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Reaching the next Edison

Marketing your patent and trademark collection¹

A patent and trademark depository library (PTDL) houses more than 200 years of patent and trademark information making it a valuable collection for both the public and the library housing it. The resources of a PTDL prove crucial to the success of cash-strapped small businesses and independent inventors who can not afford to pay a third party for patent and trademark searches. However, a patent and trademark collection is not just for the use of inventors. The United States Patent and Trademark Office's (USPTO) Web page reads, Patent trends reflect the rise and ebb of society's ever changing interests, habits, concerns, fads, and foibles.² Teachers, scientists, researchers, historians, genealogists, and many others with a simple curiosity about a household item use patents. The library benefits, of course, through increased usage and visibility.

In order to become a PTDL, a library must pay a yearly fee of \$50, acquire and maintain a backlog of at least 20 years, provide free access to the materials, and actively disseminate patent and trademark information.³ But in order for the public to use this collection, they must first know it exists. Therefore PTDLs need to actively market their unique collection. So the question arises, how does one go about marketing the library's patent and trademark collection? This article highlights a few methods of marketing a PTDL that the author has used with success in the past.

Patent and trademark workshops

Holding a workshop to instruct users on searching the online patent and trademark databases and the CASSIS workstation is one of the best ways to market a PTDL. Not only

does a workshop advertise the library's vast patent and trademark collection, but it also allows the patent librarian a chance to teach would-be inventors and entrepreneurs the proper method of searching patent and trademark databases. A good patent and trademark workshop should not just cover basic search techniques, but give a general introduction to patents, trademarks, and intellectual property, including topics such as a definition and explanation of patents and trademarks, the rights and protections granted by patent and trademarks, and how to proceed after a comprehensive search is completed.

One challenge for academic libraries holding these workshops is effective advertising. Although most colleges and universities allow members of the general public to use their library, the majority of library patrons are students, faculty, and staff of the university. In order to reach other interested people, it is wise to post flyers in as many places as possible throughout the community. Try hanging posters in local public libraries, community centers, malls, or anywhere people congregate. Remember, a potential inventor can be anywhere. Also, place an announcement on the library's Web page and in the local newspapers. Many newspapers have a community events section and allow announcements to be placed for little or no fee.

Once the workshop is complete, remember to get feedback from the participants. Find out what they liked and disliked about the presentation, what helped them the most, and what

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they would like to see changed. Also, poll the attendees to learn how they heard about the workshop. This can make future advertising of workshops more successful.

Small business associations

Working closely with a small business association is a brilliant way to market a PTDL collection. Small businesses are an extremely important part of the U.S. economy. They employ over half of the U.S. workforce, and small business associations (SBA) work closely with them to provide a plethora of help and advice.⁴ Most small businesses will require a trademark or service mark for their company or brand name. Many will also require one or more patents for their business. Small businesses combined with independent inventors account for almost 37 percent of all patent applications originating in the United States and 55 percent of important innovations.⁵ An SBA can direct small business owners to your PTDL to receive the help they need. In turn, your library gains repeat users.

Getting in with library outreach

Another excellent way to spread the word about a PTDL is through library outreach. Although outreach differs from library to library, in most cases it involves library representatives going out into the community to form partnerships and popularize the library's many resources. Make sure that the PTDL collection is mentioned on all library outreach handouts. Find time to visit the local inventor's club and provide plenty of information about the services a PTDL offers and how to contact the patent librarian. Inventor's clubs provide a unique opportunity to network among aspiring inventors. Many people have an interest in researching and learning about patents, but they do not know where to go for that information. Library outreach is a tremendous way to let them know about the unique resources offered at a PTDL.

Form partnerships with area libraries

Forming partnerships with other local librar-

ies is a smart way to market your PTDL collection. Make certain that other area libraries know that your library is a PTDL, and give them the name and contact information of the patent librarian so they may refer patrons to your collection. Get permission to post flyers in those libraries advertising the fact that your library is a PTDL and the dates and times of your workshops. Also offer to hold workshops in neighboring libraries for patrons who are unable to attend those held at your library.

Conclusion

The PTDL program is a wonderful way to make patent and trademark information freely available to the public. But in order for the program to succeed, libraries must effectively market their PTDL collection. A PTDL can market its collection by holding workshops, working closely with small business associations, getting involved with library outreach, and forming partnerships with local libraries. With proper marketing, a PTDL can not only increase library usage, but create lifelong library users, as well. A patent and trademark collection attracts a wide assortment of clientele and represents the true spirit of American ingenuity. A patron looking for patent and trademark information today could be a patron looking for a good book tomorrow.

Notes

1. This was originally presented as a poster session at the Florida Library Association's Annual Conference in Daytona Beach, Florida, March 2004.

2. United States Patent and Trademark Office, *Patents: The Collection for all Reasons*, www.uspto.gov/go/ptdl/patreaso.htm, August 4, 2004.

3. United States Patent and Trademark Office, *PTDLP Overview*, www.uspto.gov/go/ptdl/ptdlgen.htm, August 4, 2004.

4. Donald Kelly, *Inventors Bound for Global Markets*, ALA Annual Conference, Orlando, Florida, June 26, 2004.

5. Ibid. *zz*