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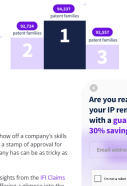
Which companies hold the most patents in the world?

Uncover who holds the world's largest patent portfolios and explore the strategic importance of patents in driving global innovation.



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In the fast-changing world of tech innovation, patents are like badges of honor for companies. They show off a company's skills and commitment to coming up with new ideas. Patents aren't just about protecting ideas; they're like a stamp of approval for the hard work put into research and development. But finding out exactly how many patents a company has can be as tricky as keeping a well-kept secret.

To explore the global landscape of innovation, let's spotlight the heavy players. Based on the latest insights from the IFI Claims 2023 Global 250 report, we'll unveil the companies that stand as the world's largest patent holders, offering a glimpse into the cutting edge of global innovation.

Source: IFI Claims 2023 Global 250, The World's Largest Patent Holders report, Jan 2023 and Jan 2024

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Panasonic Holdings Corp - Electronic Giant

Headquartered in Osaka, Japan, Panasonic Holdings Corporation stands out as a major player in the realm of **multinational electronics**. They are considered as an electronics giant based in and a global leader in innovative technologies for consumer electronics and housing.

Panasonic was **the world's top patent applicant** for three decades, from the 1980s to the 2000s. In January 2024, Panasonic still holds the leader position in the innovation playground. The company proudly boasts an impressive total of **94,327 patent families**. This achievement underscores Panasonic's unparalleled dominance in the landscape of total global patent holdings.

Panasonic Group has been actively building a strong global intellectual property portfolio, aligning it with our business and **R&D strategies**. In the fiscal year 2023, they made a significant investment of 469.8 billion JPY (¥3,184 billion) in research and development, with a calculated ratio of R&D expenses to sales standing at an impressive **5.6%**. Notably, they filed around **15,000 applications** for patents, utility models, and designs in 2023, with roughly 9,200 submitted outside Japan.

Samsung - A global technology giant

Hailing from South Korea, Samsung has established itself as a **global technology giant**. With a robust presence in consumer electronics, telecommunications, and semiconductor industries, Samsung's patent holdings mirror its diverse interests.

In 2023, Samsung (SSNLF) **secured 6,248 patents**, maintaining its lead as the top patent holder in the US, although experiencing a modest 2% dip from the previous year. Despite this, at the moment, Samsung holds the second position globally with an **extensive portfolio of 92,724 active patent families**.

Renowned for its commitment to research and development, Samsung stands as the **largest non-US spender on R&D**. In the fiscal year 2022, the company invested ₩24.92 trillion ($20.14 billion), constituting 8.2% of its ₩302.23 trillion sales. Operating in 14 countries, Samsung's largest R&D center outside Korea, SRI-B in Bengaluru, has made significant contributions, filing **over 7,500** patents globally.

Highlighting its global innovation strategy, Samsung completed its $220 million **R&D center project in Vietnam** in December 2022, initiated in 2020. This development underscores Samsung's dedication to expanding its research capabilities on an international scale.

Hitachi Ltd - Prominent Japanese multinational conglomerate

Established in 1910 and headquartered in Chiyoda, Tokyo, Hitachi stands as a prominent Japanese **multinational conglomerate**. They're experts in various things like digital systems, renewable energy solutions, railway systems, healthcare products, and financial systems. Hitachi has a long history and a wide reach, making them a major player in different industries.

In the innovation landscape, Hitachi stays at the third position regarding the number of patent families, currently owning **92,557 active families**.

Namihei Odaira, Hitachi's founder, always encouraged invention by Hitachi's employees, he said that invention was the life mission of engineers. Odaira himself made a rigorous study of patents and existing inventions, purchasing and collecting copies of patent applications. This highlights the importance of innovation within the core of the organization.

Hitachi has a strategy for handling intellectual property that has three main parts. First, there's the "**competitive strategy**," where they focus on getting and using IP rights, like patents. Then, there's the "**collaboration strategy**," where they use IP to work with others and build partnerships. Lastly, there's the "**IP for society**" part, where they want to use IP to solve real-world problems.

Recently, Hitachi has also been **focusing on IP to advance sustainability**. They're involved in "WIPO GREEN" which is like a marketplace run by the World Intellectual Property Organization. It's all about spreading technologies and ideas that can help to achieve our Sustainable Development Goals.

Chinese Academy of Sciences - A big player driving science and tech progress

The Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) is the **national academy for natural sciences** and the highest consultancy for science and technology in China. CAS takes responsibility for multiple functions – they have a national team pushing for new technology, they are a leader supporting science and tech all over the country, a place for smart advice on science, and a hub for training young talents in science and tech. In short, CAS is a big player **driving science and tech progress in China**.

In recent years, CAS made an impressive investment in innovation, which resulted in a surge in the number of active patent families, giving them the 4th position globally. CAS held 88,573 active patent families in January 2023, and by January 2024 this number **increased to 89,181**, with more than 600 new granted.

Research and development are always the priority of CAS. They have 104 research institutes, 12 branch academies, three universities and 11 supporting organizations in 23 provincial-level areas throughout the country. These institutions are home to dozens of national and CAS key labs and engineering centers. Altogether, **CAS comprises 1,000 sites and stations across the country** which all focus on innovation.

Canon - The world's largest camera manufacturer

Established in 1937, Canon is a global technology leader known for its pioneering work in imaging and optical products like **innovative cameras, printers, and medical equipment**.

Canon (CAJ) is still the reigning champ among Japanese companies for the 18th straight year. When seen in terms of cumulative patent holdings, they climbed up to the fifth place (up from ninth in 2022) with an impressive **73,517 active patent families** in 2023.

Canon's influence extends across four pivotal business domains: printing, imaging, medical, and industrial equipment. In recent times, Canon has directed its efforts towards advancing fundamental technologies such as **video analysis, cutting-edge image sensors, volumetric video, and healthcare AI**. Canon's focus is on developing technologies with versatile applications, as well as acquiring patent rights for these innovations.

Moreover, Canon is serious about staying ahead in the innovation game. In FY 2022, they invested ¥306.73 billion ($2.07 billion) in research and development (R&D), equivalent to 7.6% of their net sales. Canon has been unwaveringly investing in turning their ideas into reality, consistently **investing between 7-9% of their net sales for R&D expenses** throughout the years. Therefore, they're not merely following trends; they're forging the path in the field of innovative technology.

Other large patent holders

- **China Petrochemical Corp** claimed the sixth spot with 66,636 active patent families, a 32% increase dramatically, from the 12th position in 2022. This impressive number shows the consistency and seriousness of investment in innovation.
- **Toshiba Corp** slipped from the 6th position and settled on 7th in the new annual report, holding a total of 65,325 active patent families.
- **Midea Group Co Ltd** takes the 8th place with the number of active patent families at 64,903 according to the newest data.
- **Toyota** has secured a spot in the top 9 with a light increase in the number of patents from the previous year. Specifically, the company currently holds 64,736 active families.
- **Mitsubishi** holds the 10th position with 62,089 patents, marking a decline from its 9th-place ranking in 2022.

In a world where ideas constantly evolve, the patent scene reflects the ongoing innovation efforts of these tech giants. Patents become the markers of progress as companies strive to bring new and exciting ideas to life.

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