



The U.S. Intellectual Property Economy: What the Numbers Tell Us

A USIJ Summary of the USPTO Report: Intellectual Property and the U.S. Economy in 2024

United States Patent and Trademark Office | August 2026

\$11.4T

44% of Private Sector GDP

65.8M

Jobs Supported

53%

Higher Wages vs. Non-IP
Jobs

81.5%

of All U.S. Commodity Exports

Overview

Every four years, the USPTO publishes a landmark study measuring the economic footprint of IP-intensive industries across the entire U.S. private sector. The August 2026 edition — covering 2024 data — is the most comprehensive to date. It examines 210 industries, identifies 128 as IP-intensive, and quantifies their contributions to GDP, employment, wages, and exports.

For USIJ — whose member companies and the startups and investors they represent depend on strong, reliable patent protection — the findings are both validating and urgent. The data make clear that patent protection is not a legal technicality. It is the economic architecture of American prosperity.

IP-Intensive Industries Drive Nearly Half of the American Economy

In 2024, IP-intensive industries accounted for \$11.4 trillion — 44% of total U.S. private sector GDP. That is more than twice the combined output of every non-IP-intensive sector in the country. By IP type:

- Trademark-intensive industries contributed \$9.5 trillion
- Design patent-intensive industries contributed \$6.8 trillion
- Utility patent-intensive industries contributed \$6.0 trillion
- Copyright-intensive industries contributed \$1.9 trillion

The leading industries by output include computer systems design (\$522B), software publishing (\$380B), non-store retailing (\$421B), and pharmaceuticals (\$247B) — all of which are intensive users of multiple forms of IP, including utility patents.

Critically, the IP-intensive industry share of private sector GDP has grown from 41% in 2019 to 44% in 2024 — a trajectory that makes clear that America's economic future is increasingly patent-dependent.

65.8 Million American Jobs Depend on IP Protection

IP-intensive industries directly employed 49.6 million workers in 2024 — 33% of all U.S. private sector employment. An additional 16.2 million jobs were indirectly supported through supply chains, bringing the total to 65.8 million jobs, or 44% of the entire private sector workforce.

These are not abstract statistics. They represent the engineers, researchers, designers, technicians, and entrepreneurs whose livelihoods depend on the ability to protect their innovations. Every policy decision that weakens patent rights — through PTAB abuse, reduced patent eligibility, or inadequate enforcement — puts these jobs at risk.

Patent-Protected Jobs Pay 53% More — and the Premium Is Growing

Workers in IP-intensive industries earned an average of \$1,897 per week in 2024 — 53% more than the \$1,238 average in non-IP-intensive industries. This earnings premium has been rising for decades. Between 2014 and 2024 alone, the premium across all IP-intensive industries increased from 47% to 53%.

The wage premium is not uniform across IP types. Workers in utility patent-intensive industries — the industries most directly dependent on a strong patent system — earn a 91% premium over non-IP-intensive workers. This is the clearest quantitative evidence that patent protection does not merely reward corporations: it raises wages, expands the middle class, and creates the kind of high-value employment that drives broadly shared prosperity.

IP-Intensive Industries Power American Exports

In 2024, IP-intensive industries accounted for \$1.58 trillion in U.S. commodity exports — 81.5% of all U.S. commodity export value. Eighteen of the top 20 commodity-exporting industries were IP-intensive. Leading export industries include:

- Aerospace products and parts: \$141 billion
- Pharmaceuticals and medicines: among the top five
- Semiconductor and electronic components: among the top seven
- Motor vehicles, basic chemicals, and navigational instruments

The U.S. competes globally on the strength of its innovations. IP-intensive industries are America's primary tool for competing in a world where China, the European Union, and other nations are aggressively building their own IP systems and innovation economies.

USIJ Perspective: What This Means for Patent Policy

The USPTO's findings carry a clear policy message that USIJ has been making for years: the strength of the U.S. patent system is not a niche legal concern. It is a macroeconomic variable of the first order. Every dimension of American economic health — GDP growth, employment, wages, and global competitiveness — is materially dependent on the quality and reliability of U.S. patent protection.

The Startup Imperative

USIJ's member companies represent the innovation pipeline that feeds the industries documented in this report. Startups in semiconductors, biotechnology, medical devices, cybersecurity, and AI — precisely the sectors identified by the USPTO as the most IP-intensive and the most economically vital — cannot attract investment, build teams, or reach market without the certainty that their core innovations are protectable.

The USPTO's own data on agricultural startups illustrates this dynamic directly: thousands of ag-tech startups have used patent applications as the primary tool for attracting venture investment and achieving successful exits. The same pattern holds across every IP-intensive sector. Patents are not the reward for innovation — they are the instrument through which innovation is financed.

The PTAB Threat to the Patent Economy

The \$11.4 trillion GDP figure and the 65.8 million jobs are not self-sustaining. They depend on a patent system that reliably grants enforceable rights and maintains those rights against serial administrative attack.

USIJ has documented extensively how PTAB's invalidation rates — historically as high as 70% of all-claims invalidation at final written decision — undermine the investment certainty on which IP-intensive industry growth depends. A venture investor evaluating a semiconductor startup is not measuring the intrinsic quality of the patents. They are measuring the probability that those patents will survive a major IPR campaign by entrenched incumbents. When that probability is perceived as low, the capital does not flow. When the capital does not flow, the startup does not form. When the startup does not form, the next generation of IP-intensive industry GDP does not materialize.

The USPTO NPRM, the PREVAIL Act, and the RESTORE Patent Rights Act are not abstract patent reform debates. They are economic policy interventions with direct implications for whether the trends documented in this report continue — or reverse.

USIJ's Call to Action

The USPTO's August 2026 report makes the economic case for strong patent protection with unprecedented clarity and scope. USIJ urges Congress and the Administration to act on its implications:

- Finalize and implement the USPTO PTAB NPRM to stop serial validity attacks on American innovators' core patents
- Enact the PREVAIL Act to permanently reform PTAB's standing, burden of proof, and estoppel rules
- Enact the RESTORE Patent Rights Act to restore the presumption of injunctive relief that deters efficient infringement
- Enact the Patent Eligibility Restoration Act (PERA) to resolve the Section 101 uncertainty that prevents patent protection for AI, diagnostics, and personalized medicine
- Resist proposals to weaken pharmaceutical patents, university research funding, or licensing revenue frameworks that directly sustain the innovation pipeline feeding the IP-intensive industries that drive \$11.4 trillion in GDP

"A strong patent system is not a favor to corporations. It is the economic infrastructure that sustains \$11.4 trillion in GDP, 65.8 million American jobs, and 81.5% of our commodity exports. Weaken it, and you weaken America."

— Alliance of U.S. Startups and Inventors for Jobs (USIJ)
