



FACULTY & RESEARCH

Article | Journal of Economic History | December 2011

Did R&D Firms Used to Patent? Evidence from the First Innovation Surveys

by [Tom Nicholas](#)

Abstract

Matching 2,777 R&D firms in surveys conducted by the National Research Council between 1921 and 1938 with U.S. patents reveals that 59 percent of all firms and 88 percent of publicly-traded firms patented. These shares are much higher than those observed for modern R&D firms. Industry, firm size and the location of R&D facilities relative to major cities are shown to be important determinants of the propensity to patent. The effect of these factors remained constant across the 1920s and the Depression years suggesting that the tradeoff between patent disclosure and secrecy did not change over time.

Keywords: [Research and Development](#); [Patents](#); [Surveys](#); [Innovation and Invention](#); [Geographic Location](#); [United States](#);

Format: Print [Find at Harvard Read Now](#)

Citation:

Nicholas, Tom. "[Did R&D Firms Used to Patent? Evidence from the First Innovation Surveys.](#)" *Journal of Economic History* 71, no. 4 (December 2011): 1032–1059.

[Export Citation](#)

About the Author



[Tom Nicholas](#)

William J. Abernathy Professor of Business Administration
[Entrepreneurial Management](#)

[View Profile »](#)

[View Publications »](#)