How to Conduct a Preliminary U.S. Patent Search

Database: USPTO Web Patent Database

Search Strategy: Classification search

Content:
- 1790- Present: Scanned images of patents are available & searchable by current U.S. patent classification, patent number and issue date
- 1976- Present: Text searchable
- 2001-Present: Published patent applications

Recommended Patent Search Strategy

1. Brainstorm keywords to describe the invention
   a. What does it do?
      i. The essential function of the invention.
   b. What is the end result?
      i. The essential effect or basic product resulting from the invention.
   c. What is it made of?
      i. The physical structure of the invention.
   d. What is it used for?
      i. The intended use for the invention.
   e. What problem(s) does it solve?
      i. What key problem does it resolve?

2. Use brainstormed keywords to find initial class/subclass combinations in the Index to the U.S. Patent Classification
   a. Go to the Index to the U.S. Patent Classification website
      http://www.uspto.gov/web/patents/classification/uspcindex/indextouspc.htm
   b. Multi-step:
      i. Locate each keyword generated from the brainstorm (step 1)
      ii. Record class and subclass numbers for each keyword term
      iii. A plus sign + following a subclass indicates that additional subclasses may be relevant

3. Verify the relevancy of class/subclasses using the Classification Schedule
   a. Look in the class schedule for all the class/subclasses identified in step 2

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b. See where subclasses suggested by the Index fall in the schedule

c. Subclasses are not always in numerical order

4. Confirm the scope of subclasses using the Classification Definitions
   a. Read the corresponding subclass definitions to establish the scope of subclass(es) relevant to the search
   b. Definitions also include “See” references that will point to additional appropriate classes and subclasses

5. Retrieve complete patent documents and published applications by classification
   a. Click red P icon: Retrieve the list of patent numbers and titles for all the patents within the subclass
   b. Click blue A: Retrieve published application

6. Review complete patent documents and published applications
   a. Review each patent/patent application associated with classification:
      i. Title
      ii. Abstract
      iii. Drawings
      iv. Description of Drawings
      v. Summary
      vi. Description of Invention

7. Retrieve and review cited references from relevant patents