



Opinion Poll

Small Business Owners Support Legislation Reforming Patent System

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Small Business Majority

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Executive Summary

Small business owners nationwide are doing everything they can to fortify their businesses in our slowly recovering economy. In communities across the United States, it is the jobs small businesses provide and the consumers they serve that keep our recovery moving. However, this recovery is threatened when small businesses are faced with costly and frivolous lawsuits brought on by patent assertion entities—commonly referred to as patent trolls. According to a national scientific opinion poll conducted for Small Business Majority, small businesses support patent reform legislation that would help prevent patent trolls from targeting small businesses.

Patent assertion entities are companies that don't make or sell anything of their own; they purchase relatively ambiguous patents and then demand royalty payments for use of their technology, or immediately file lawsuits against firms they believe are infringing on their intellectual property. This situation is not just faced by companies that manufacture or sell technology: it also affects end users of common technologies, such as a coffee shop offering WiFi to their customers.

Small business owners understand that in order to prevent these attacks, reform is needed to strengthen the U.S. patent system. Our polling found that by more than a 3:1 margin, small employers support the Innovation Act—legislation that would change the rules and regulations surrounding patent infringement claims to reduce frivolous lawsuits brought by patent trolls. It would require, among other things, more specificity in patent lawsuits and more transparency in patent ownership, and protect end users of commonly used technologies from being targeted by patent trolls. When small employers learned more about the provisions within the bill, their support grew even stronger.

For example, small businesses believe they should be protected from patent trolls by requiring them to sue the party that is actually responsible for infringement, not the end users who had no input into the product. Seventy-seven percent of entrepreneurs support this provision. What's more, nearly three-fourths (73%) of small business owners believe patent trolls should be deterred from attacking small businesses in the first place by penalizing them for filing fraudulent patent assertions or sending abusive demand letters. Seventy-six percent believe courts should impose financial sanctions against patent trolls that file baseless lawsuits.

In the case that a small business must go to court to fight a patent troll, more than 6 in 10 (61%) support a provision that would allow courts to require the loser in a frivolous patent case to pay the winning side's fees and costs. And more than three-fourths (77%) support a provision that would require more transparency in patent lawsuits by requiring plaintiffs to disclose who the owner of a patent is before litigation, so that it is clear who stands to benefit financially from the lawsuit. Half of entrepreneurs strongly support this provision.

Small employers also showed particularly strong support for a provision that would reduce the cost of discovery in patent lawsuits. Eighty-two percent of entrepreneurs support the creation of new judicial rules to reduce the costs of discovery in patent litigation, so that high legal fees do not force small businesses and entrepreneurs to settle out of court when they don't need to.

Small employers also agree that improvements should be made to the U.S. Patent Office in order to help prevent abuse of the system. A vast majority (68%) believes the U.S. Patent Office should be fully funded so there is closer scrutiny of patent applications. Nearly three-fourths (74%) support expanding patent review opportunities to prevent patent trolls from threatening small businesses with patents that were questionable in the first place, and seven in 10 support creating a system to trigger automatic reviews of patents that are commonly exploited by patent trolls.

It's important to note the respondents don't see this issue through an ideological lens and were in fact predominately Republican – with 47% of small business owners identifying as Republican, 29% as Democrat and 19% as independent.

Main Findings

- **Small employers support legislation that seeks to reform the patent system. It would require, among other things, more specificity in patent lawsuits and more transparency in patent ownership, and protect end users of commonly used technologies from being targeted by patent trolls:** By more than a 3:1 margin, small employers support the Innovation Act—legislation that would change the rules and regulations surrounding patent infringement lawsuits to reduce frivolous lawsuits brought by patent assertion entities. When small employers learned more about the provisions within the bill, their support grew even stronger.
- **Small businesses agree the loser in a frivolous patent case should pay the winner's fees:** More than 6 in 10 (61%) support a provision that would allow courts to require the loser in a frivolous patent case to pay the winning side's fees and costs.
- **The vast majority of entrepreneurs believe end users should be protected from frivolous patent lawsuits:** 77% of small businesses believe they should be protected from patent trolls by requiring them to sue the party that is actually responsible for the infringement, not the end users who had no input into the product. Nearly half (46%) of respondents *strongly support* this provision.
- **Small businesses agree patent trolls should be penalized for fraudulent patent assertions or abusive demand letters:** Nearly three-fourths (73%) of small business owners believe patent trolls should be deterred by penalizing them for filing fraudulent patent assertions or sending abusive demand letters. Seventy-six percent believe courts should impose financial sanctions against patent trolls that file baseless lawsuits.
- **Small business owners support more transparency in patent lawsuits:** 77% of small employers support a provision that would require more transparency in patent lawsuits by requiring plaintiffs to disclose who the owner of a patent is before litigation, so that it is clear who stands to benefit financially from the lawsuit. Half of entrepreneurs *strongly support* this provision.
- **Entrepreneurs overwhelmingly support a provision that would reduce the cost of discovery in patent lawsuits:** 82% of entrepreneurs support the creation of new judicial rules that would reduce the costs of discovery in patent litigation, so that high legal fees do not force small businesses and entrepreneurs to settle out of court when they don't need to.
- **Small employers support making improvements to the U.S. Patent Office:** A vast majority (68%) believes the U.S. Patent Office should be fully funded so there is closer scrutiny of patent applications.
- **Entrepreneurs support expanding review opportunities for patents:** Nearly three-fourths (74%) support expanding patent review opportunities to prevent patent trolls from threatening small businesses with patents that were questionable in the first place. Seven in 10 support creating a system to trigger automatic reviews of patents that are commonly exploited by patent trolls.
- **Respondents were politically diverse:** 47% identified as Republican, 29% as Democrat and 19% as independent or other.

Entrepreneurs Support Legislation to Reform the Patent System

Our polling found that by more than a 3:1 margin, small employers support the Innovation Act—legislation that would change the rules and regulations surrounding patent infringement claims to reduce frivolous lawsuits brought by patent trolls. It would require, among other things, more specificity in patent lawsuits and more transparency in patent ownership, and protect end users of commonly used technologies from being targeted by patent trolls. When small employers learned more about the provisions within the bill, their support grew even stronger.

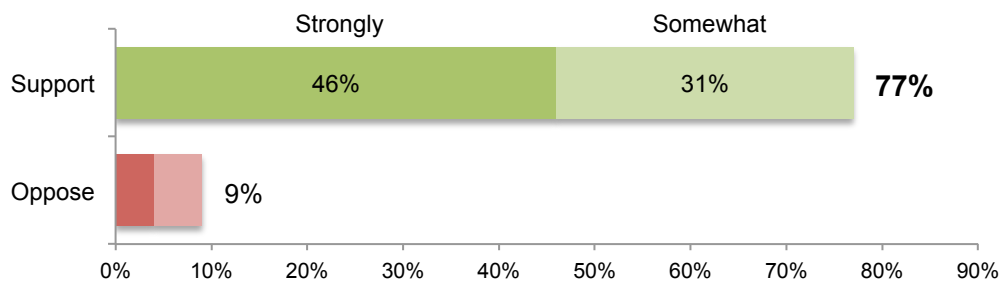
Small Employers Strongly Support Provisions Within Patent Reform Legislation

Small businesses' support for proposed patent reform legislation grew further once they knew more about specific provisions that would help improve the patent system.

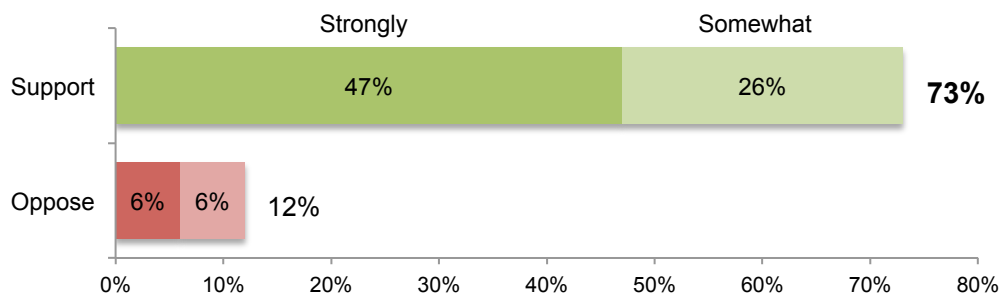
Small businesses believe they should be protected from patent trolls by requiring them to sue the party that is actually responsible for infringement, not the end users who had no input into the product. Seventy-seven percent of entrepreneurs support this provision, with nearly half (46%) who *strongly support* this.

What's more, nearly three-fourths (73%) of small business owners believe that patent trolls should be deterred from attacking small businesses in the first place by penalizing them for filing fraudulent patent assertions or sending abusive demand letters. Seventy-six percent believe courts should impose financial sanctions against patent trolls that file baseless lawsuits.

■ **Figure 1: Entrepreneurs agree end users of common technologies should be protected from patent infringement lawsuits**

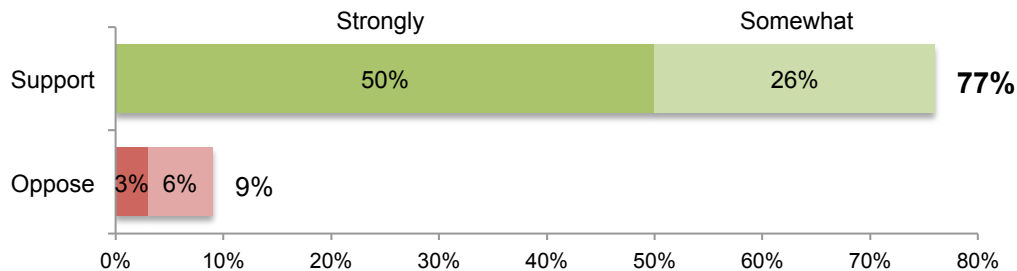


■ **Figure 2: Small business owners believe patent trolls should be deterred from filing fraudulent patent assertions or sending abusive demand letters**



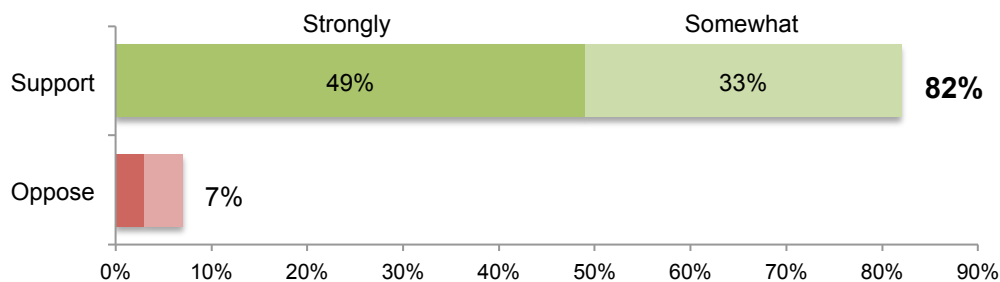
In the case that a small business must go to court to fight a patent troll, 77% support a provision that would require more transparency in patent lawsuits by requiring plaintiffs to disclose who the owner of a patent is before litigation, so that it is clear who stands to benefit financially from the lawsuit. Half of entrepreneurs *strongly support* this provision.

■ **Figure 3: Small employers support more transparency in patent lawsuits by requiring plaintiffs to disclose information about the patent’s owner**



Small employers also showed particularly strong support for a provision that would reduce the cost of discovery in patent lawsuits. Eighty-two percent of entrepreneurs support the creation of new judicial rules to reduce the costs of discovery in patent litigation, so that high legal fees do not force small businesses and entrepreneurs to settle out of court when they don’t need to.

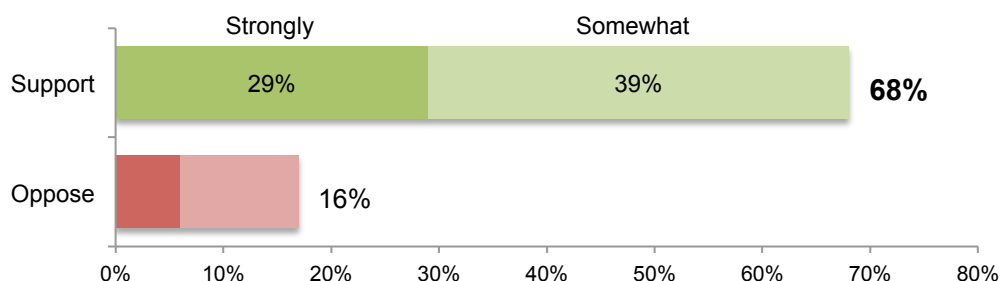
■ **Figure 4: Entrepreneurs support rules to reduce the costs of discovery in patent litigation, so high legal fees do not force them to unnecessarily settle out of court**



More than 6 in 10 (61%) support a provision that would allow courts to require the loser in a frivolous patent case to pay the winning side’s fees and costs.

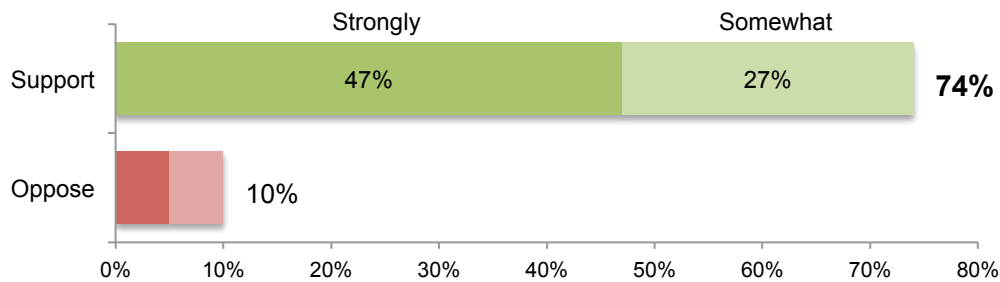
Small employers also agree that improvements should be made to the U.S. Patent Office in order to help prevent abuse of the system. A vast majority (68%) believes the U.S. Patent Office should be fully funded so there is closer scrutiny of patent applications.

■ **Figure 5: Small businesses support improving the U.S. Patent System to help prevent abuse of the system**



What's more, nearly three-fourths (74%) support expanding patent review opportunities to prevent patent trolls from threatening small businesses with patents that were questionable in the first place. Seven in 10 support creating a system to trigger automatic reviews of patents that are commonly exploited by patent trolls.

■ **Figure 6: Small business owners believe the patent review system should be expanded to prevent patent trolls from threatening small firms**



Conclusion

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and create the vast majority of new jobs. As these poll findings make clear, they believe patent trolls take advantage of the patent system and support reform that would help prevent this type of abuse.

Small businesses support specific provisions within patent reform legislation because they believe it would improve the system by making patent lawsuits more transparent, protect end users of common technologies from frivolous lawsuits and deter patent trolls by penalizing them for sending abusive demand letters. Entrepreneurs support patent reform legislation because it would help protect the small business community and allow them to continue to grow and create jobs, therefore helping to strengthen our economy even more.

Methodology

This poll reflects a telephone survey of 505 small business owners across the nation, conducted by Lake Research Partners and Chesapeake Beach Consulting for Small Business Majority with a margin of error of +/-4.3. The survey was conducted from April 7-23, 2014.

Poll Toplines

Small Business Majority
Technology and Patent Poll
505 Small Business Owners Nation-Wide

	TOTAL	1-9 EMPL	10-99 EMPL
N=	505	335	170
1. Just to confirm, are you the owner of a for-profit small business, who handles operations of the business or manages the employees?			
Owner-operator.....	41	42	38
Owner-manager	29	25	38
Both	30	33	24
Neither.....	TERMINATE		
Don't know	TERMINATE		
2. Approximately how many people work 30 or more hours per week at your company, including yourself? Please don't include contractors.			
1-9 Employees	66	100	0
10-19 Employees	17	0	50
20-49 Employees.....	13	0	38
50-99 Employees.....	4	0	12
3. Which of the following categories best describes your business?			
Non-retail services	19	20	17
Retail.....	17	21	11
Construction.....	14	13	15
Manufacturing.....	10	6	18
Restaurant	8	5	12
Real Estate.....	6	7	4
Information Technology	3	2	4
(Other: SPECIFY).....	24	26	18
(Don't know/Refused)	0	0	0
4. What is the zip code of your business?			
Region			
Northeast.....	19	22	15
Midwest.....	21	20	23
South	34	35	32
West.....	25	23	30
New England.....	5	7	1
Middle Atlantic	14	15	13
East North Central	14	14	15
West North Central.....	7	6	9
South Atlantic	19	19	20
East South Central	5	5	6
West South Central	10	12	7
Mountain.....	9	8	11
Pacific, except California	5	4	7
California.....	11	10	12

	TOTAL	1-9 EMPL	10-99 EMPL
N=	505	335	170

5. Have you heard anything about the Innovation Act – a bill that would change the rules and regulations surrounding patent infringement lawsuits to reduce frivolous lawsuits brought by patent assertion entities¹ by requiring, among other things, more specificity in patent lawsuits and more transparency in patent ownership, and protect end users of commonly used technologies from being targeted by PAEs– which was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in December 2013 and is now under consideration by the Senate?

Yes	13	12	15
No	84	85	82
(Don't know/Refused).....	3	2	3

6. Based on what you know or anything you've heard, do you support or oppose the Innovation Act?

[IF UNDECIDED]: Would you say you lean toward supporting it or opposing it?

Support	32	35	25
Undecided lean support	13	10	18
Undecided lean oppose	3	3	4
Oppose	10	11	10
(undecided/don't know)	42	41	43
Support	44	45	43
Oppose	14	14	14

7. Now, I'm going to read you several specific patent reform proposals. For each, please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose that particular proposal. Here's the first one.

Sorted by "Strongly support"

	TOTAL	1-9 EMPL	10-99 EMPL
	505	335	170
10a.Require plaintiffs to disclose who the owner of a patent is before litigation, so that it is clear who stands to benefit financially	50	53	45
10d.Create new judicial rules to reduce the costs of discovery in patent litigation, so that high legal fees do not force small businesses and entrepreneurs to settle out of court when they don't need to	49	51	45
10i.Require courts to impose financial sanctions against PAEs that file baseless lawsuits	49	52	44
10c.Expand patent review opportunities to prevent PAEs from threatening small businesses with patents that were questionable in the first place	47	52	38
10f.Penalize fraudulent patent assertions or abusive demand letters	47	52	38
10h.Protect end users from lawsuits by requiring PAEs to sue the party that is actually responsible for infringement, not the end users who had no input into the product	46	50	37
10g.Create a system for triggering automatic reviews of patents that are commonly exploited by PAEs	37	41	31
10b.Improve patent quality by fully funding the U.S. patent office so there is closer scrutiny of patent applications	29	36	17
10e.Allow courts to require the loser in a patent case to pay the winning side's fees and costs ...	28	30	25

	TOTAL	1-9	10-99
N=	505	EMPL	EMPL
		335	170

a. Require plaintiffs to disclose who the owner of a patent is before litigation, so that it is clear who stands to benefit financially

Strongly support.....	50	53	45
Somewhat support	26	26	28
Somewhat oppose.....	6	5	9
Strongly oppose.....	3	3	3
(Don't know)	14	13	14
Support.....	77	79	73
Oppose.....	10	8	13

b. **SSA:** Improve patent quality by fully funding the U.S. Patent Office so there is closer scrutiny of patent applications

Strongly support.....	29	36	17
Somewhat support	39	37	41
Somewhat oppose.....	11	6	19
Strongly oppose.....	6	5	6
(Don't know)	16	15	17
Support.....	68	73	58
Oppose.....	16	11	25

c. **SSB:** Expand patent review opportunities to prevent PAEs from threatening small businesses with patents that were questionable in the first place

Strongly support.....	47	52	38
Somewhat support	27	24	31
Somewhat oppose.....	5	4	7
Strongly oppose.....	5	5	5
(Don't know)	16	15	18
Support.....	74	77	69
Oppose.....	10	9	12

d. **SSA:** Create new judicial rules to reduce the costs of discovery in patent litigation, so that high legal fees do not force small businesses and entrepreneurs to settle out of court when they don't need to

Strongly support.....	49	51	45
Somewhat support	33	33	34
Somewhat oppose.....	4	3	5
Strongly oppose.....	3	2	4
(Don't know)	12	11	13
Support.....	82	84	79
Oppose.....	6	5	8

	TOTAL	1-9	10-99
N=	505	335	170

e. **_ SSB:** Allow courts to require the loser in a patent case to pay the winning side's fees and costs

Strongly support.....	28	30	25
Somewhat support	33	35	28
Somewhat oppose.....	10	8	14
Strongly oppose.....	7	5	11
(Don't know)	22	22	21
Support.....	61	65	54
Oppose.....	17	13	25

f. **_ SSA:** Penalize fraudulent patent assertions or abusive demand letters

Strongly support.....	47	52	38
Somewhat support	26	22	33
Somewhat oppose.....	6	6	6
Strongly oppose.....	6	6	7
(Don't know)	15	14	16
Support.....	73	73	71
Oppose.....	12	12	13

g. **_ SSB:** Create a system for triggering automatic reviews of patents that are commonly exploited by PAEs

Strongly support.....	37	41	31
Somewhat support	34	32	37
Somewhat oppose.....	6	7	4
Strongly oppose.....	5	4	6
(Don't know)	18	16	22
Support.....	71	73	68
Oppose.....	11	11	10

h. **_** Protect end users from lawsuits by requiring PAEs to sue the party that is actually responsible for infringement, not the end users who had no input into the product

Strongly support.....	46	50	37
Somewhat support	31	28	36
Somewhat oppose.....	5	5	6
Strongly oppose.....	4	3	5
(Don't know)	15	14	16
Support.....	77	78	73
Oppose.....	9	8	11

	TOTAL	1-9	10-99
N=	505	335	170

i. Require courts to impose financial sanctions against PAEs that file baseless lawsuits

Strongly support.....	49	52	44
Somewhat support	27	27	28
Somewhat oppose.....	7	6	9
Strongly oppose.....	3	3	4
(Don't know)	14	13	15
Support.....	76	78	72
Oppose.....	10	9	13

The few remaining questions are for statistical purposes only.

8. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or something else?

IF INDEPENDENT: Would you say that you lean more toward the Republicans or more toward the Democrats?

Republican.....	36	33	41
independent - lean Republican	11	13	9
Republican.....	47	45	50
independent	19	20	16
Democrat	29	29	30
independent - lean Democratic.....	6	6	5
Democrat	23	22	24
(Don't know/Refused).....	5	6	4

9. What is your age?

18-24	1	1	1
25-29.....	2	2	2
30-34	6	7	4
35-39.....	9	9	8
40-44	10	8	14
45-49.....	10	8	14
50-54.....	17	18	15
55-59	14	13	15
60-64	15	16	14
65-69.....	7	8	5
70-74.....	3	4	2
75 and over	2	2	1
(Refused)	3	3	2

	TOTAL	1-9	10-99
N=	505	EMPL	EMPL
		335	170

10. (RECORD GENDER)

Male	69	69	69
Female	31	31	31

11. For statistical purposes only, which of these categories best describes the gross revenue of your business in 2013?

Less than \$100,000	10	12	5
\$100,000 to under \$250,000	15	19	8
\$250,000 to under \$500,000	17	20	12
\$500,000 to under \$1 million	16	15	17
\$1 million to under \$2 million	11	11	12
\$2 million or more	16	10	29
(Don't know/Refused).....	15	14	18

12. For how many years have you been the owner of your current business?

Less than 1 year	3	3	2
1-2 years.....	5	5	4
2-5 years	15	14	16
6-10 years	25	23	28
11-20 years.....	23	24	21
More than 20 years	27	28	25
(Don't know/Refused).....	3	3	3