

# New customers for PatLib Genoa – Good practice for attracting more clients

Paola Carbone

*Centro PatLib, Chamber of Commerce, Piazza De Ferrari 30r, 16121, Genova, Italy*

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## Abstract

PatLib Genoa provides a number of services to companies in the Liguria Region. A number of initiatives have been carried out in recent years to promote local innovation. Among these initiatives are promotion of SMEs in the maritime sector; provision of tailored services for firms; and services for researchers and academics.

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*Keywords:* PatLib; Italy; Liguria; Promotion; SME; Maritime; ICT; Diogene

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is about some actions taken by the Genoa Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Handcraft and Agriculture through the “Innovation and Patent Office”, to promote the innovation of companies in the Liguria Region.

As already underlined in a previous article [1] in the seventies the Liguria region was traditionally a commercial and industrial area, but in the nineties it was one of the least developed region in the north of Italy. Now the situation is gradually changing, but companies still need to be helped by general promotion actions, to gain competitiveness in the global market.

The former goal of Genoa PatLib Centre [2] (i.e. to encourage both SMEs and Ligurian researchers to use patent information as a basis for their research and commercial policy) has now changed to a wider one: the promotion of innovation in the area, for the growth of the economic system and its competitiveness.

## 2. Genoa innovation and patent office

In the last few years the PatLib Centre has been integrated within the “Innovation and Patent Office”, which manages The Innovation Relay Centre (IRC) and other projects concerning patents, technology transfers, technology and patent information and trademarks which are aimed at enhancing the competitiveness and the growth of local companies.

Diogene [3], the project described in the previous article [1], is now managed by the “Innovation and Patent Office” and the University of Genoa. It is not only the patent section that we manage but, the funding, certification, and technology transfer sections also.

The services provided by the “Innovation and Patent Office” are now more comprehensive and include information to companies and research centres about patents, licensing, technology transfer and also tailored promotion.

The main services are:

- Patent monitoring/searching.
- Technology alert and matching.
- Organization and participation in brokerage events.
- Patent helpdesk.
- Funding helpdesk.

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*E-mail address:* [paola.carbone@ge.camcom.it](mailto:paola.carbone@ge.camcom.it)

- Assistance for Transnational Technology Transfer agreements.
- Organization of technical seminars, technical meetings, conferences.

The “Innovation and Patent Office” takes part in several collective projects with partners from research and industry at local, national and international levels. The Innovation and Patent Office has a portfolio of clients such as companies, inventors and researchers from universities, private research centres and public research centres (INFM, CNR). It mainly concentrates on innovative companies, SMEs and spin off.

As aforementioned the objectives are to promote and simplify both inward and outward access to innovation and technology transfers in the Liguria region and to establish a number of different initiatives to support and speed up this process.

The “Innovation and Patent Office” does this by promoting local patents and technologies. Clients’ patents and technologies are promoted using the network the Office is linked to and a more personalised service tailored towards each particular client. Promotion might be initiated by a client approaching the PatLib Centre or, in some cases, the PatLib Centre might approach a potential client. With regard to this second scenario a “good practice” has been developed in order to attract and gain new customers.

The EPO databases are utilised to full capacity to extract local applicants for a certain patents field, and then the most established patents from the Liguria region are selected.

After the applicant has been identified the PatLib Centre locates a contact person within the company and arranges a meeting in order to propose some tailored services.

The most useful services available are:

- the promotion of technology offers and requests in a professionally prepared newsletter;
- the promotion of *market oriented* patents in our “patents window”;
- patent and technology watch;
- preparation of technology offer to be included in the marketplace of the IRC network;
- registration for “Automatic Matching Tool”;
- inclusion of patents in technology catalogue to be diffused for the preparation of brokerage events;
- inclusion of patents in a patent list to be published in specialized magazines.

These services, which are mainly targeted towards SMEs are proposed on the basis of the company’s history, its aims and objectives, potential growth and overall business plan. The consultants we send into these companies are chosen because they have particular skills and knowledge to enable them to gather accurate information and offer appropriate suggestions with regards to the growth of the company.

The approach follows a “step by step” philosophy to gather information on the company, to raise their confidence in our ability to provide appropriate service.

### 3. Examples of initiatives

This is illustrated by the two following examples: the first is a group of SMEs belonging to the maritime sector, the second is a “one to one” approach.

There is a third example about the services we provide for researchers and academics.

#### 3.1. SMEs in the maritime sector

More than 60% of the Ligurian region GDP is produced by the maritime sector. A substantial part of this percentage includes all *services* related to ports and sea, but the remaining percentage deals with boat and naval market, security and environmental technologies.

The boat market is characterized by a high level of technology: companies need extensive high technical knowledge. This is in both the production phase itself and in environment and security laws.

There was a selection of patents filed by Ligurian companies and research centres for 2000–2003.

We contacted an English/Italian magazine “TTM – Sea Technologies and Logistic” to ask if they would publish an article and a list of patents. A mutually beneficial agreement was reached and they made no charge for this.

We sought permission with the applicants to include their patents in the published list.

The list was organized in three section: ships or other waterborne vessels – related equipment; micro-structural technology; hoisting, lifting, hauling. The list included 25 patent titles: the informal agreement between assisted companies and The PatLib Centre included authorisation to filter any future expressions of interest on behalf of assisted companies. The magazine was distributed during the 2003 Genoa International Boat Show.

In spite of specific advertising and 8500 publications were distributed, just a couple of contacts were registered, and no negotiations followed. But The PatLib Centre had gained 25 more clients . . .

We realise that clients need something more in addition to advertising, they need market oriented services and potential business opportunities: therefore we decided to propose a conference and brokerage event to the same 25 clients and to others. The event was scheduled for one year later.

The event was organized by the Genoa Chamber of Commerce, the Italian Chamber of Commerce for France of Marseille and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Marseille–Provence. Companies were asked to present their technologies during the business forum and to present their own products to assist in the compilation of a technology catalogue, used for the organization of bilateral meetings.

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