

INVENTION

Exploiting Your Idea

Self-confidence, a patent attorney, about \$300 and a practical, new idea may help you turn your inventive genius into cash. It takes about three years to get a patent.

By ALLEN LONG

➤ "I HAVE an idea," the letter begins, "but I do not know how to patent or sell it. What do I do?"

Queries such as that pour into the United States Patent Office daily. Thousands of embryo inventors scattered from coast to coast want to convert their ideas into money.

Patent Office officials say hundreds of other persons probably have invented gadgets to use around the house, but have not considered having them patented. Many of those gadgets might be turned into cold cash. Even yours.

Patent procedure is complex. But with a little self-confidence, a good patent attorney, a sum of \$300 and a practical, new idea, you can overcome the complexities of the law easily. You do not need a model of your device.

Standing by to give you assistance is the National Inventors Council. The Council will evaluate your idea, so far as it relates to the needs of the armed forces or to the welfare of the nation.

Items the Council deems worthy of further governmental investigation are referred to the Department of Defense or to the appropriate agencies. But whether or not the Council refers your idea, you can call attention to your invention through the Patent Office's "Register of Patents" that circulates to many manufacturers. You also can take your invention directly to the manufacturers.

Start Wheels Turning

But before you do that, you should start the wheels turning toward getting a patent for your device. That is true especially if your invention will be manufactured commercially. Few manufacturers will discuss your idea until you at least have filed a patent application.

The companies consider that the wise thing to do. They may be working on a gadget similar to yours. Discussing your idea may result later in a lawsuit if the company puts out a device similar to yours, and you believe they stole some of your ideas. Dates on the patent applications will help clear up the dispute.

It is difficult to say how much a patent will cost. A lot depends upon how long it takes the patent attorney to search files for similar inventions. But for the amateur whose inventions will not be too complex, \$300 is an estimated average.

Suppose you invented a dandy dandelion puller this summer to cut down back-breaking toil in your weed-infested lawn. Suppose it has pincer-like jaws operated remotely from the end of a four-foot handle. Suppose also that you want to patent and market it. This is what you do:

Chances are that someone already has invented the same thing. Even so, your device may be sufficiently different from other inventions so that you could patent it. But you need a patent attorney to find out.

If you cannot visit the Commissioner of Patents yourself, write him for a list of attorneys and agents registered to practice before the U.S. Patent Office. The list costs \$1.75.

After you have hired an attorney, you should tell him all about your idea. He will not divulge your secrets since he may be disbarred if he does.

The attorney will search through Patent Office records for similar inventions. He will compare your weed-puller with other weed-pullers. Depending upon his findings, he will advise you to file a patent application. That will cost \$30. You will plunk

out another \$30 when the patent is granted.

A free booklet available from the Commissioner of Patents, called "General Information Concerning Patents," describes the patent application. It also contains other helpful information.

The specifications-and-claims section of the application probably is the most important. It describes what you consider to be your invention.

Since the claims must be carefully worded, it would be wise to let your attorney write them. You sign the document saying you believe yourself to be the first inventor of such a weed-puller.

If the device can be illustrated, drawings should be included in the application. Unless you are skilled in mechanical drawing, you should hire a competent draftsman. But unless specifically called for, no model should be sent to the Patent Office.

Your attorney will handle the rest. It takes about three years for the average patent to go through. If by that time you have found no manufacturer for your device, you can have your patent listed in the "Register of Patents," a list of patents that are for sale.

Thomas' Register of American Manufacturers, available at many libraries and business offices, provides a convenient list of companies who make weed-pullers. Each



SEARCHING PATENT RECORDS—The row of men shown here are patent attorneys studying patents previously issued by the Patent Office to determine whether their clients' devices are sufficiently different to be patented.

company is a potential buyer of your idea. Thus under the heading of "Weeders," about 40 companies and their addresses are listed.

You may be unsuccessful in persuading a company to make your device. That is the "calculated risk" you take. But on the other hand, you may be successful. And that extra income should be mighty handy.

Many Items Patentable

A search through Patent Office records reveals many items you probably would not consider patentable. An automatic hat-tipper, for instance, was awarded patent number 556,248, years ago. The device clamped inside bowler hats and rested on the wearer's head. By merely nodding at a passing lady, the wearer caused his hat to tip a salute.

A "better mousetrap" received patent number 883,611. The gadget was designed to frighten mice away rather than to kill them. Bait enticed the mouse to stick his head through a hole in the cage-like affair. A spring collar surrounded the hole. Attached to the collar was a small bell. When the mouse stuck his head through, the collar clamped around the mouse's neck. The inventor believed other mice would be scared away when the tinkling mouse returned to the nest.

One inventor received patent number 323,416 on a pair of suspenders having a long cord attached to them. The idea was that if the wearer ever got trapped in a burning building with no means of escape, he could detach the cord and lower it to the ground where a rope could be tied to it. Then he could haul up the rope and escape.

Those patents may sound frivolous, and indeed, they well may be. But perhaps they give you an idea of just what sort of thing CAN be patented.

The device you worked out to help you around the house probably is not frivolous. Chances are that many other home owners would like to have a labor-saver just like yours. And the bigger the market is for your device, the greater your chance is of turning your inventive genius into cash.

Science News Letter, September 20, 1952

GERONTOLOGY

Old Folks Have Broader Outlook Than Youngsters

►DO NOT PUT the old folks on the shelf because they are set in their ways. Drs. M. E. Linden and P. D. Courtney of Norristown, Pa., State Hospital, reporting to the Gerontological Society meeting in Washington, exploded the old idea that elderly people have narrowed interests.

Our custom of relegating the older person to a "back shelf" is due, in their opinion, to an overemphasis on the importance of youth and sexual fertility.

The social outlook of old people is actually broader and less self-centered than that of younger people.

Science News Letter, September 20, 1952

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