

Free Guide to the Types of Intellectual Property

Using McDonald's as a Real-World Example,
from Trademarks to Patents

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Search. Register. Protect.



Introduction

Most businesses protect their name. Very few protect everything else.

This guide shows you the different types of intellectual property available, using McDonald's as a simple, recognisable example, so you can identify what you may be missing.

1. Word Trademark

Example: McDonald's / Big Mac
What it protects: The name of your business or product.



Protection Level: ● ● ● ● ● (Very High)
Threat Level if unprotected: ● ● ● ● ● (Critical)

Why it matters: This is the strongest and most enforceable form of protection. Words are clear, less open to interpretation, and easier to defend legally.

McDonald's Insight: Without owning names like "Big Mac", competitors could legally use similar product names.

Ask Yourself: Do I have a brand or product name that generates revenue - but isn't protected?

2. Logo / Figurative Mark

Example: The Golden Arches
What it protects: Your visual identity - logos, symbols, icons.



Protection Level: ● ● ● ● ● (High)
Threat Level if unprotected: ● ● ● ● ● (High)

Why it matters: If customers recognise your brand visually, this is essential. Without it, similar-looking brands can appear and confuse your audience.

McDonald's Insight: The Golden Arches are recognised globally. Without protection, imitation would be widespread.

Ask Yourself: Would customers recognise my brand from the logo alone?

3. Series Trademarks

Example: McChicken / McMuffin / McNuggets

What it protects: A consistent naming structure across multiple products or services.



Protection Level: ● ● ● ● ● (High)

Threat Level if unprotected: ● ● ● ● ● (Moderate)

Why it matters: Perfect for growing brands. It protects your naming strategy, not just individual names.

McDonald's Insight: The "Mc" prefix is instantly recognisable and commercially valuable.

Ask Yourself: Am I building a range of products that follow a naming pattern?

4. Slogan / Tagline

Example: "I'm Lovin' It"

What it protects: Your marketing message or tagline.



Protection Level: ● ● ● ● ● (Medium)

Threat Level if unprotected: ● ● ● ● ● (Moderate)

Why it matters: A strong slogan builds brand recall, but only if it's distinctive enough to protect.

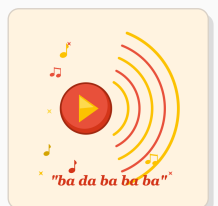
McDonald's Insight: Their slogan is as recognisable as their logo.

Ask Yourself: Do I use a tagline consistently in my marketing?

5. Sound Trademark

Example: "ba da ba ba ba"

What it protects: Distinctive sounds linked to your brand.



Protection Level: ● ● ● ● ● (High - if distinctive)

Threat Level if unprotected: ● ● ● ● ● (Moderate)

Why it matters: In audio-driven marketing (social, radio, TV), sound can be as powerful as visuals.

McDonald's Insight: Their jingle is instantly recognisable worldwide.

Ask Yourself: Do I use music, jingles, or sounds people associate with my brand?

6. Design Marks

Example: Fries packaging / burger boxes

What it protects: The shape and appearance of products or packaging.



Protection Level: ● ● ● ● ● (Medium)

Threat Level if unprotected: ● ● ● ● ● (Moderate)

Why it matters: Prevents others copying the physical look of your product.

McDonald's Insight: Even their packaging contributes to brand recognition.

Ask Yourself: Do my products or packaging have a distinctive look?

7. Trade Dress

Example: Restaurant design, colours, layout

What it protects: The overall look and feel of your brand experience.



Protection Level: ● ● ● ● ● (High but complex)

Threat Level if unprotected: ● ● ● ● ● (High)

Why it matters: This is what competitors often copy - your "vibe".

McDonald's Insight: You can recognise a McDonald's from across the street.

Ask Yourself: Is my brand experience visually distinctive enough to be copied?

8. Patents

Example: Kitchen systems / operational tech

What it protects: How something works - processes, systems, inventions.



Protection Level: ● ● ● ● ● (Very High)

Threat Level if unprotected: ● ● ● ● ● (High)

Why it matters: If you've created something innovative, this stops others using it.

McDonald's Insight: Operational efficiency is a huge competitive advantage.

Final Thought

Most businesses protect one thing.

The most valuable brands protect everything.

Naturally budget plays a factor for most SME's, which is why it's important that your budget is spent protecting the Intellectual Property that truly matters to you.

What Are You Missing?

Do you have intellectual property you didn't realise could be protected, or you haven't secured yet?

Have More Questions?

If you're unsure what applies to your business, this is exactly where most people start.

Get a review of your brand and identify what's worth protecting before someone else does.

Book a Free Consultation with one of our Experts today.

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