

New pilot survey reveals importance of intellectual property

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The National Science Foundation and the U.S. Census Bureau co-sponsored this data collection as part of a revamped and expanded Business R&D and Innovation Survey, which collects information from a nationally representative sample of about 40,000 companies. Credit: Thinkstock

New survey results indicate that trademarks and trade secrets are the most important forms of intellectual property (IP) protection according to most businesses, followed by copyrights and patents.

The findings shed light on the importance businesses place on various types of IP protection for their companies. Specifically, during 2008, they reported whether utility patents, design patents, trademarks, [copyrights](#), [trade secrets](#) and mask works--copyright protection for semiconductor products--were "very important," "somewhat important," or "not important."

IP protections are granted to the owners of a variety of intangible assets, such as discoveries and inventions; musical, literary and artistic works; and symbols, names, images and designs used in commerce.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) and the U.S. [Census Bureau](#) co-sponsored this data collection as part of a revamped and expanded Business R&D and Innovation Survey (BRDIS). The BRDIS collects information from a nationally representative sample of about 40,000 companies, including companies in both manufacturing and nonmanufacturing industries.

Overall, 15 percent of all businesses reported trademarks as either very important or somewhat important to their business in 2008; that is 6 percent said trademarks were very important, while 9 percent said they were somewhat important.

Fourteen percent of surveyed businesses reported trade secrets as very important or somewhat important at 6 percent and 8 percent respectively.

But, because each form of intellectual property protection is specialized, the percentages are not additive across types. A trade secret, for example, provides economic benefit by keeping information from being publicly known, whereas a trademark protects economic value through name or brand recognition. Therefore, a single firm could identify both of these forms as important to its business.

"Much of today's business derives its competitive advantage from the ability to protect and exploit exclusive rights over investments in [intellectual property](#)," said John Jankowski, lead author of the report in NSF's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. "Hence, IP protection is a persistent and recurrent concern of businesses."

Meanwhile, 12 percent of U.S.-located businesses identified copyrights as important, and businesses indicated that design patents and utility patents are important forms of IP protection, at 5 percent and 4 percent respectively.

In another finding, mask works, which provide extremely focused [copyright protection](#) for semiconductor products, were reported as very or somewhat important by 2 percent of all businesses.

More information: For more information from this survey, see Business Use of Intellectual Property Protection Documented in NSF Survey: [www.nsf.gov/statistics/infbrie ... sf12307/nsf12307.pdf](http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/infbrie...sf12307/nsf12307.pdf)

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