

Innovation Management

Intellectual Property

Our Basic Approach and Strategy

Unicharm focuses on the development of products, services, and technology useful to the realization of its “NOLA & DOLA” corporate philosophy. Therefore, it strives to ensure its continued superiority in business by steadily applying and acquiring intellectual property (IP) through these R&D activities. The responsibility for planning and implementing IP strategies is shouldered principally by the Intellectual Property Division.

The Intellectual Property Division centralizes the management of the Unicharm Group’s IP assets and formulates and executes IP strategies linked to its business and development strategies. Specifically, Unicharm has applied for and secured trademarks that protect its brands in more than 160 countries around the world and is also protecting its rights to proprietary packaging. Along with raising the quality of our IP rights, we are also working to establish and strengthen our IP portfolio. To this end, we will acquire patent and trademark rights in a timely manner through the active use of the Patent Prosecution Highway Program of the Japan Patent Office and accelerated examination systems in Japan and overseas. We are also working to promote IP policies through active exchanges of opinion with the Japan Patent Office.

Meanwhile, Unicharm also takes a firm stance on protecting its IP rights, including filing lawsuits to tackle infringement or unauthorized use. Its Intellectual Property Division cooperates closely with the marketing and R&D divisions as well as overseas subsidiaries, and works with local government agencies to eliminate unauthorized and counterfeit products in Japan and overseas, such as in Asia.

Management Structure

Independent of the R&D Division and business divisions, the Intellectual Property Division manages cross-divisional matters regarding IP in both Japan and overseas. Through regular meetings with the relevant divisions and subsidiaries, the Intellectual Property Division devises countermeasures after discussing whether to secure IP to establish competitive advantages for Unicharm.

Initiatives and Results

Making Active Use of Intellectual Property

At Unicharm, we actively use IP rights to protect our high-value-added products and services. One of the most important areas of focus is the IP mix, which provides multifaceted protection of products and services with multiple IP rights, including patents, utility models, designs, and trademarks. We have two objectives in this area. The first is deterring entry into premium products, namely acquiring patents for new technologies to prevent other companies from imitating us and to differentiate between products. The second is deterring the development of lower-priced copies of products. As our brand power is particularly strong in Asia, where lower-priced imitations modeled on the appearance and selling points of our own products appear on the market, we leverage our trademarks, designs, and utility models to minimize any potential damage to our sales.

We also analyze and keep abreast of information on the status of our IP in comparison with that of other companies. Objectively viewing the strengths of our IP, we communicate this information to senior management, business divisions, and the R&D Division.

In-House Training Programs

Unicharm is committed to cultivating a corporate culture that promotes the respect and protection of the IP of Unicharm and other companies as articulated in the Unicharm Group Charter of Actions by conducting employee training through a combination of on-the-job training, off-the-job training, and e-learning to ensure that employees in Japan and overseas are fully aware of compliance issues related to matters such as patents, trademarks, and misleading representations.

Invention Reward Program

Unicharm has established the Invention Reward Program to recognize and reward inventors for inventions that have achieved results in all aspects, including not only a product’s functional value but also its social value, technical value, and patent value. The purpose of this program is to inspire and encourage employees to play an active role in inventing new products and serve as a mechanism for sparking extraordinary inventions. A reward ceremony for this program has been held annually over its 20-year history since fiscal 2004.