

1996

Customer Satisfaction Report



U.S. Patent and Trademark Office



One of my top priorities for the Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) is to provide high quality services to you. This commitment is reflected in our Strategic Plan as one of our two primary goals:

“To provide our customers with the highest level of quality and service”

and

“To play a leadership role in intellectual property rights policy development”

Efforts to achieve our goals occur each and every day in the delivery of products and services to you:

Based on input provided by our customers and partners, we developed our initial customer service standards in 1994. We continue to review those standards and establish new standards as appropriate. In 1995, we published our first Customer Satisfaction Report outlining our standards and the results of our customer satisfaction surveys. A few initiatives that resulted from your input include: the restructuring of the Patent Organization into industry sectors to ensure greater consistency between the examination of applications in related technologies; the establishment of minimum filing date requirements for processing applications in an electronic environment in the Trademark Organization; and the expansion of ordering and delivery mechanisms for products and services to include fax, credit card payment, express delivery, and ordering through the Internet in the Information Dissemination Organization.

PTO CUSTOMERS:

Inventors
Applicants
Owners
Attorneys
Agents
Researchers
Academia

The purpose of this report is to continue communicating with you on our service delivery issues. We continually seek to improve our listening and learning techniques and we welcome your comments. You may contact us at:

Center for Quality Services
PK1-812
2011 Crystal Drive
Washington, D.C. 20231

Phone: (703) 305-4217
Fax: (703) 305-8002

Bruce A. Lehman
Assistant Secretary of Commerce and
Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks

Customer Service Standards

Our first customer service standards for the patent and trademark processes were published in 1994. These standards were developed based on input provided by customers in over 20 focus sessions throughout the United States (over 400 customers participated in these sessions). We validated these standards through customer satisfaction surveys.

In 1996, we published service standards for our key information dissemination products and services. Again, focus groups were used to obtain customer input on those characteristics of the products and services which are most important.

Information Dissemination surveys will be distributed to obtain input on our performance and the key service attributes of importance to customers. We will continually review and update all standards to ensure that they reflect your needs and expectations.

For a comparison of how we are performing against our established standards for Patents and Trademarks over the past two years, see the table under the Measuring Customer Satisfaction section.

PTO-Wide

We will ensure that our written communications clearly set forth the technical, procedural, and legal position of patent examiners and trademark examining attorneys.

We will treat you with courtesy each time you contact us and, if appropriate, will direct you promptly to the proper office or person.

We will widely disseminate information about changes in practice and procedures to ensure that both you and PTO employees know about changes prior to their effective date.

If a PTO employee being called is not available, they will return your call by the next business day or, if you

request, an alternate point of contact will be provided.

Our correspondence with you will be legible and of good print quality.

We will respond to your status letters within 30 days from the date received in the PTO.

Patents

Your facsimile transmissions of properly addressed formal amendments after final rejection will be matched with the appropriate files and delivered to the examiner within 3 business days of receipt.

We will deliver your facsimile transmissions of properly addressed papers marked "Informal" or "Draft" to the examiner within one business day.

We will conduct a thorough search of relevant U.S. patents, foreign patent literature, and non-patent literature contained in PTO search files and, where appropriate, a reasonable search of other non-patent literature during the patent examination process.

We will respond within 30 days from date received in the PTO to papers filed after the examiner allows the application and up to the time PTO receives payment of the issue fee.

We will correctly generate and mail a notice indicating the application number, date of filing, and the title of invention for complete, standard applications. These notices will be mailed within 19 days of receipt of the application in the PTO.

Trademarks

We will make a determination of the registrability of trademarks within 13 months of receipt of the application in the PTO.

We will correctly generate and mail filing notices within 14 days of receipt in the PTO.

We will examine new applications and provide a written first communication regarding registrability within three months of the filing date.

We will issue correct Notices of Publication within 30 days of the date the file is approved.

We will mail correct Certificates of Registration within 7 days of the date of registration.

We will issue correct Notices of Abandonment within 45 days of the date the file was abandoned.

Information Dissemination

Search Services - Patents

We will maintain a Patent Search Room where:

- You will have access to paper documents that are accurately filed in a timely manner:

The Official Gazette - Patents and the numeric set of issued patents will be available to you on issue day. The location information for classes and subclasses will be posted for your use within 24 hours from the time the class/subclass is relocated.

- You will have timely access to the automated search systems;
- You will have access to equipment for making quality copies of documents; and
- You will be provided with effective assistance in using Search Room resources.

Search Services - Trademarks

- You will have access to paper documents that are properly categorized and accurately filed in a timely manner:

The Official Gazette - Trademarks will be available to you on issue day. Bound volumes will be stamped within five days from receipt of the information in the Trademark Search Library.

- You will have timely access to the automated search systems;
- You will have access to equipment for making quality copies and documents; and
- You will receive effective assistance in using Search Library resources.

Regional Search Services

We will enter into full partnerships with libraries to make patent and trademark information widely available to you throughout regions of the United States. We will enable the Patent and Trademark Depository Libraries to serve as our partners in disseminating intellectual property information to you.

General Information Services

We will provide you with accurate, timely general information about the patent and trademark processes, products, and services, as well as information about the Patent and Trademark Office itself. Copies of the general information booklets and forms will be mailed to you within two days of receipt of your request.

Office of Electronic Information Products Development

We will provide you with quality patent and trademark electronic information products according to a published delivery schedule. We will provide you advance notice of product, price, and schedule changes.

We will develop new patent and trademark electronic information products to enable Patent and Trademark Depository Libraries to disseminate intellectual property information to you.

We will maintain an electronic Bulletin Board to provide you with complete patent and trademark bibliographic information on the day it is published.

We will seek your suggestions for product and service improvements, and will respond to you within one month.

Office of Public Records

Patent and Trademark Copy Sales

We will fulfill requests for patent and trademark copies completely and accurately within:

- Two days of receipt for orders placed at the PTO's local Public Service Window or sent via facsimile transmission;
- Five days of receipt for orders mailed to PTO on a coupon;
- Eight days of receipt for orders mailed to the PTO in a letter;

- Three days of receipt for orders placed via PTO's Electronic Ordering Service; or
- 24 hours of receipt for expedited service if requested, fees paid, and the order is placed at the PTO's local Public Service Window or sent via facsimile transmission.

We will provide missing copies or replacement copies free within 24 hours of customer request.



The Patent and Trademark museum celebrates American innovation.

Assignment Recordation Services

We will accurately record patent and trademark assignments within 20 days of receipt and mail recorded assignment documents within 34 days of receipt.

Certification Services

We will fulfill orders for certified copies of patent and trademark documents completely and accurately within:

- 10 days of receipt for trademark registrations or within three working days of receipt if expedited service is requested and fees paid;
- 17 days of receipt for patent and trademark applications-as-filed or within seven days of receipt if expedited service is requested and fees paid;
- 25 days of receipt for patent and trademark file-wrappers and contents; or
- 10 days of receipt for certified copies of patents.

If we cannot fulfill your order on time, we will contact you by phone or fax early in the process cycle and explain in detail why your order may be delayed.

Updates to Patent Records

We will process changes to automated records of patented cases and file the related papers in file-wrappers within 30 days.

Measuring Customer Satisfaction

As we begin to make plans for changing work processes, determining budgets, and introducing new products/services, customers are invited to attend focus sessions or roundtable discussions to provide their input on our plans. These approaches are used in addition to the standard hearings and conferences designed to communicate with our customers. During these sessions, we frequently obtain customer input on satisfaction with particular products and services.

Established survey efforts are in place for the Patent and Trademark processes. Efforts are currently underway to

establish similar efforts for information dissemination products and services. We will distribute approximately 5,000 satisfaction surveys to randomly selected customers who have used our services within the last two years. These customers are asked to rate the importance of key attributes of products and services and their satisfaction with our performance against our established customer service standards. These surveys are distributed to customers of the patent process, the trademark process, and key information dissemination products and services. In addition to obtaining input on our standards, we ask such overall questions as:

- Were you treated with courtesy each time you contacted the Office?

- How satisfied were you with the staff regarding their ability to provide accurate answers to questions ?

- How can products and services be improved at the PTO?

Responses to these survey efforts will be used to guide action planning for the three business areas: patents, trademarks, and information dissemination. The tables on the following pages compare last year's baseline data with the results from this year's surveys for patents and trademarks. The Information Dissemination surveys will be distributed in 1997. Results of these surveys will be published in newsletters, both the Patent and Trademark *Official Gazette*, and in future customer satisfaction reports to you.

We have also begun piloting a Patent Customer Feedback Card this year. These cards are being mailed to customers in the semiconductor industry and to users of the newly established Patent Assistance Center. The Card is intended to be a universal tool for gathering data on customer satisfaction and is designed to promote a high-level response rate and encourage customer participation. This pilot will be evaluated and, if successful, will be implemented in other areas, enabling us to obtain a clearer understanding of differing customer requirements. Results of these types of survey efforts will be included in future reports and newsletters.

We use a variety of approaches to obtain reliable and timely information from our customers:

- Focus sessions*
- Roundtable discussions*
- Written surveys*
- Telephone surveys*
- Assistance Centers*

Were you treated with courtesy each time you contacted the Office?

How satisfied were you with the staff regarding their ability to provide accurate answers to questions ?

How can products and services be improved at the PTO?

1995 and 1996 Results— Customer Satisfaction Survey

In 1995, we mailed 1,035 patent and 1,187 trademark customer satisfaction surveys to customers and received a 37% response rate for patents and a 51% response rate for trademarks. In 1996, we increased the number of surveys mailed to 1,500 for patents and 1,500 for trademarks and received a 35% response rate for patents and a 43% response rate for trademarks.

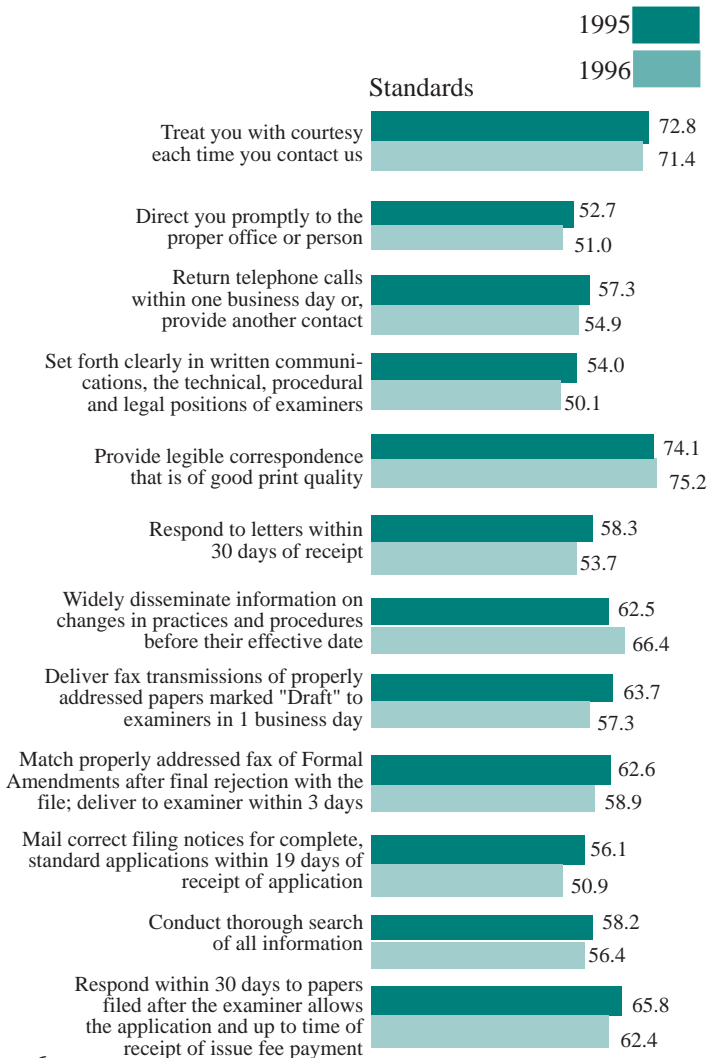
Overall, the 1996 satisfaction results regarding the Patent and Trademark process did not change from the 1995 results. The mean score for the overall customer satisfaction item remained at 3.3 on a 5 point scale, and the percentage of satisfied customers remained at

approximately 50% for Patents and 3.5 on a 5 point scale, and 64% for Trademark customers satisfied.

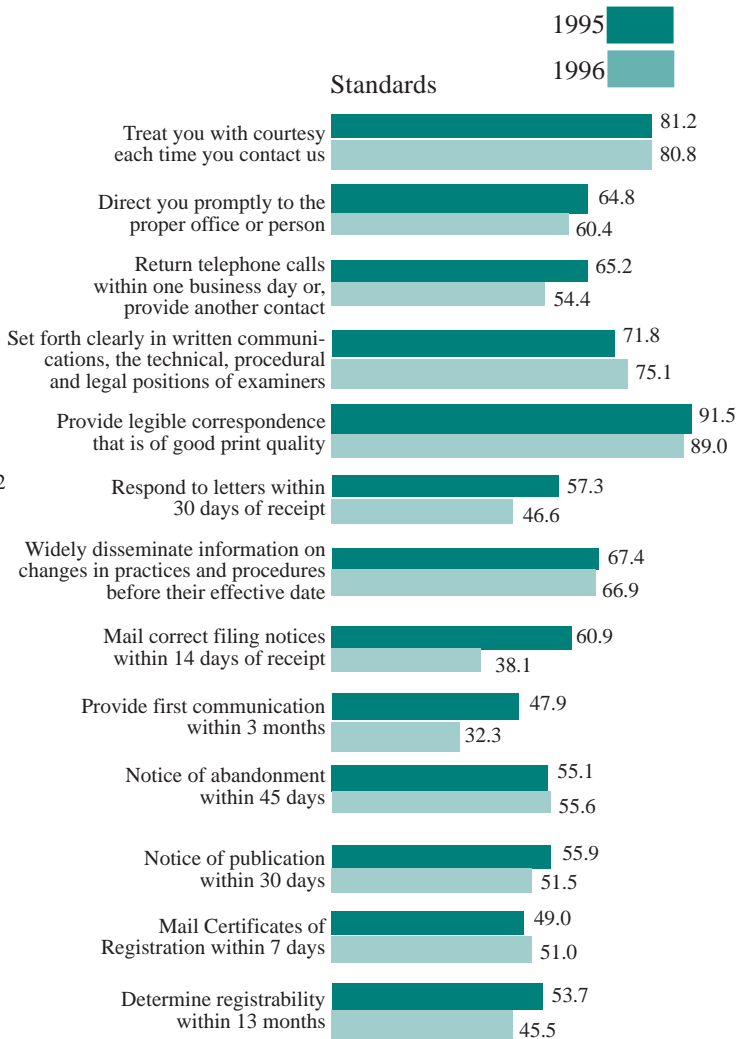
As in the 1995 survey results, customers identified the "outcome" as the most important component of the Patent process with "staff competence" the second most important. Additionally, the top two priorities for the Trademark offices have not changed in 1996. "Clear written communications" remains the top priority, followed by "directing promptly to the proper office or person".

Following are graphical results of the survey.

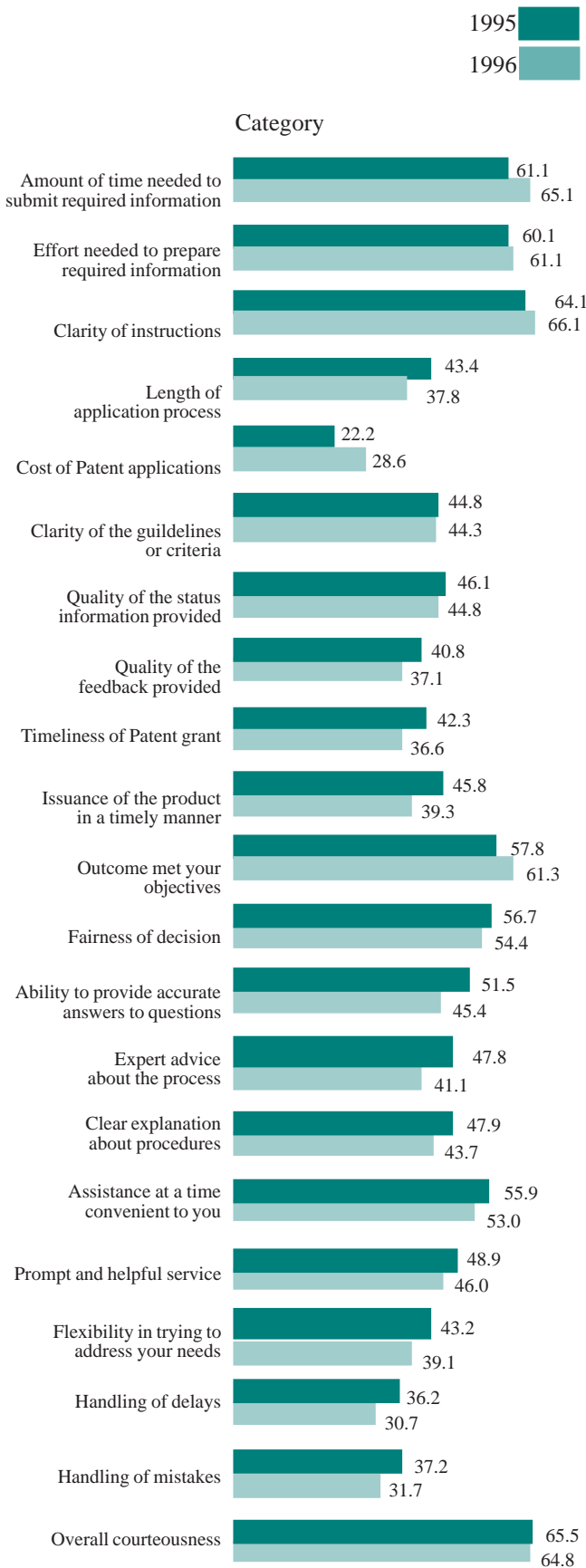
**Comparison of 1995 to 1996
Patent Satisfaction Levels
With PTO's Performance
Against Customer Standards**



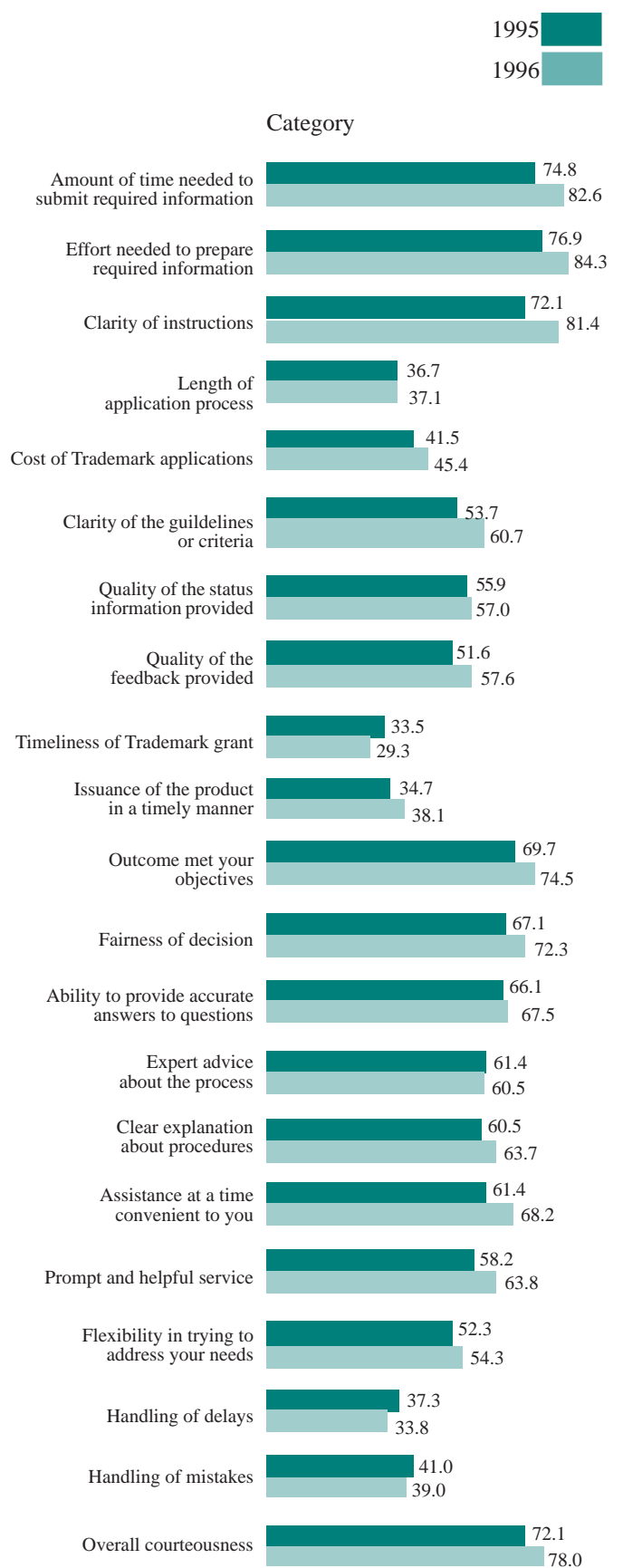
**Comparison of 1995 to 1996
Trademark Satisfaction Levels
With PTO's Performance
Against Customer Standards**



Comparison of 1995 to 1996 Total Percent Satisfied with Patent Process Categories



Comparison of 1995 to 1996 Total Percent Satisfied With Trademark Process Categories



Customer Communications

Formal methods of communication with our customers include *The*

Official Gazette, the *Patent and Trademark Office Review*, our annual report, and administrative public hearings. In addition to these more formal approaches, we have established direct lines of communi-

cation with a number of specific customer groups through the use of newsletters and monthly/quarterly meetings. Newsletters for various products and services allow us to communicate with customers about the status of services and share important information about process-

ing issues and upcoming events. Routine meetings with customer groups serve as useful forums to understand performance issues from the customer perspective as well as to share important information and address customer concerns.

Our Assistance Centers are another method used to communicate with our customers. Both the Patent and Trademark business areas have established "hotlines" to address customer questions and to provide assistance. The individuals who staff these centers are responsible for answering technical questions and recommending actions to systematically improve processes.

Patent Assistance Center
(1-800-PTO-9199)

Trademark Assistance Center
(703-308-9000)

We frequently provide speakers for conferences and annual meetings to many of our major customer groups. Additionally, we provide training on specific issues, share important information on rule changes, and introduce new products and services.

Many PTO customers have found it convenient to obtain important information via our Internet sites, <http://www.uspto.gov/> and <ftp.uspto.gov> which can be accessed 24 hours a day. The PTO website contains information of interest to the intellectual property community such as: publications containing general information about patents and trademarks, press releases, announcements of proposed changes in PTO rules, forms relating to patent and Patent Cooperation Treaty applications, and current job announcements. Users can access a searchable database containing patent bibliographic data and abstracts for all U.S. patents granted since 1976. Another searchable database contains the full text and full images of patents relating to AIDS research. Patents relating to AIDS from the European Patent Office and Japanese Patent Office are also included.



Commissioner Lehman uses new Patent Assistance Center search facilities.



The Patent Assistance Center officially opened on July 10, 1996

Improvements in Customer Service Delivery

With increased filings and the desire to improve customer satisfaction, we have launched major reengineering efforts of the following processes: patent, trademark, and certification services.

These reengineering efforts have followed a disciplined approach:

- Documenting the existing process.
- Obtaining customer input for the new design.
- Benchmarking other high-performing organizations to aid in our design.
- Developing a new model.
- Validating this model with customers and stakeholders.
- Planning for the transition to the new process.
- Implementing immediate initiatives.



Independent Inventors applaud PTO management officials.

These major efforts and our frequent communication with customers through focus sessions and surveys have resulted in the identification by both our employees and customers of a variety of changes in service delivery and improvement initiatives. These changes include:

Patents

- Creating a new service mission: “Helping Our Customers Get Patents”
- Increasing emphasis on quality searches through the use of coach/counseling for patent examiners in the semiconductor area.

Customers have said they need:

Less adversarial examiners

Examiners who work with applicants

A non-retaliatory patent complaint process

Improved staff accessibility

Uniform adherence to rules, regulations

Ability to use credit cards

Greater ordering options

A better trained staff to answer questions

More consistent actions

Ability to communicate with examiners/examining attorneys through the use of new technologies such as:

voice mail

E-mail

videoconferencing

Call to be directed right the first time

- Restructuring the Patent Organization into industry sectors.
- Establishing a Patent Assistance Center.
- Aligning all aspects of the prosecution of applications within Group 2900 from time of receipt from the mail room until the applications are abandoned or are ready to be released to the printing contractor.
- Building a flexible organization structure that places greater emphasis on art knowledge.
- Concentrating patent examining procedure training towards the goals of improving consistency of practice and quality of work product.

Trademarks

- Restructuring the Trademark Organization into market sectors.
- Establishing filing date requirements for process-

ing applications in an electronic environment.

- Increasing Trademarks’ use of technical resources.

-Establishing potential uses of Internet E-mail for communication with attorneys/customers.

-Enhancing website information, including “Basic Facts” booklet as well as other relevant trademark information.

- Establishing in-house photocomposition of the *Official Gazette*.
- Aligning the refund policy to ensure prompt customer satisfaction.

Information Dissemination

- Establishing partnership libraries in Sunnyvale, California, and Detroit, Michigan, to provide expanded search services and product delivery to customers in those regions.
- Establishing videoconferencing facilities to allow customers to conduct interviews with examiners from remote facilities without having to travel to PTO headquarters.
- Publishing an Information Dissemination Products and Services Catalog which identifies the vast collection of patent and trademark information products and provides specific directions to obtain materials or use the services.
- Expanding ordering and delivery mechanisms for several products and services to include fax, credit card payment, express delivery, and ordering through the Internet.

Success Stories

Customers are recognizing a new PTO!!! They are calling and writing to let us know that they have noticed changes - and for the better!

Customers are calling and writing to let us know that they have noticed changes - and for the better!

Recently, we heard from an attorney thanking us for the expediency of our service in deciding a petition, "...At the PTO, customer service is a reality, not just a slogan." Because of the PTO's prompt attention to this customer's needs, he was able to save his client six months of work.

Soon after the opening of the Patent Assistance Center, we heard from many customers, all with the same response, "I couldn't believe how fast I got an answer to a complex question!"

From an independent inventor expressing his gratitude for the support an examiner had given him we heard, your employees "...make it possible for small, independent inventors like myself to survive and utilize the patent system for our benefit."

"...At the PTO, customer service is a reality, not just a slogan."

From a doctor who was in the midst of negotiations for a licensing agreement for his pending patent in cardiac technology, "In my forty years of business, I have never experienced such a prompt, courteous and helpful service by anyone in the public or private sector." This agreement, "...will lead to both job creation and the saving of countless lives."

A reporter wrote us to say..."I have seen the government phone systems go from bad to worse...however, your new system is a blessing. It's easy to use, clear, fast and the 800 number is not always busy. Please do the taxpayers of the U.S. a favor and pass on your secrets to the rest of Washington!"

"In my forty years of business, I have never experienced such a prompt, courteous and helpful service by anyone in the public or private sector."

After an impromptu meeting with an examiner who gave an overview of the PTO to a group of patent attorneys and inventors touring the PTO. "The service and commitment exhibited...are rare and should not go unrecognized."

"I couldn't believe how fast I got an answer to a complex question!"

We heard from an applicant after he had called one of our patent examiners regarding his confusion in understanding the patent application process and timing. The examiner explained, "...with language that I could understand (very important), solved my concerns that I had and gave me further insights into the patent process. After getting off the phone with your employee...I had this feeling of relief, I felt positive of what I was doing, I had a new direction. To be quite honest, I felt really good."

"Your new system is a blessing. It's easy to use, clear, fast..."

