

British Inventor Profile

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This study was designed to complement the United States Inventor Profile Research Project of the PTC, Academy of Applied Science, and was cosponsored by the British Institute of Patentees and Inventors.¹

The purpose was to find out who is using the United Kingdom patent system and what they are patenting. Although it is not as extensive, it has still produced some interesting results.

The study began in 1975. The British inventors who were surveyed were all members of the above mentioned British Institute. Three hundred questionnaires were sent out and 262 were returned. Because the sample was based on one year, it is not possible to discuss trends and we were not able to obtain demographic or geographic distributions. However, the results are of great interest.

The British inventor works by himself. Most inventions were formulated on the inventor's private time, and not while he was working on a corporate project.

The inventors are prolific; they hold at least two different patents and about half of the inventors have patents pending. They

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¹ See Inventor Profile, this issue.

also have inventions they could have patented, but did not for various reasons. Significantly, about 25 percent of the inventions are protected by trade-secret not patents.

The inventors usually invent within their field of primary concentration. They do not go out of their field or invent in different areas. However, the invention often arises while researching a different problem as a result of some practical need discovered.

The British inventor takes about three months to develop his or her idea to the state where a patent can be applied for. Most inventors keep a diary of their inventing process. This is because of a major difference between the British and American patent systems. In Britain, the inventor may file a provisional specification of his invention while he is perfecting it to the point where it can be patented. In the United States an idea must be fully developed before any action can be taken. (Two other major differences between the patent systems are that publication is a bar to a patent in the British system whereas the United States permits filing up to one year after publication; and in Britain, the patent automatically goes to the first person to file, rather than the first to invent as in the United States.)

Forty-four percent of the inventors found their inventions in market difficulty, primarily because of their lack of capital.

Finally, almost all of the inventors agreed that the patent protection should be extended beyond 18 years. The limited duration of the patent is a major reason why they feel it is not worth patenting all their inventions.

About 50 percent of the patents granted were in the field of mechanical engineering. About 25 percent were in electrical engineering and the remainder were in various other fields.

In those cases where the invention was assigned to an employer, small companies of less than 25 employees made forty-four percent of the inventions. Medium-sized companies with about 100 employees produced 32 percent of the inventions. Large companies with more than 1000 employees produced under 22 percent of the inventions.

About one-half of the inventors felt that their employers encouraged the development and patenting of inventions. About one-third felt that their employer neither encouraged nor discouraged the invention process. The remainder felt the employer distinctly discouraged invention.

On the marketing side, slightly less than one-half of the employers encouraged the marketing of the invention. The remainder

neither encouraged nor discouraged the marketing process. Significantly, most inventors felt their companies failed to do all they could to make maximum use of their patent. Also, most companies had no incentives to encourage their employees to invent nor did most inventors get any financial reward from their corporate patents.

The results of the survey in conjunction with commercial inventions, show that companies spend somewhere around \$100,000 in the marketing effort. The income companies realized, however, was somewhere around two million dollars.

To summarize the keypoints of the survey:

1. Most inventions are not the efforts of large corporations; the inventors are lone individuals often working as part of a small project or group in a small company.
2. The inventors feel they have no incentive from employers to invent or to patent.
3. Most realized little financial gain from their patents.
4. The production and commercial use of the patent is restricted by the lack of venture capital or corporate marketing funds.

