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PAY GRADE | *By Sarah E. Needleman*

■ **The job:** Patent researcher

■ **Nature of the work:** These professional investigators work for law firms, research businesses, the federal government and corporations. They scour various sources to make sure an idea or invention is original and they typically specialize in areas such as electronics, computer science, chemistry and mechanical engineering. "Their job is to find what we call 'prior art,'" says John Tsavaris, special counsel at Kenyon & Kenyon LLP, an intellectual-property law firm in New York.

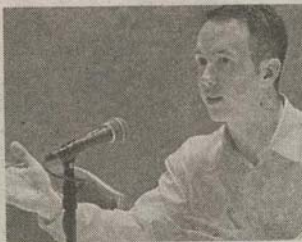
■ **The pay:** At law firms, patent researchers with one to four years of experience earn annual salaries of about \$65,000, says Gary Buckland, a vice president at Kelly Law Registry, a legal staffing firm in Troy, Mich. Those with 15 to 20 years of experience may earn upward of \$85,000, he says. Patent researchers employed by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office—known as patent examiners—earn salaries ranging from \$40,184 to \$75,537, depending on specialty.

■ **The hours:** Patent researchers typically work during normal business hours, though they may occasionally put in overtime to meet deadlines.

■ **The benefits:** Traditional health-care packages and retirement-savings programs are common at most firms; standard for government workers.

■ **Other incentives:** Researchers get to see products before commercialization. "Sometimes a client will provide us with prototypes of the inventions we're researching," says Matt Rodgers, a vice president at Landon IP, in Alexandria, Va.

■ **Best part of the job:** Katherine Schultz, a patent engineer at Michael Best & Friedrich LLP, an intellectual-



Matt Rodgers of Landon IP

property law firm in Milwaukee likes the variety. She does research work in addition to helping attorneys draft and defend patent applications. "When someone walks in with a new invention disclosure, it's always a surprise," she says.

■ **Worst part of the job:** "It can be repetitive," says Mr. Rodgers. "You might have several projects in a row that have similar objectives, so they require the same type of research." The job's work environment may be a downside. "It's pretty quiet most of the time," says Cindy Troutt, a patent researcher at Canon U.S.A. Inc.

■ **Education/Qualifications:** A bachelor's degree in a technical discipline such as science or engineering is a common requisite, says Dr. Tsavaris, also an adjunct professor at Fordham University School of Law. Employers also look for candidates with strong analytical, organizational and time-management skills, he adds. Career changers may be able to gain entry into the field upon completing internships or coursework on patent research.

■ **Hiring:** Demand for patent researchers is steady. There's a backlog of more than 750,000 patent applications with the federal government, says Lynn Feild, a workgroup manager at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Jobs there are listed at usptocareers.gov. Openings at companies and law firms are advertised on job boards, including intelproplaw.com and patentlyo.com.