Preface to fourth edition

The time interval since the third edition appeared in 2012 has seen no slackening in the pace of change in patent information. Although some challenges have remained the same – for example, the increasing number of active patent offices around the world – others have been less easy to anticipate, such as the continuing rise in the number of patent applications filed annually worldwide, and the decline in dominance of English as a major language of the source documents. Both of these latter factors have led to massive developments in the technology for machine translation of patent texts. Equally significant has been the development of computer-assisted tools at all stages of the patenting process, from the initial filing through examination, work-sharing between patent offices, granting and eventual publication of granted specifications. There is even speculation that IT systems of the future will completely replace the human work of search, if not examination.

Despite all these changes in the processes within the patent community, the fact remains that any search is only as good as the sources used, and in my consultancy work I have to return time and again to the basic question – what does my database contain? No search engine, however “intelligent”, can find an answer if the relevant data items are missing from the data repository which is being searched. For that reason, I believe that there is still a place for a guide to the resources available for searching in patents. Note that this is not a guide to all the resources which a competent patent searcher may need to use when conducting a patentability search. With modern patent laws demanding universal novelty, this book has only undertaken the task of discussing sources of patent information, not sources of prior art as such; it is beyond my scope to discuss every source of non-patent literature which might impinge upon granting or validity decisions. The existing chapter on non-patent literature can only be taken as the briefest of overviews; each individual searcher needs to develop their expertise in this area, and the choice of significant information sources to use will depend heavily upon the technical domain in which they do their searching.

The past years have seen a continued expansion of national economies in Africa, South America and parts of Asia. To reflect this, the current edition has added chapters covering the major patenting countries from these regions. The chapters covering the established patent systems of other nations have also been reviewed and updated.

At the time of writing, it is still uncertain whether the European Union regulations concerning unitary effect of patents granted by the EPO will come into effect, either in their original form or amended after the UK’s exit from the EU.

There are always going to be some changes “in the pipeline” at the point where a book publisher’s patience finally runs out and the author is persuaded to stop amending their text and allow the publication presses to roll. For that reason, I am grateful to the liaison staff at Walter de Gruyter who allowed me to continue to work as long as I have, and to the staff at many of the organisations whose products are described, who have submitted to ongoing requests for the latest information.

Much of the current awareness for the modern patent search professional has to come from personal networking and the painstaking collection of numerous pieces of isolated information, which build up into a coherent picture of what is happening in the industry. I am grateful for every such conversation – face-to-face or electronic – with colleagues, which has helped me in this process.

On the human side, we have seen the process of professional registration for the patent searcher finally get underway with the formation of the International Standards Board for Qualified Patent Information Professionals (ISBQPIP). I am hopeful that the dedication of my contemporaries, searching patents within corporations and patent offices around the world, will be more fully recognised as a result. I trust also that the next generation of patent search professionals will have a heightened appreciation that their work – complex, dynamic, often multi-lingual and international – adds up to a fulfilling career path. It is my hope that both the experienced and novice searcher will find something in these pages which helps their journey.

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