

Using patent research for competitive analysis

Archi Leenaers, president of Anatech (The Netherlands), a Dutch company dedicated to the development and manufacturing of instruments for material characterization: "Anatech puts a strong emphasis on technology, where one third of its 24 employees participates in product development. That is pretty much for a SME. Our instruments are being used in laboratories for quality control, in materials engineering for checking product specifications and for scientific research. Anatech is active on various markets."

Unique products

"We do not have our own sales force. The instruments we develop are being sold by other companies under their own label. These resellers are multinationals that sell products worldwide. In this way, also our products are sold in more than 120 countries. By supplying complete instruments we act like a separate business unit. It is agreed that resellers can only market and sell our products; without our permission they are strictly not allowed to use our technology in their own products."

Learning to read patents

"In 2002 I came into contact with a consultant from the Netherlands Patent Office. He gave me more insight in finding patents. Now I can simply find my way in Espacenet. He also learned me how to read patents. What parts need to be studied and what can be skipped? Just 10% of the story is essential."

Strategic insights

"I look for new patents in our fields of activities on a regular basis. There is a lot to learn from patent information, e.g. how certain technical problems have been solved. Apart from that: you get a good impression on who is working on what. That gives strategic insights. That is why patent research is now an integral part of our competitive analysis. Multinationals mostly have a special department for that. We have to do it in between other activities. To prevent patent research to fall between two stools, also two of our employees received a training last year at the Netherlands Patent Office in how to read patents."

*Source: "Innovating with patent knowledge",
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