

IBM No Longer Tops in Annual U.S. Patents Issued

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For the first time in decades, IBM lost its top spot in total number of utility patents granted by the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office for 2022, with an almost 50% decline from last year. Samsung Inc. is now the world leader with 8,513 issued U.S. Patents in 2022. IBM slipped down into second place with 4,329 issued patents. IBM had held the top spot for last 29 straight years and reportedly generating more than \$27 billion in IP income since 1996. A shift after three decades of prominence has surely caused a stir in the US patent landscape.

IBM's rate of issued patents had started to slow in recent years even though it had maintained the top spot. For its part, IBM has stated that the dip in patents issued and the loss of the top spot was purposeful, and that IBM's strategy exhibited an intentional shift to "no longer pursue numeric patent leadership" and to free engineers from the laborious and costly process. IBM has further explained that this process has been part of an ongoing effort toward more collaborative efforts across technologies instead.

Overall, U.S. patent grants in 2022 dropped to their lowest level since 2018, although the companies at the top of the list have continued to obtain an impressive number of patents. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing holds the third spot with 3,024 issued patents, Huawei in fourth with 2,836, and Canon rounding out the top five with 2,694. The rest of the top ten include technology giants LG, Qualcomm, Intel, Apple, and Toyota.

While IBM's reduction was seen across all types of patents, the largest drop concerned those for semiconductors and hardware memory. Samsung's rise was boosted by patents for visual display systems and voice communication. Applications directed to artificial intelligence applications and consumer-facing tools powered by machine learning technology were also prominent. As new technologies continue to develop, it is no surprise that the what lands in the files of the USPTO will follow suit.

IBM's shift from the top spot may be considered a one-off result of a technology giant's strategy shift, or could be an indicator that technology companies might alter their focus for IP protection within the U.S. Patent system.

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