

How to protect *your* ideas

Take a look around you. *Almost everything* that you use has been created by someone who has invested their time, effort and money to make it. There are rules that protect their and your creativity.

Creativity & Intellectual property laws

These rules are called intellectual property laws and they don't just apply to finished commercial products, they apply to anything that anyone creates that is original. They are important to understand if you want to sell your ideas or your creative work but they are also equally important if you want to give your work away.

Patents

Things that are invented and can be made or used, like machines, can be protected by patents. A patent is effectively a certificate from the Government which says the idea for your invention is yours and although you have to explain how it works to get the patent, no one else is allowed to use it without your permission.

Patents must be registered and the process of getting them registered is often expensive and complex (on average it costs £4000 and takes 5 years to register a patent). It is a good idea to keep the inner workings of your invention a secret until you can find someone to pay for professional help (see Trade Secrets overleaf).

Copyright

Things that people create which have an author, artist or composer are protected by copyright and are known as copyright works. These include books, written reports, websites, apps, pictures, music, films and computer games.

You don't need to register a copyright work for it to be protected, but it does have to be original and written down or recorded in some form. This includes saving it to a digital device like a phone, tablet or PC.

Copyright is created automatically – the law says that other people can't make copies or send them to others without the author's permission. In order to make this clear you should always put a copyright symbol '©', the name of the authors and the year on anything you produce.

Design Rights

The way that a product looks on the outside is protected by design rights (think of the shape of the Coca Cola bottle). Design rights come in two types – registered and unregistered. Unregistered design rights don't last as long as registered design rights, but like copyright they are automatic as soon as you write it down or record it in some form.

Trade Marks

Trade marks are the names that organisations use for their brands. For example the name 'Coca Cola' is a trade mark and if anyone made a new soft drink called 'Kuka Cula' it is likely that they would be breaking the law. Make sure that any product name you use is not already in use by another product.

Trade Secrets

Trade secrets are a very important way of protecting your ideas and the recipe for Coca Cola is a good example. It's protected and it is illegal to find out that secret and tell it to anyone. In order to protect your ideas you should make sure you don't tell people everything about your project – just enough that they understand what makes it special. TeenTech Awards use something called a non-disclosure agreement (or NDA) which mentors and awards judges sign to promise that they will not use or tell anyone about your ideas without your permission.

For more information

- The UK Intellectual Property Office (IPO) is the Government department responsible for intellectual property law <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/intellectual-property-office>
- The British Library Business and IP Centre helps people develop ideas and they have library resources and expert advice <http://www.bl.uk/bipc/>

