Introduction to Patent Searching
Patent Attorney Elizabeth Pozyaev, ME Advisory Board Member

1. Choose a patent search engine. There are several free providers of this information.
   - [www.google.com/patents](http://www.google.com/patents) - A good start for beginners since most of us are familiar with the Google search engine already.

2. Start general and then narrow your search. As you discover “key” words used within the art, incorporate them into your search.

   **Example of Google Patent Search**
   Enter Search: work physical (handicap OR disability)
   Results: Second result lists Patent No. 6116690 - Height adjustable work chair having a non-swivel seat

   **Example of USPTO Patent Search**
   Enter Search: Term 1 – handicap Field 1 – all fields
   Term 2 – work Field 2 – all fields
   Results: Twelfth result lists Patent No. 7,222,826 - Adaptive arm support

3. When you find a patent that is in the area you are focusing on, look at the most useful patent searching part…the prior art references. Each patent cites several other patents in the same field that were considered during the patent examination process. These citations can link you to multiple on-point patents. Many patent search engines include other patents that list that patent as a citation as well. This can help you collect a large number of relevant patents.

4. Now that you have found all of these patents, what do you do with them? One use of patents is to increase your knowledge of the subject matter and introduce you to several “terms of art” within the field – buzzwords that will help you while you immerse yourself in the field. You can also use the patents to judge the “state of the art.” Your idea may be different than or can build on and expand the current state of the art.

   From a business and new product development standpoint, you need to search for patents that already exist for your idea. If you find a patent that is exactly like your conceived invention, and it was approved within the last 17 years, someone else currently owns that idea. You can add on to that idea though, and patent the extension! Just be careful of infringement – you cannot practice your idea (sell it or take a product to market) if part of the product is still covered by the other patent. In this case you could enter into a licensing agreement with the patent holder.

   *Notes: Once a patent is expired, the information belongs to the public. You do not have to worry about infringing the expired patent anymore.

   Many engineering companies require their developing engineers to do a preliminary patent search before sending a new invention to an attorney.