How to Become a Patent Information Professional

The following is a summary of responses to an inquiry that I made to the PIUG discussion email list in August 2008. This page is intended to provide information to newer information professionals with an interest in patent information and who are considering making patent information a major part of their career. In addition to this summary, I have also provided links directly to some of the more in-depth responses that I received, so that you can see how some current practitioners responded. Please feel free to make additions or corrections, or contact me and I will make the additions/corrections for you.

- Currently there are no concrete requirements or certifications for becoming a professional patent searcher. This may change over the next few years.
- It helps to have a degree in Library/Information Science and a bachelors or advanced degree in the technical area appropriate to the type of patent searching you're interested in (usually mechanical, electrical, biological, or chemical engineering).
- For chemical and biological searching, it helps to have a masters or PhD in the subject area, but this is not usually the case for mechanical and electrical.
- Basic knowledge of patent law is useful. Some patent agents later become professional searchers (and vice-versa). Their knowledge of patent law is highly beneficial for helping clients evaluate patent information. However it is not a requirement for searchers to have been agents or to know patent law.
- Should have an understanding of the various patent search types and how to determine the appropriate search type based on a client's needs (don't expect the client to know). Search types include Novelty, Validity, Infringement, Freedom to Operate, and State-of-the-Art.
- Should have experience with several patent and non-patent technical literature databases, as well as understanding of a variety of patent documents (issued patents, patent applications, file wrappers, other procedural filings) and how to search for them.
- Should enjoy reading patents, not merely tolerate working with them.
- Fluency in one or more of the following languages, besides English is useful: German, Japanese, and Chinese; other languages may also be useful.
- Should have professional indemnity insurance for their safety, but this is not required. Patent searchers being held legally liable for 'malpractice' is practically unheard of (one respondent pointed out one case where a searcher was sued for overlooking a very obvious piece of prior art -- see Practitioner Response A, below)

Practitioner Response A
Practitioner Response B
Practitioner Response C
Practitioner Response D

Several responses to my inquiry were to inform me of specialized training programs available for those interested in becoming professional patent searchers. These seem to range from programs for the beginner with little or no knowledge of patent information to advanced seminars for continuing education. This has given me the idea to create another page here on the wiki listing such programs. That will be available in the near future.

Additional Articles and References