



New Patent Design Unveiling

Media Kit

UNITED STATES
PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE



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Topline messages

- In 2018, the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) will issue the 10 millionth U.S. utility patent.
- The “Patent Clause” of our Constitution (Article I, Section 8, Clause 8) grants inventors exclusive rights to their creations for a limited time.
- Patent 10 million is a significant milestone. It symbolizes the United States’ rise as an innovative and economic powerhouse built on more than two centuries of intellectual property protection.
- The design of U.S. patent grant covers has changed many times since 1790, but only twice in the last 100 years. A new design will be used starting with patent 10 million.
- We do not yet know exactly when patent 10 million will issue or what the patent will be for.

South by Southwest Interactive Festival (SXSW) unveiling

On March 11, 2018, the USPTO unveiled the new patent cover design during a special SXSW Interactive Festival premiere event cosponsored by The National Inventors Hall of Fame (NIHF).

Ceremony participants

- **Andrei Iancu**, Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the USPTO
- **Drew Hirshfeld**, USPTO Commissioner for Patents
- **Robert Metcalfe**, inventor of Ethernet, National Medal of Technology and Innovation laureate (2003), and NIHF inductee (2007)
- **Susann Keohane**, IBM Global Research Leader for Aging, Master Inventor, Academy of Technology, Austin Research Laboratory
- **Paul Rosenthal**, USPTO acting Chief Communications Officer

Frequently asked questions

1. What is a patent cover? How will the new design affect it?

- When a new patent is issued, the grantee receives a printed copy bound in a cover bearing the USPTO seal and the signature of the current USPTO director.
- The new cover design will be issued for the first time with utility patent number 10,000,000 sometime in 2018. All subsequent utility, plant, and design patents will also have the new design.
- The physical size of the new patent cover and contents is now a standard letter size (8.5 x 11 inches). The old patent cover design was approximately 7.75 x 11.25 inches. The change streamlines the production process of the patent cover and the documents that go within it.
- Other than size, the layout and content of the inside pages of the patent will not change.

2. Why is the USPTO changing the design of the patent cover?

- The patent is one of the most significant documents that the federal government issues. Some of the older covers were highly elaborate, reminiscent of currency or stock certificates.
- Throughout history, the design of official U.S. patent grants has changed many times, yet only twice in the last 100 years.
- The most recent version prior to the new design was more than 30 years old and did not strongly reflect the significance of the document. This new design honors the history of our patent system and denotes the significant value of patents.

3. Who created the new design?

- A team of three in-house USPTO graphic designers collaborated to create the new patent cover.
 - **Jeff Isaacs**, Office of the Chief Communications Officer
 - **Rick Heddlesten**, Office of the Commissioner for Patents
 - **Teresa Verigan**, Office of Policy and International Affairs

4. What process did the design team use to choose the new patent cover design?

- Each member of the three-member design team created at least six options for initial consideration.
- Initial designs fell into three categories — an update of the existing cover, a reflection of the long history of the document, and a completely contemporary approach.
- The initial field of designs was narrowed to six. Each designer then created a new round of iterations based on the other designers' work.
- Commissioner for Patents Drew Hirshfeld made the final selection.

5. How many times has the USPTO patent cover design been changed?

- Fewer than twelve basic designs have been used since the first patent was granted in 1790.
- During the 19th century, it was common for the illustrations to change every few years. Other elements of the layouts also changed slightly from time to time in between major design revisions.
- A single design was used from just after the turn of the century through the mid-1980s. Blanks in the forms, which had been previously filled by hand, began to be filled by typewriter beginning in 1909.

Patent cover design history

There have been fewer than twelve basic designs since President George Washington signed the first patent in 1790. Over the last 228 years of patent history, between the major design changes, there were also slight updates to text and the images on the document. The following describes patent examples collected from the USPTO, museums, and private collectors.

- 1790: President George Washington signed the first patent, granted to inventor Samuel Hopkins of Philadelphia.
- 1800 patent example: The patent cover became a typeset form with blanks filled in by a calligrapher. Patents were still signed by the president, attorney general, and secretary of state. Cover designs, while reflecting the craftsmanship of hand-set type, were largely utilitarian during this period.
- 1827 patent example: This example was engraved by William Stone, best known for creating a highly accurate facsimile of the signed Declaration of Independence for the nation's 50th anniversary.
- 1855 patent example: By the mid-1800s, patent covers began to feature a series of engravings of the Patent Office building and, later, the Department of Commerce building. Except for one post-Civil War design, this practice continued until the 1980s redesign.
- 1867 patent example: Victorian-era patent covers reflected the heavily ornamented style of the period. Elaborate engravings remained in use for a century and a half.
- 1875 and 1901 patent examples: Through the latter half of the 19th century, the patent cover design experienced several rounds of cosmetic changes in typography, as well as a series of new engravings of the Patent Office building. Patents were signed by the Commissioner of Patents, as well as the Secretary of the Interior, as the Patent Office was then part of that executive branch department.
- 1903 patent example: This design persisted from the beginning of the 20th century through the mid-1980s with only minor changes. Familiar inventions, ranging from the Wright Flyer to the starship Enterprise, were granted patents under this cover.
- 1976 patent example: Signed by President Gerald Ford, this one-of-a-kind, hand-inscribed patent was granted to Pennsylvania inventor Sidney Jacoby as part of celebrations for the nation's bicentennial. This was the last patent known to be signed by a U.S. president.
- 1985 patent example: In the mid-1980s, what is known as the modern patent cover design came into use. This was the first patent cover not bound by an actual ribbon.

Designing a new patent cover

By Jeff Isaacs, USPTO Brand Management and Visual Design Specialist

When I started at the USPTO in 2014, I was tasked with creating a visual brand identity system for the agency. As part of that process, I naturally looked at the design of the patent cover, which is one of the most highly visible things produced by the agency.

It was clear that the design could use some help. It was dated, poorly typeset, and I knew that we could create a document more worthy of its significance. Ultimately, I decided to leave it alone for the time being – both because it was technically outside the scope of the brand system, and because I was a little too new to the agency to open that particular can of worms.

Over the years I would occasionally give some thought to what a redesigned patent cover could look like. During some downtime in early 2017, I sketched a few basic designs. I realized we were about a year and a half from issuing patent ten million, and that there would never be a better time to introduce a redesign than that major milestone.

I pitched the idea to our chief communications officer, who brought it to the commissioner for patents. By the spring of 2017 we had the go-ahead. I'd gotten my wish, which was a wonderful and terrifying prospect.

Starting the process

The patent is one of the most significant documents that the federal government issues. Some of the older covers were highly elaborate, almost looking like currency or stock certificates. So it was clear that we had a lot to live up to. It was also clear that me that sitting alone in my office churning out designs wasn't going to get us the best possible result, especially in the time we had to work with. My first step after we got the green light was to put together a design team from among our in-house creative talent. I chose a small group so that we could move quickly – Rick Heddlesten from the commissioner's office, and Teresa Verigan from the Office of Policy and International Affairs.

When I was putting together an initial briefing for the team, I wanted to provide an overview of the history of the document, which dated back to the first patent signed by George Washington in 1790. I was surprised to find there was very little information available on the topic, both within the agency and outside it.

I gathered what I could, and after a brief kick-off meeting we got to work. I asked the team for designs in three basic categories: an improvement to the existing patent cover, a classic design inspired by the historical versions, and an anything-goes clean sheet of paper approach.

Each of us brought six designs to the initial review. We pared the initial 18 down to six candidates. I then had each team member do a round of design iterations on everyone else's designs, rather than their own. This was done both for the value of cross-pollinating ideas, and to ensure that every member of the team would have a hand in the finished design.

As we worked, we had a set of important and sometimes competing requirements to keep in mind. First, of course, we had to meet all of the legal requirements for the document and its contents. Second, we were trying to create a design that could be reproduced without any technical challenges and which

wouldn't drive up our production costs. And third, we really wanted to create something that not only had significant "wow" factor, but would stand the test of time.

The last version of this design was used for almost 35 years. The version before that, almost 80. So not only were we creating something that would possibly remain in use for generations, but would also be seen centuries from now. Patent covers hang in corporate offices and on the living room walls of inventors' descendants. They find their way into library and museum collections around the world, waiting to be rediscovered by future archivists and researchers. We wanted to be sure that whatever design we settled on was worthy of that kind of longevity.

After a few rounds of revisions we had three strong candidates ready to go. We pitched them to Drew Hirshfeld and his staff, and before long we had a final design selection. We then set about making the final rounds of revisions to the design.

Selecting meaningful details

We had already established that we wanted to use a script font for much of the content as a way to tie the new design to its 18th and 19th-century predecessors. It turned out to be quite a challenge to find a typeface that didn't make the patent cover look like a wedding invitation. We finally settled on a typeface based on hand-lettered 18th century documents, paired with a classic book font for the legal text on the front and inside covers.

As a final historical homage, towards the end of the process I added as a preface the key phrase from the constitutional clause that established the patent system - Article 1, Section 8, Clause 8 - "To promote the progress of science and useful arts...", pairing it on the page with the agency seal and surrounding ornamentation that were already there.

Since the design, like the old one, already made use of foil stamping for the seal, we took advantage of that and extended its use to the small ornaments as well as the bold "Patent" lettering that is the centerpiece of the design. This design also makes stronger use of color than any previous version, in the form of the red band bordering the front cover and wrapping around the spine and the entire back. The 1980s version was the first that wasn't bound with an actual ribbon. This new one is the first that doesn't even feature a facsimile ribbon, but the red band is a bit of an homage to that historical feature.

As we talked about public communications and events surrounding the introduction of the new design, we discussed placing it in its historical context and I came back to some of the initial research I'd done on the evolution of the patent cover over time. There didn't seem to be a lot of good primary sources available, so I began to think about how to establish a timeline of all the designs we've used in the last 228 years.

Tracking down history

The first stop was our own walls. We've moved three times in the last century and have undoubtedly lost a lot, but there are still a number of framed patent covers hanging in public spaces around the building, dating as far back as Thomas Jefferson, who led the first Patent Board. We also reached out to USPTO staff to see what they had in their possession. Many had covers for patents granted to their relatives, and one avid collector had an entire wall full of 19th and early 20th century patents and trademarks. We even

found a one-of-a-kind, hand-inscribed bicentennial patent from 1976, signed by Gerald Ford and presented to an inventor in a ceremony at Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

We discovered a trove of patent covers in the collection of the National Inventors Hall of Fame, which helped us narrow down details like when the design used for most of the 20th century was introduced, and even when the office switched from handwriting to typewriters to fill in the blanks.

We also took advantage of the fact that patent covers are highly collectible documents. A simple eBay search turned up covers that helped fill in some gaps in the timeline, and a rare documents dealer was able to provide a high-quality collection of images which included a design used briefly in the pre-Civil War years that had not turned up in any of our other research.

For some of the rarest examples, like the very first patent ever issued by the United States, we turned to the museums which hold the original documents.

From all of these sources, we've been able to assemble a fascinating picture of how these designs evolved over time, encompassing everything from the symbolism of the artwork to their lives as everyday working documents created by our predecessors at the agency. Hopefully we can preserve this research so that some future designer has a good starting point when the time comes to retire our new design.

Press and links

USPTO, 10 Million Patents homepage:

<https://10millionpatents.uspto.gov>

USPTO Event Page, New Patent Design Unveiling:

www.uspto.gov/about-us/events/new-patent-design-unveiling

SXSW News, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office Unveiling New Patent Design at SXSW:

<https://www.sxsw.com/news/2018/u-s-patent-and-trademark-office-unveiling-new-patent-design-at-sxsw/>