](http://www.uspto.gov)
- World Intellectual Property Organisation: [www.wipo.int](http://www.wipo.int)
- European Patent Office searchable database *Espacenet*: [www.epo.org/searching/free/espacenet.html](http://www.epo.org/searching/free/espacenet.html)
- European Union Intellectual Property Office: [euipo.europa.eu](http://euipo.europa.eu)
- The Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property: [www.ige.ch](http://www.ige.ch)
- Japan Patent Office: [www.jpo.go.jp](http://www.jpo.go.jp)
- The Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys (a UK professional body): [www.cipa.org.uk](http://www.cipa.org.uk)
- Institute of Professional Representatives before the European Patent Office: [www.patentepi.com](http://www.patentepi.com)
- The Institute of Trade Mark Attorneys (a UK professional body): [www.itma.org.uk](http://www.itma.org.uk)