

Internet rights champions call for US patent reform

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The US Patent and Trademark Office, pictured in 2006, in Alexandria, Virginia. Internet rights group Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) on Tuesday launched a campaign to reform the US patent system, which it argued has been "weaponized" to attack inventors.

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"The software patent system is broken," EFF staff attorney Julie Samuels said in a release.

"Patents are supposed to help promote new inventions and ideas, but software patents are chronically misused to limit competition, quash [new tools](#) and products, and shake down companies big and small."

San Francisco-based EFF called on [Internet users](#), inventors, academics and activists to join forces to fix flawed patent rules.

Seven proposed changes and an invitation for people to endorse the effort and provide feedback were posted online at a Defendinnovation.org website.

Recommendations included trimming the life of a patent from 20 years to five and having Congress examine whether software patents help the economy at all.

The EFF also suggested letting winners in lawsuits recover legal costs from losers as a way of discouraging "patent trolls" from pursuing tenuous claims.

The term is a reference to people or companies that get patents and sit on them with the intent to one day squeeze money out of [inventors](#) who actually put the innovations to use.

"The US Patent Office is overwhelmed and underfunded, and issues questionable patents every day -- patents that hurt [innovators](#) and consumers alike," said EFF activism director Rainey Reitman.

"It's time for the technology community to work together to create a blueprint for reforming the broken software patent system."

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