



Unique data cleaning approach increases confidence in analyses and business decisions

Many issues affect the quality of patent data that is available from open-source patent databases. One of the most important data points contained in a patent document is the field containing the "applicant name". Mistakes in this field can cause patents to be assigned to the wrong commercial entity and lead to incorrect corporate decision making, costing companies valuable resources.

As pioneers in the field, and based on years of extensive collaborative research, LexisNexis®

PatentSight[®] has developed a unique and industrytrusted approach toward ensuring consistent high data quality. Read this paper to learn about:

- Common errors that affect the applicant name field in global patent databases
- The impact of these errors on analyses
- The unique PatentSight[®] approach towards correcting such error-infested data to ensure reliable and trustworthy patent analytics

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Introduction

Every day, thousands of patents are filed at various intellectual property offices around the world. Depending on the office that a patent is filed in, there can be variations in language, content and formatting of the data points contained within. Patent offices have varying propensities to adhere to a universal code, making it all the more difficult to set up a collective international database that is consistent in terms of data quality.

An unreliable database results in faulty and unreliable analytics and consequently makes any and all insights derived from the analyses ultimately useless. If implemented, these imprecise insights can cause much damage to organizations by leading them to make decisions that can have million-dollar impacts. Hence, it is important for businesses and managers to ensure they are using reliable, high-quality patent data for innovation management.

As pioneers in the field of patent analytics and based on our years of extensive research, we can attest that the best way to ensure reliability of a database is to actually go through the data within and make sure errors are identified and corrections are made to the data.

This ensures that end users can confidently make decisions based on analyzing the data. Organizations using reliable data can rest assured about the impact of their decisions.



What value does patent data contain?

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), defines patents as both a type of document and a form of intellectual property right. Legally, a patent allows its owner to exclude others from commercially profiting from the protected invention.

Fundamentally, a patent provides a territorial protection to its owner by making it illegal for anyone apart from the patent holder to be able to commercially benefit from the technology, within the region in which the patent is granted. Since patent data is publicly accessible, some amount of transparency can be expected in the patenting process.

In their summary document on the **Fifth Session Meeting of the Committee on WIPO Standards on Applicant Name Standardization**¹, WIPO described understanding patent documents and the data they contain within, as a fundamental necessity for patent analytics. Patent documents contain key information regarding the technology within, such as:

- The date of publication and filing of the patent
- Application number of the patent
- Applicant and inventor names as well as their locations
- Prior art, i.e. sources (patents and other types of sources like scientific publication) on which the patent-protected technology builds
- Technology classification codes, typically International Patent Classification or Cooperative Patent Classification Codes
- Drawings and images
- A description and claims toward the invention that is protected by the patent

Since patents are territorial rights, patent data provides global views on inventions and technological change. Analyzing patent data can thus provide significant insights into the innovation landscape. Using a powerful analytics tool like PatentSight, and our world-class patent data, improves your ability to uncover and communicate actionable business intelligence.

Even though this information is publicly accessible, the data is concentrated at each international and national authority. Since these authorities operate at varying levels of efficiency and follow diverse documenting policies, working with global patent data becomes extremely difficult. Ensuring the quality of patent data, that decision makers work with, involves reviewing and cleaning large amounts of data fields in order to make the database analysis-ready.

Applicant Name—Why is it important to ensure accuracy?

Of all the information that is contained in a patent document, we focus on the various problems affecting the quality and accuracy of one specific patent data field: the applicant name. This field captures the name of the company/entity that has filed for the respective patent application, thereby claiming ownership to the underlying invention that the patent protects. In the following sections, you will learn about some general, commonly found issues that plague the applicant name field in various IP databases and a few other errors that our experienced in-house research team have identified.

There have been a number of initiatives from government agencies, such as the various international patent offices, that provide guidelines for the cleaning of patent data, typically termed harmonization. Realizing the importance of data quality for reliable analytics insights, we continuously work in close collaboration with our industry partners and customers to identify areas of improvement and develop methods to improve the overall quality and reliability of our patent

¹Source: Committee on WIPO Standards (CWS). Fifth Session. Geneva, May 29 to June 2, 2017



database. Over the years, this work has resulted in the identification of further inaccuracies that plague opensource patent databases. These inaccuracies can lead to skewed analyses and incorrect decision making.

Hence, the onus falls on the data and analysis software providers, like LexisNexis PatentSight, to ensure the data they are providing for analyses is cleaned and regulated. In addition to identifying data quality issues, we also discuss the steps taken to systemize this information, to enable accurate patent analytics and facilitate informed decision making.

How does data quality affect your patent analytics?

Patent analytics is a part of firms' routine data-driven intelligence activities, usually achieved by evaluating and analyzing the portfolios of companies/countries based on the strength/quality of the patents contained within them. Various value metrics and indicators have been employed for these purposes that build on patent data.

Accurate analytics requires accurate patent data, following closely behind the philosophy 'garbage in, garbage out'. Simply put, if the data used to perform analysis contains inaccuracies, the results of the analysis will be just as inaccurate and unreliable. Standardized and accurate data is the only solution that ensures reliable results from an analysis, and consequently well-informed strategic decisions based on these results.

In the case of the data field, applicant name from a patent document, errors can lead to a variety of serious problems for data users. For decision makers who base their derivations on the resulting analyses, such errors can substantially limit the accuracy of their derivations and ultimately even affect the overall corporate performance. Issues arising from working with incorrect ownership information can range anywhere from wrongful litigation, to incorrect competitive benchmarking, to misguided strategic decisions that target the wrong competitor, remaining unaware of new entrants in a technology field, etc.

Hence, it is imperative that decision makers, who rely on insights from intellectual property (IP) analytics, demand the patent data they are working with is high quality.

Sources of patent data

The major sources of patent data are the national patent offices like the Chinese National Intellectual Property Administration, the Japan Patent Office, and the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), as well as other international intellectual property governing organizations such as the European Patent Office and WIPO.

The PatentSight service, relies on data provided by the European Patent Office, named DOCDB and INPADOC, which is updated every week with patent information from 80+ authorities. DOCDB comprises patent bibliographic data for major worldwide authorities, including the European Patent Office, the USPTO, the Japanese Patent Office, the Chinese Patent Office and the WIPO. INPADOC comprises legal status data for over 50 patent authorities worldwide, including the European Patent Office, the United States Patent and Trademark Office, the Japanese Patent Office, the Chinese Patent Office and the WIPO.

Based on our decades of research and collaboration on projects with industry partners in patent data quality, we know the data obtained from these public sources cannot be directly plugged into any analytics tool or help uncover any useful insights. This is due to the fact the data provided by these authorities contain a multitude of errors. At PatentSight, we tackle this issue by setting up additional data-cleaning procedures. This consists of both manual research, by a dedicated and experienced research team, and using next-generation algorithms to augment the accuracy and integrity of the patent data that is fed into our analytics platform.



How does incorrect patent data affect patent information users?

One of the main challenges faced by patent information users is the sheer volume of data available for analysis. To put this in perspective, in 2019 there were about 15 million patents in force ². In total there are more than 13 million active patent families, as of December 31, 2020, in the PatentSight database. With such large volumes of data to work on, the risk of overlooking incorrect or incomplete data increases exponentially.

IP departments all over the world use large amounts of patent data for various analyses and studies. It is based on these analyses that management makes strategic decisions about the future, litigations or mergers and acquisitions. According to a study by the International Bureau at the WIPO, applicant name inconsistencies can cause errors in the findings of any of the following situations, and more.

- Freedom to operate (FTO) searches—when performing these searches, knowing who exactly the owner of the patents is, is of absolute importance. Decision makers need this information to accurately strategize their next move in terms of licensing negotiations or litigation.
- Company analyses—it becomes extremely risky when analyzing portfolios of companies (especially ones that own large numbers of patents) if all the patents that are actually owned by the company in question are not considered, as it leads to flawed decisions.
- Portfolio benchmarking—without accurate patent ownership information, comparing and setting portfolio benchmarks would be an absolute waste of resources.
- Technology landscape analyses—primarily carried out to gain an overview of the innovation activity in a specific technology field of interest, this type of analysis, too, relies heavily on accurate ownership information: if all the companies active in a

technology field are not identified, they will not be served.

General issues that impact patent data quality

International authorities, like the WIPO, the European Patent Office, the USPTO, the Japan Patent Office, the Korean Patent Office etc., have identified the following problems to be the most common affecting applicant names within patent databases.

Patents assigned to subsidiaries

It is common practice among large conglomerates, that have multiple subsidiaries in various countries, to protect their inventions in all or many of these regions by filing patents through the respective subsidiary. In this case, the applicant name on these patents would be that of the subsidiaries or in some cases even subsidiaries of subsidiaries. This ensures a level of privacy for the ultimate commercial owner (which is the parent company). Large organizations, operating in highly innovative and competitive industries, often tend to hide their innovations from their competitors by using this technique.

Large organizations, operating in highly innovative and competitive industries, often tend to hide their innovations from their competitors by filing patents through a subsidiary or even a subsidiary of a subsidiary.

Filing this way makes it extremely difficult to link the innovations back to the parent company. From a patent data consumer's perspective, if these patents are not correctly assigned to the ultimate parent company that owns the subsidiary, any analysis performed with this data will be inherently flawed, since the actual current



portfolios are not being analyzed. Linking subsidiaries to their parent companies requires extensive research and knowledge of the international business landscape.

Experienced and well-trained researchers spend considerable amounts of time and effort to fully match patents through the convoluted corporate structures to their ultimate commercial owner. The PatentSight applicant name matching process ensures that all patents, even those filed for by subsidiaries, are assigned to their ultimate commercial owner. For example, patents filed by Harman International, an automotive supplier based in Germany, must be assigned to Samsung since the commercial power ultimately resides with them as Harman is a subsidiary of the Korean electronics giant since 2017.

Patents owned by Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd.

Original Applicant	Portfolio Size	
SAMSUNG ELECTRONICS CO LTD	73,417	
SAMSUNG DISPLAY CO LTD	16,723	
SAMSUNG MOBILE DISPLAY CO LTD	3,177	
SEMES CO LTD	2,961	
SAMSUNG SDI CO LTD	2,063	
HARMAN INT IND	805	
BEIJING SAMSUNG TELECOM R&D CT	671	
SAMSUNG MEDISON CO LTD	669	
SAMSUNG ELECTRO MECH	613	
HEWLETT PACKARD DEVELOPMENT CO	565	
HARMAN BECKER AUTOMOTIVE SYS	553	
KOREA ADVANCED INST SCI & TECH	483	
KOREA ELECTRONICS TELECOMM	474	
SAMSUNG ELECTRONICS CN R&D CT	427	
SAMSUNG LED CO LTD	397	
MEDISON CO LTD	369	
BEIJING SAMSUNG COMM TECH RES	311	
HARMAN BECKER AUTOMOTIVE SYSTEMS GMBH	284	
SAMSUNG DIGITAL IMAGING CO LTD	267	

Harman International Industries Inc., the German automotive supplier, is a subsidiary of the electronics giant Samsung since 2017.

Alternate names of the same applicant

Patent offices usually publish documents exactly as they were filed. Since every applicant does not follow a uniform code while filing the application documents, one company can have various names, depending on the people who filled out the form when applying for the patent. In the case of an academic applicant, ETH Zürich, patents have been found to be filed under the following name variations:

- ETH Zürich
- Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich
- ETH Zurich

All different names to the untrained eye, but the patents rightfully belong to one ultimate commercial owner, the ETH University in Zurich, Switzerland.

In certain instances, patents have even been found within a same family but with different applicant names.

Different assignee names in one patent family

Another hurdle in the path to accurately matching patents to their current owner, is reassignments. For example, when two patents belonging to the same family of patents are reassigned to different companies in each of the respective countries, there are no widely accepted guidelines for assigning the patent family.

For instance, consider two independent companies, A (operating in the U.S.) and B (operating in China). If both of these companies acquire patents that protected the same technology within their respective authorities, there are no official guidelines that explain which company owns the whole patent family.

Although this is a rare occurrence, such an issue has the potential to skew portfolio sizes of companies and hence any analytics performed with unadjusted data.



Different or multiple applicant names for patents in the same patent family

This is an issue that rises when multiple companies own patents belonging to the same patent family. In this case it would be impossible for a user to identify exactly to whom a patent belongs. This can also be the case when a patent is co-owned by multiple companies.

If the two companies from the previous example worked together on an invention and filed for a patent together, then the patent is co-owned by company A and company B.

In case of co-ownership, decisions are often made internally, between the parties involved, as to how the ownership of the patent is divided between them.

Misspellings of the applicant name

Depending on the region/authority where a patent is filed, there can be any number of variations of spelling the same company name.

Patents owned by International Business Machines Corporation have been found filed under numerous variations of the spelling and usage of the IBM acronym. If this is not corrected before being fed into a database, there can be a significant difference in the number and quality of patents owned by the company. This type of error can lead to incorrect and dangerous decision making, especially at the corporate level.

Patents owned by International Business Machines Corporation (IBM)

Original Applicant	Portfolio Size	
INT BUSINESS MACHINES COPORATION	44	
INT BUSINESS MACHINE CORPORATION	42	
INT BUSINESS MASCHINES CORPORATION	33	
INT BUSINESS MACH CORP < IBM>	29	
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES CORPORATION	21	
INT BUSINES MACHINES CORPORATION	17	
INTERNAT BUSINESS MACHINESS CORP	16	
INT BUSINESS MACHINES CORPROATION	11	
INT BUISNESS MACHINES CORPORATION	11	
INT BUSINESS MACHINES CORPORATIONS	10	
INTELLECTUAL BUSINESS MACHINES CORP	10	
INTENATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES CORP	9	
INT BUSNIESS MACHINES CORPORATION	9	
INTERNET SECURITY SYSTEMS INC	9	
INT BUSINESS MACHINES COPRORATION	8	
INTERNESHNL BIZNES MASH KORPOREJSHN	7	
INT BUSINESS MAHCINES CORPORATION	7	
INTERNAT BUSINESSS MACHINES CORP	7	
INT BUSINESS MACHINES CORORATION	7	

Patents owned by IBM have been found filed under numerous variations of the spelling and usage of the acronym.



Six other data quality issues that PatentSight researchers identify and correct

In addition to the data quality issues that were mentioned in the previous section, our researchers have identified additional, frequently occurring types of errors that are found in most of the patent information databases. These were identified as a result of our ongoing close cooperation with our customers, industry partners and government organizations. The following are these additional errors.

1. Corporate name changes

It is common for companies to change their names due to various reasons like restructuring, change of ownership, rebranding, etc. For example, Panasonic was previously

Patents owned by Panasonic Corporation

Original Applicant	Portfolio Size
PANASONIC CORP	23,428
PANASONIC IP MAN CO LTD	16,311
MATSUSHITA ELECTRIC IND CO LTD	13,793
PANASONIC IP MAN CORP	17,590
SANYO ELECTRIC CO	6,233
PANASONIC IP CORP AMERICA	2,069
PANASONIC ELEC WORKS CO LTD	2,729
MATSUSHITA ELECTRIC WORKS LTD	2,731
HITACHI DISPLAYS LTD	542
PANASONIC LIQUID CRYSTAL DISPL	707
PANASONIC ELECTRIC IND CO LTD	387
JAPAN DISPLAY INC	163
OKADA TOMOYUKI	63
YAHATA HIROSHI	69
IKEDA WATARU	48
PANASONIC ELECTRIC WORKS CO LTD	343

Excluding Matsushita's patents from Panasonic's portfolio results in not displaying around 14,000 patents that are actually owned by Panasonic.

Not including the patents belonging to Matsushita in the Panasonic portfolio would result in an incomplete understanding of Panasonic's actual portfolio.

named Matsushita Electric before they changed their name in 2008.

To put this in perspective, more than 10,000 patent families belonged to Matsushita Electric's portfolio at the time of the name-change, which would have been missing from Panasonic's portfolio had they not been reassigned properly in the database.

2. Ongoing mergers and acquisitions

After corporate mergers and acquisitions (M&A), the resulting combined entity becomes the commercial owner of the combined portfolio. Considering these portfolios as separate entities can lead to grossly inaccurate strategies. Due to a variety of reasons, a merger or an acquisition does not always result in a direct amalgamation of the original portfolios. Hence, it is vital for reliable intelligence that all the technology transfers during these transactions are closely followed and the resulting patent portfolio adjusted accordingly in the database.

Our research team closely follows all announced M&A targets until the deal goes through and is finalized or is called off, to ensure these changes are updated to the portfolios and corporate trees in our database. For perspective, our team tracked over 700 M&A activities that were announced between the years 2000 and 2015 alone, among 185 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from the US.

At PatentSight, we make sure that completed M&As are tracked in real-time and changes to portfolios are immediately implemented in our database.



Patents owned by Bristol-Myers Squibb

Original Applicant	Portfolio Size	
SQUIBB BRISTOL MYERS CO	1,637	
BRISTOL-MYERS SQUIBB COMPANY	567	
BRISTOL MYERS SQUIBB CO	352	
MEDAREX INC	74	
SQUIBB & SONS LLC	41	
MEDAREX LLC	40	
KORMAN ALAN J	19	
CELGENE CORP	186	
HUANG HAICHUN	18	
JUNO THERAPEUTICS INC	72	

When Bristol-Myers Squibb Company acquired Celgene Corporation in 2019, all of Celgene's patents came under the commercial ownership of Bristol-Myers Squibb.

3. Mergers and acquisitions that happened in the past

Our data researchers take special care during the cleaning of raw patent data to ensure that all historical M&A activities that the firms (being harmonized) have gone through are also taken into consideration when assigning patent families to their current ultimate owners. Our database is designed to capture this information in such a way that it is available according to point-in-time.

So, if required, portfolios from a historical cross section of time can be analyzed to understand what this portfolio looked like, at this specific moment in time. In order to ensure accuracy, all historical M&A activities need to be accounted for and extensive checks and corrections also need to be performed to make sure these transactions are reflected in the current portfolio of patents assigned to each company.

4. Reassignment of patents

When patent sales or trades take place, the status of the patents involved is updated with the respective authorities. This data sheds light on who the patents

Patents are only assigned correctly when historic and current owners are identifiable.

belonged to and who have they been reassigned to; and this needs to be carefully studied in order to ensure any reassignments are also reflected in the database.

Making sure this information is updated, allows patent portfolios from a historical cross section of time to be analyzed, i.e., the ability to analyze current and past patent portfolios as they were at that point in time.

Back in 2016, the mobile phone maker Xiaomi bought close to 1500 patents from Microsoft that covered technologies like communications, video and cloud computing. If this patent sale is not reflected in the database, Microsoft will still be shown as the current owner of these patents. Imagine the kind of consequences, if this data is not corrected before it is used in an analysis or to make decisions.

5. Firms with identical or generic names

Another commonly found data quality issue, which affects accurate assignee information, is caused by companies having identical generic names and/ or patent offices translating the original name into a different language. This could lead to wrongful attribution of a patent to a completely different portfolio than the one it was supposed to be assigned to.

For example, the case of FH Westküste, a university in Northern Germany, and West Coast College, located



in the U.S., clearly depicts how this type of error affects the data quality. A German patent, owned by the American University, gets assigned to the German University since the name of the American University translates directly into German as that of the German University's name.

Another such case of a classic mix-up was observed between two universities from China and the U.S—both named Northwestern University, but no relationship between each other. This problem is also observed in Chinese corporations that have similar names since they tend to include their company's location in their corporate names. It results in countless companies that have similar-looking names and name endings.

6. Translation and transliteration mistakes at patent offices

Our research team comes across numerous mistakes that stem from patent offices haphazardly adapting or translating original company names to their local languages. In most cases these translations are mere phonetical equivalents of the original name in the local language. In such cases, the researcher leans on his/ her personal judgement and experience to figure out the actual name of the company in order to assign the patent to the correct owner.

If such errors are not identified, patents that should belong to Microsoft would be incorrectly assigned to a non-existent or wrong company. Patent officers tend to translate names phonetically resulting in such errors.

It takes immense patience, a keen eye and years of experience to spot such trivial mistakes from within a haystack of information.

Patents owned by Microsoft Corporation

Original Applicant	Portfolio Size	
MICROSOFT CORP		52
MAJKROSOFT TEKNOLODZHI LAJSENSING EHLEHLSI		49
MICROSOFT TECHNOLOGY LICENSING LLC		45

Companies like Microsoft Corporation, that have subsidiaries all over the world, often own patents that are filed under names like Majkrosoft or Maikurosofotu.



What is the PatentSight multi-stage data harmonization process?

As a global thought leader among patent data and analytics tool providers, PatentSight ensures that our users have access to data of the highest quality.

This is achieved by setting up a dedicated team of more than 10 experienced researchers, who work with our industry partners and customers, focusing solely on checking the patent data in our database with a finetooth comb. Adjustments are made to the data when they find any of the issues mentioned in the previous sections or other mistakes are spotted.

With members from many nationalities, who are graduates in a variety of disciplines, ranging from linguistics to medicine, our data research team is equally diverse in terms of educational and cultural backgrounds. Being able to review documents in their original national languages enables us to correct, maintain and update global patent data.

Presently, the PatentSight database contains more than 43 million patent families (both active and inactive patents), where each patent family consists of one to multiple patent documents/patent rights. This number increases every week, with each delivery of updated data sets received from the data providers.

Since each patent family consists of the same patent filed in different regions, this number is even larger, when such individual patent documents are considered. Continual updates arrive from the European Patent Office every week, making the task of cleaning this data the most vital and prioritized activity at PatentSight.

In terms of process, the entire data cleaning cycle is conducted in two stages.

1. In the first stage, all data received from the European Patent Office is matched to our existing corporate tree structures, using a proprietary algorithm. Since this process is largely automated it does not require much human interaction to complete. 2. After the weekly data stream from the data provider has been successfully matched, our dedicated team of data researchers comb through the database. They analyze individual patent documents and the linked legal status information to check for any reassignments, sales, M&As, etc., that may have not been captured in the patent document information. This part of the data cleaning process is the most time-consuming, since it relies on some amount of intuition and a great deal of research.

Apart from going through historical data and correcting inaccuracies, the entire process described in the infographic on the following page is conducted by the data research team every week, thus ensuring regular checks and balances.

In addition to this process and the respective system, there are other elements that have been established in order to further increase the accuracy and speed of the data cleaning process. These include a corporate structure database that provides corporate tree information, a patent register information source and primary research conducted by the team using various open-access sources of information, all performed in-house to ensure increased validity and reliability of the data that is ultimately made available on the PatentSight Business Intelligence platform.











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Advanced Patent Ownership Tracking Process at PatentSight





Conclusion

At the end of this multi-stage approach toward data cleaning, also known as patent data harmonization, there are obvious, measurable and realistic changes in the portfolios of most large and small companies.

It is not necessary that all corrected portfolios include more patents, since the focus of this activity is to ensure the number of patents are correctly assigned to the actual commercial owner.

Each week when we receive updated data from the patent authorities, our research team also looks for sudden, unusual changes in corporate portfolio sizes or similar sudden changes to any of our portfolio quality indicators. These are common red flags for large amounts of patents being either reassigned or sold off, thereby indicating a need to be further investigated.

Therefore data harmonization is an ongoing process at PatentSight, and one that we maintain at world-class efficiency levels, to ensure that our users have the best data quality available at their disposal. The unique PatentSight combination of diverse, competent and experienced data researchers, along with robust algorithms and software, ensure data quality that is unparalleled in the industry, since it is inimitable.

Find more information:

www.patentsight.com/excellent-patent-data

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PatentSight[®] launched its first business intelligence software in 2012. In 2018, PatentSight became part of LexisNexis[®] IP. Its platform provides unique, reliable and relevant insights into the patent landscape for decision makers and patent experts in the fields of:

- Competitive intelligence and benchmarking
- R&D strategy
- Disruptive technology scouting
- M&A and due diligence
- Licensing and monetization
- Portfolio optimization

Patent Asset Index[™]

PatentSight is known for its development of the Patent Asset Index[™], a proven approach to assess patent quality and benchmark patent portfolios.

The Patent Asset Index is recognized by technology leaders to provide an accurate view of the strength, quality and value of patent portfolios to reveal the impact and efficiency of an enterprise's investment in innovation.

Analyses delivered by PatentSight are regularly reported to top executives of leading companies. Benchmarks are often featured in the shareholder annual reports of some of the world's largest corporations. Excellent data quality is our highest priority and a foundation of any analysis.



For more information, visit PatentSight.com

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