

10 Steps to Protect Your Great Idea

Got a Great Idea? Follow these First Steps

By Alan Tratner, SCORE Counselor from Santa Barbara, CA

1. Put all your ideas, notes and drawings in an inventor's journal, and have it signed, witnessed and dated. Be careful about disclosing your ideas to anyone—use a confidentiality or non-disclosure document when discussing your ideas.
2. Decide whether to file a provisional patent application with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. For more information on the benefits and how to file, visit the USPTO Web site at <http://www.uspto.gov>.
3. Conduct a Preliminary Patentability. Search to discover what patents exist like your ideas—and get a patent attorney to render you a Patentability Opinion. There are many ways to conduct the search, including the Patent Depository Libraries on the uspto.gov Web site. File a PTO Provisional Patent Application for one year if all looks good.
4. Make a model, demo or illustration and conduct preliminary market research with end-users. Know the consumers of your product, and listen to feedback. Use feedback to fine tune your project.
5. Investigate intellectual property filings such as utility and design patents in the United States and overseas. Also investigate copyrights, trademarks, service marks and domain name registrations for Web sites. Explore U.S. and international protection options and limitations.
6. Think about the two main pathways to inventing success: entrepreneurship or licensing—how do you want to be rewarded for your great ideas? The pathway you choose will dictate a lot of your actions—and budget.
7. Do not fall prey to invention development/promotion scams, which are prevalent. Check with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for a list of these unscrupulous firms. If their promises sound too good to be true, they probably are. Get real professional help and seek the support of legitimate inventor organizations.
8. Investigate competitive products to make your product superior or better priced. Employ brainstorming techniques to evolve and accelerate the marketability of your ideas.
9. Find an [inventor mentor](#)—some one who's done this process before—to provide guidance.
10. Believe in your ideas and persevere—it takes some time and effort to do all this right. Be realistic about your goals and good luck.

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