

News story: Warning: misleading invoices – don't be fooled

Misleading mail

If you receive an unsolicited invitation, DO NOT PAY IT until you have checked what services are being offered and if it is from an official source.

Changes to the mailings

Following IPO's successful legal action against private organisations offering official-sounding trade mark renewal services, and upheld complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority, customer feedback has changed.

Customer feedback about misleading offers for trade mark renewal services has steadily declined over the past six months. However, the volume of customer feedback about misleading offers to enter trade marks on private official-sounding registers is increasing.

Entries in unofficial publications or 'registers'

The invitations look like official invoices and sometimes include a pre-paid reply envelope.

The two main private organisations that issue these 'registration' offers are currently:

- the World Organization for Trademarks (WOTRA)
- the Intellectual Property Organisation Service (IPOS)

You are under no obligation to pay them.

You should be aware, details of all UK applications and granted patents, registered trade marks and designs, are automatically entered onto our official registers:

The European Patent Office (EPO), World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) all operate similar official registers.

These automatically record all applications for granted patents, and registered trade marks and designs, either filed directly with them, or through us.

WIPO has further information on [unsolicited invitations relating to international patent applications](#).

European Union trade mark filing

Some businesses, who are not regulated legal service providers, are contacting applicants of UK trade marks. They are offering to file a European Union Trade Mark application based on the data present in their UK application.

There is no obligation to file a European Union Trade Mark application to obtain protection in the UK. If however you decide to consider such an offer, you should check:

- whether the person is offering to represent you before EUIPO in the event of any problems with, or objections to, your application – not everyone can do this
- whether the fee quoted by the UK service provider includes the official fees for making a European Union Trade Mark application. If not, how these fees will be paid

What to do if you receive an unsolicited invitation

Check to see what services are being offered and if it is from an official source. You are NOT obliged to pay any fees. These companies are not linked to any government or EU institution.

If you receive a misleading invoice, [we would like to hear about it.](#)

We would like you to include an electronic copy of both the invoice, and the envelope it was received with, in your email for our records. If you also received a pre-paid return envelope, please send a copy of that as well.

If you are in doubt about the mailing, check with your patent or trade mark attorney, solicitor, patent advisor or inventor-support organisation.

You can also contact the [Chartered Institute of Trade Mark Attorneys](#) or the [Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys](#) whose members provide general advice on patents, designs and trade marks.

Action Fraud

If you have received an invoice in relation to your trade mark, design or patent and were misled into paying the organisation, please also report it to Action Fraud.

For customers or representatives who have received a misleading invoice, please make an [Information Report to Action Fraud](#) via the online reporting tool.

For customers or representatives who have paid a misleading invoice, please make a [Crime Report to Action Fraud.](#)

Action Fraud is the online reporting portal for all instances of fraud affecting UK citizens and businesses. It is operated by the City of London

Police who are the UK lead Force for the investigation of fraud. Reports are collated and analysed by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB). Depending on a scoring matrix, together with an assessment of available evidence, they can be sent to an individual police force for investigation.

The NFIB also send out industry alerts when new methods or techniques to defraud companies are identified. Whilst we cannot guarantee a response by law enforcement, it would be helpful if you kept the invoice and accompanying envelope(s) in a plastic sleeve and handle it as little as possible.

Thank you for your cooperation.