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"Protection and access to innovation through the Net:
An environment for technological progress.
Patents, trade marks, design"

Information services for companies and higher education institutions provided by PATON, the regional patent information centre of Ilmenau Technical University, with special emphasis on the use and creation of Internet services

1. Network of German Patent Information Centres (PIZ)

A network of more than 20 Patent Information Centres exists in Germany (Fig. 1).

These centres are cooperating closely with the German Patent and Trade Mark Office (DPMA) to ensure good conditions for regional information supply.

PATON in Ilmenau is one among 13 centres which belong to institutions of higher education.

2. Prime functions of the PATON Patent Information Centre

PATON is an information and training centre run by Ilmenau Technical University.

It is also the central office of the Thuringian Higher Education Patent Network which attends to eight higher education institutions and six research institutes (Fig. 2).

PATON acts as the official Patent Information Centre and patent receiving office for business and research in the Free State of Thuringia.

The regional centre has contributed to achieving a continuous increase in the number of patent and utility model applications received by the DPMA (Fig. 3).

PATON's organizational set-up has been consolidated to ensure the performance of its prime functions (Fig. 4).

The centre has five departments:

- Search department (literature, patent and business searches)
- Patent consulting centre (patent library, user searches, inventor promotion and patent reception)
- Host and network services (patent database build-up, delivery of full patent texts, network operation)
- Patent exploitation office
- Training centre for specialist and patent information, and for the protection of industrial property

This set-up has enabled the centre to manage the chain of "inform-invent-patent-exploit", and provide assistance on a continuous basis.

3. Service modifications as a result of CD ROM and internet technology implementation

The implementation of CD ROM technology starting in 1990 has resulted in the streamlining and in a higher user friendliness of regional services.

But services remained tied to a particular location as users still had to come to a regional centre to solve all patent-related questions.

But the speedy introduction of internet technology led to more fundamental changes beginning especially in the year 2000.

In part, services were no longer tied to a specific site and users could do without the regional Patent Information Centre to carry out user searches or look for full patent texts. The number of visitors declined accordingly (Fig. 5).

Patent Information Centres have to react and prove their commitment in order to be successful and survive.

PATON as the Thuringian Centre has drawn two essential conclusions (Fig. 6):

- a. Expand local services to reach a more comprehensive level including patent consulting by patent attorneys, patent promotion, patent reception and patent exploitation
- b. Create and expand supra-regional services such as internet databases, internet full text delivery and searches by order

The partnership relations between regional Patent Information Centres will be deepened on the road to expanding comprehensive services.

But a relation marked by competition is emerging in some branches with regard to the performance of supra-regional services, e.g., when supplying full texts through the internet. This may lead to tensions.

4. Creation and use of information services in PATON

Databases on science, technology, patents, business and legal matters and the electronic patent library, are made available to the users largely free of charge in the reading room of PATON. They can be accessed either on CD ROM or through the internet (Fig. 7).

Recently, we have been stepping up user searches through the integrated DEPATISnet, espacenet and epline systems.

We are making an effort to train users in the comprehensive use of DEPATISnet offered by the DPMA (Fig. 8).

During the further development of our own services, we are focussing on internet solutions and online searches carried out by order.

To qualify Internet services of our own

A starting point for this are the patent databases available in our centre up until now (Fig. 9).

Another starting point is PATONline, our electronic full text delivery system (Fig. 10) which contains more than 11 million patent full texts.

At present, we are supplying more than 150000 full texts per year (Fig. 11).

GlobalPat may be used as an example for the PATON databases existing until now (Fig. 12).

Searches can be performed easily in all fields covered.

Full text delivery is directly linked to the search result (Fig. 13).

Full patent texts are made available even in languages which are difficult to access (Fig. 14).

Our developments are not competing with the systems of the Patent Offices such as DEPATISnet and espacenet or databases such as WPI.

They are used as a supplement.

To serve our users, we are creating an internet patent database covering a restricted scope of countries, but allowing selected patent statistical evaluations.

The aim is to enable users to take advantage of this database and obtain key information at the start of development projects. Such information refers, e.g., to the highest ranking scientists and technicians, companies, and priority countries, etc. (Fig. 17).

A linkage between simple rankings concerning the patent activity of companies and world-wide competition can be used as a basis for patent portfolios (Fig. 18).

This approach corresponds to the recommendations we are giving to the users: Make statistical analyses first, and detailed searches later on.

Some specialists forego patent information and their statistical evaluation. But they are overlooking at least two fundamental advantages provided by patent information:

- a. Completeness
- b. Early availability.

In terms of content, patent information is not necessarily better than other information.

But it gives signals which reach us between 6 and 7 years earlier than others.

This is the very point as a cutting edge in time is a cutting edge in competition (see Fig. 8).

To qualify our online searches by order using commercial databases like WPI, etc.

The number of our clients and their search orders is limited by the capacity of the searchers working in our centre (Fig. 15).

The numbers have remained almost constant for a number of years.

The ratio between the client number from companies and higher education institutions has also remained almost constant.

They are using our centre at the same proportion.

But these clients present a clear difference regarding the ratio of patent and literature searches (Fig. 16).

In companies, the proportion of patent searches is 87 %. For higher education institutions, this part is only 37 % with literature searches prevailing at a rate of 52 %.

The part of business searches is the same for companies and higher education institutions. It is 10 % for both client categories.

As far as the comprehensive utilization of commercial databases is concerned, we are aiming at supplementing searches by statistical analyses to a higher degree.

At present, we are developing and testing two statistical programs of our own. The essential features of these programs are based on the linkage between scientific, technical, patent and business databases such as, e.g., SCI, INSPEC, WPI, DPCI and PROMT.

We are trying to introduce computer-assisted standard statistics at a reasonable cost and as a normal part of search reports in the future.

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