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Millions of U.S. Patents Re: The Pace of Invention and Innovation is Accelerating

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The very first US patent, “LOCOMOTIVE STEAM-ENGINE FOR RAIL AND OTHER ROADS”, Inventor: John Ruggles, was issued on July 13, 1836. Fast-forward to December 28, 1976, when the 4 millionth US patent was issued, titled “PROCESS FOR RECYCLING ASPHALT-AGGREGATE COMPOSITIONS”, Inventor Robert L Mendenhall. That’s 4 million US patents issued in 140 years. The 8 millionth US patent, “VISUAL PROSTHESIS”, Inventors: Robert J Greenberg et al., was issued just 35 years later on August 16, 2011. This means that in 35 years, the US doubled the amount of patents that had taken 140 years to issue.

What does this mean? I believe it means the pace of invention and innovation is accelerating. There are more people alive on this planet than ever before. Thus, there are more scientists, engineers, working professionals and so on, and most importantly for this topic, more inventors alive on Earth than ever before. Companies and individuals recognize the value of patenting inventions. I believe the pace of patenting will continue to accelerate. I don’t see how it could be otherwise, short of legislation greatly curtailing patenting or the occurrence of some major calamity. Innovation is a hallmark of mankind.

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