



Postal Address:

PO Box 1140

Upwey, Vic, 3158

Phone: 03 8288 1432

Web: www.mmwtrademarks.com.au

E: info@mmwtrademarks.com.au

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What is a Trademark?

The trademark laws operating in Australia define a trademark as:

“A sign used, or intended to be used, to distinguish goods or services dealt with or provided in the course of trade by a person from goods or services so dealt with or provided by any other person.”

A sign, for the purposes of trademark registration can be pretty much anything – a word or words, a logo (comprising words and imagery or style), an image on its own, a colour, a shape, an aspect of packaging and even smells and sounds can be registered as trademarks. The key is to ensure that your ‘sign’ is capable of distinguishing your goods/services. This means it needs to act as a ‘badge of origin’ for those goods or services, something that lets consumers and others know that the product/service belongs to you. It is therefore more difficult to register a trademark if it is, or has as its main element/s, something that other traders would honestly need to use to describe their goods/services of the same or similar nature to yours.

Examples of difficult to register trademarks, those that are questioned on their *capability to distinguish the goods/services* would be:

The Best Computer Shop (for retail services) – Other computer shop operators are likely to need to use this phrase for their own shop honestly;

Melbourne Chinese Restaurant (for restaurant services) – Other Chinese restaurant operators are likely to need to inform people they are in Melbourne and use this similar phrase;

SnugFit (for clothing goods) – Other clothing producers are likely to need to describe their clothes as “snug fitting” and use this similar phrase.

Trademarks may also be questioned on their capabilities when they are for common surnames or simply the names of places – this is because other people with that surname have a right to use it, as do people from a certain place.

In a lot of cases, combining a ‘commonly used’ word or phrase with a not-so-commonly used word or phrase (or an image/logo) will avoid this issue because on the whole it’s not likely other traders would need to use that trademark.

Things to Consider before Applying

Is your trademark registrable?

Most importantly, your trademark needs to meet the actual definition seen on the previous page to be registrable; if it doesn't it could prove difficult to secure rights.

It's also important to ensure your chosen trademark does not conflict with one that holds earlier rights. If someone else has registered the same or *deceptively similar* trademark already, for similar goods/services (or has an application pending before you) it could be difficult for you to secure registration due to that conflict and the likelihood of confusion occurring between your 'brand' and the one with earlier rights. For this reason, we strongly encourage a trademark search to be conducted *as soon as you select a name and before you officially commence using it*. The search is discussed further in this guide.

There are also certain words and symbols that are prohibited by Trademark Law in Australia, or, are covered by other legislation. For example, you could not register a trademark that incorporates the Olympic Rings.

You cannot register trademarks that are scandalous, contrary to law or likely to mislead and deceive.

Scandalous trademarks are, generally speaking, ones that are offensive to other people (not necessarily simply in poor taste or rude but truly offensive) such as trademarks that include offensive and/or abusive elements that are personal, religious or racial in nature.

For a trademark to be considered 'misleading and deceptive' there must be an element that automatically does this – up front. For example, if you were to attempt registering a trademark that included a domain name that you didn't own, this would be deceptive; or, if you tried using a celebrity's name in your trademark but didn't have permission to do so, this would also be deceptive, as you would be suggesting an affiliation or endorsement that doesn't exist.

Who can own a trademark?

The making of an application in itself is confirmation to the trademark office that you use, or intend to use the trademark for the goods/services that are relevant. The 'rightful' owner is usually the one that adopted the trademark, or has permission to file on behalf of another person. A trademark can be challenged by other parties if they believe that you are not the 'rightful owner' of the trademark, or that the application has been made in bad faith.

The owner must be someone with a legal status – such as an individual or group of individuals, or an incorporated body (such as a Pty Ltd or Limited company). A

business name cannot own a trademark. Generally the right to own property, including trademarks, falls to whoever is the business registrant.

Is it possible for someone else to use or register the same ‘trademark’?

In short, yes. By registering your trademark you are granted the right to use that trademark for the goods/services nominated. It may be possible for someone else to register the same trademark, quite easily, for goods/services that are not deemed related – where it’s unlikely consumers would be confused between them.

It is also possible for someone else to register the same, or similar, trademark for the same goods/services *after* you do. This can be done if they show that they used and promoted that trademark since earlier than you sought trademark registration and that use has been continuous (if they can do this, the examiner **must** remove your trademark as a problem). It *may* also be done if they show their use to be honest and continuous with your trademark registration. (This later option can be more difficult, as the evidence generally needs to be substantial).

It’s also important to note that if someone has used the same, or very similar, trademark since *before you first used or registered, whichever is the earlier date* but not sought registration as a trademark, they may have rights under common law that would allow them a defence against trademark infringement, which in turn could see them allowed to continue use even if you have registered the trademark.

Business Names, Company Names, Domain Names etc

Having registered any of these names does **not** provide you with ownership and rights in the name – **only trademark registration will do this.**

A **business name** is also known as a trading name. It allows the registrant of that name to *trade* by the name – in the state they have registered. It’s essentially an ‘alias’ for whoever is carrying on the business, however, when registering a business you will see there is a disclaimer to ensure that your chosen business name does not infringe a trademark.

A **company name** is a legal entity (where as a business name is not). If a company intends to trade by a name, other than the company name registered, it must also register a business name. This is a Federal registration rather than state based, however, still does not provide ownership or higher protection than a trademark.

A **domain name** is essentially your website address; the name that others will type into their internet browser in order to find your website. Domain names are basically provided to you under license for a certain period of time to use as the identifier for your website and must be renewed or you will risk loss of website and email accounts. Again, it does not provide ownership to the key name you have chosen.

Step 1 – Trademark Search

We consider that a trademark search should head your 'to do' list when considering a new name for a business, company, product or service. If your preferred name is too similar to an existing trademark you could not only have difficulties in securing rights, but you may be infringing another person's rights and face action because of it.

Ensuring your chosen trademark is available and is not infringing anyone else's rights provides you with peace of mind to know that your 'brand' won't be stepping on any toes, and that it *can* become your property and business asset.

Even if you have been using your 'brand' and promoting it for some time, difficulties can arise so a trademark search should always be considered.

The official examination with the government office once you file an application can take a long time (usually around 4 months) so you may wish to know where you stand sooner and our various searches can provide you with this information.

We offer different types of searches to suit different budgets....

- Identical search – considers whether there is any absolutely identical trademark already registered in Australia to your chosen name, for the same/closely related goods or services;
- Register Search – considers the Australian trademark database for any absolutely identical trademarks, or deceptively similar trademarks already pending or registered in Australia that may be raised as 'too similar' to yours;
- Full Availability & Infringement Search – considers whether there are likely to be trademarks consider to conflict with yours; whether there are any other areas of the Trademarks Act that may see your trademark as not registrable; whether there are existing businesses and companies in Australia who have used the same name for a while and have 'prior' rights and general Internet Searches.



Step 2 – Filing the Application & Classes

As trademarks are ‘signs’ used to distinguish the goods/services of different traders, it follows that when you file an application you must advise what those goods/services are.

All goods and services fall into ‘classes’ that have been listed and put in place under an international agreement. The list of classes and the goods/services that fall into them have been adopted by a majority of countries around the world. There are 45 of these ‘classes’ to select from. Numbers 1-34 cover *goods* and numbers 35-45 cover *services*. A part of our search process (regardless of the type of search you select) is to provide recommendation on which classes you require.

When we prepare and file your application, in order to meet the basic filing requirements, we must advise the trademark office of the class number and provide a specification of the goods/services being claimed with the class/es. By employing our office to file the application on your behalf, we will attend to this for you.

Further, by employing our office to file the application we will be listed as your agent on the official record as the “address for service”. This means all government correspondence will come to our office for attention – it also means that in the event another party wishes to query, contact or challenge your trademark they should contact us rather than you directly. By receiving all communication for you we can review, report and advise accordingly.

Series Trademarks

It is possible to request registration of a series of trademarks. This is allowed when you have two or more trademarks that closely resemble each other and differ only in respect of one or more of the following ways:

- a. statements or representations as to the goods or services in relation to which the trademarks are to be used;

For example – in relation to ‘clothing, headgear and footwear’

NAME Clothing

NAME Headgear

NAME Footwear

b. statements or representations as to number, price, quality or names of places;

Examples:

Number	Price	Quality	Names of Places
MMW 1	MMW \$1.00	MMW Premier	SYDNEY MMW
MMW 2	MMW \$20.00	MMW Superior	MELBOURNE MMW
MMW 1 st	MMW \$5.00	MMW GOLD	MMW
MMW 2 nd	MMW £5.00	MMW SILVER	MMW PERTH
MMW 3 rd	MMW ¥5.00	MMW BRONZE	MMW W.A

c. the colour of any part of the trade mark.

Examples:

MMW; **MMW**; MMW (these differ only in colour in part of the mark so would be acceptable).

Types of Applications

There are several ways to file an application in Australia, suited to different purposes and budgets:

1. Paper Filing (most expensive and not used by our office) – this involves completing and posting/faxing a ‘paper’ application – this incurs the highest government fee for a standard trademark;
2. Pick List Filing – (least expensive government fee) – usually appropriate; this means we select goods/services from a government generated pick-list for each class of your trademark application – using their terms and definitions
3. Own Specification Filing – (In between government fee) – this allows us to draft the goods/services in our own words rather than use the pick list – this can be good when you have an unusual product/service that does not meet common definitions, or if we need to draft your specification in a way that avoids conflict with another trademark.



Step 3 – Government Examination (Report or Approval)

After your application is filed the government office must examine all of the details to ensure that:

- a) The basic filing requirements are met; and
- b) To ensure that your trademark is registrable

This process currently takes around 4 months – a time frame that does fluctuate. Once examination is complete, we will receive an ‘adverse report’ if there are any problems found, or a ‘notice of acceptance’ if no problems are found.

Adverse Reports:

If an adverse report is issued, and you have had a full search conducted before filing, the issues raised will not come as a surprise. The most common reasons for the trademark office to object to your trademark being approved are (as explained in further detail earlier in this guide):

- a) Your trademark conflicts with a trademark that has an earlier date than your own; and
- b) Your trademark is not automatically seen as capable of distinguishing your goods/services from those of other traders

If an adverse report is issued you will be given 15 months to respond and address the issues so that your trademark is in order to be approved. We encourage any applicant that receives a report to respond to it **as soon as possible**. If left too late in the time frame, you may need to request (and pay for) an extension of time past the 15 months allowed.

The *usual* way to address these types of issues is providing evidence of use (or in some cases, intent to use) your trademark; refining your goods/services to remove the issue, and in some cases negotiating with owners of earlier trademarks. Our office will advise, based on *your* situation the best, and most likely to succeed option. This advice is provided at **no additional charges**, as it is included in your application fee detailed on the previous page. We will seek your instruction and if (and only if) you provide it will be take further billable action on your behalf.

Notice of Acceptance (approval)

If no issues are found during the government examination of your application – or if you successfully address any issues that are raised – a notice of acceptance will be issued. This will advise of the date on which the acceptance of your trademark will be advertised in the *Official Journal of Trademarks*. The advertisement of

acceptance commences a 3-month period during which other people may lodge formal objections to your trademark becoming registered, if they believe they have grounds to do so.

If nobody opposes your trademark during those 3 months, or do not request an extension of time in which to lodge their objection, your trademark can then progress to full registration.

What if someone opposes?

If someone files a notice of opposition against your trademark becoming registered during the 3 month period (or within an extended period if they request such an extension) they must notify us if we are acting as your agents. Further, their notice must advise on what grounds they are opposing your trademark. There are a number of grounds an opponent may select – including the same ones that the examiner may rely on to issue an adverse report; additionally an opponent may claim that you are not the owner of your trademark; that it is too similar to one that has acquired a reputation in Australia; that it includes false geographical indications amongst others.

After filing a notice of opposition, they will then have three months to file (and provide us with a copy) evidence in support of that opposition, in an attempt to prove that the grounds they have selected are true. You will then have the opportunity to provide evidence in answer to the evidence they have supplied (you will also have three months). The opponent will then have a final chance to supply further evidence before the matter is decided. A decision may happen simply by a government officer considering both parties' evidence, or either of the parties can request to be heard in the matter.

The successful party in opposition proceed is able to request an 'award of costs' in their favour. This means, the unsuccessful party may be ordered to pay a certain amount of the 'winning' side's costs. All costs are determined by a set schedule.

Of course, if your application is opposed we will notify you immediately upon our office being informed, and provide advice, recommendations and fee estimates based on your particular case.

Step 4 – Registration & Rights

If your trademark is accepted for registration and is not opposed by a third party (or, if you are opposed but come out as the successful party) the trademark can then proceed to registration upon receipt of final fees. This will not occur for a minimum of 7.5 months.

How long does registration last?

The initial period of protection is for 10 years from the date the Application was first filed; you can renew this each 10 years if you desire and are still using your trademark. It's important to note that trademarks can be vulnerable to removal if they remain unused for a certain period of time.

Where will I be registered?

Your trademark will be registered Australia-wide. Your rights therefore also apply Australia-wide (unless particular limitations are placed on your trademark, which usually would occur to resolve opposition matters and similar).

What rights do I have as a trademark owner?

There are several *main* rights that come with a registered trademark:

- The right to **use** your trademark, in Australia, in connection with the goods/services it is registered in respect of;
- The right to **authorise the use** of your trademark in Australia, in connection with the goods/services it is registered in respect of (e.g. in a licensing situation, or franchise situation etc).
- The right to take **infringement action** against other persons that use your trademark (or a deceptively similar trademark), in Australia in connection with the same or related goods/services without your permission, and are found to be infringing upon your rights.
- The right to claim your trademark is 'registered', and use the trademark with the ® symbol. A person cannot claim or represent a trademark as registered, or use this symbol, if it's not registered. In fact, it's an offence to do so.



Fees

The following fees apply during the course of a standard Australian trademark application. All fees are inclusive of government fees, professional fees and GST and are current at the time of publication.

Searches (see page 7)	
Identical Search	\$0.00
Register Search	\$88.00
Full availability & Infringement Search	\$330.00 (word marks)
Full availability & Infringement Search	\$550.00 (word & image marks)

Standard Applications (see page 9)	
First class using the 'pick list'	\$495.00
Each additional class using the 'pick list'	\$385.00
First class own specification rather than pick list	\$575.00
Each additional class own specification rather than pick list	\$465.00

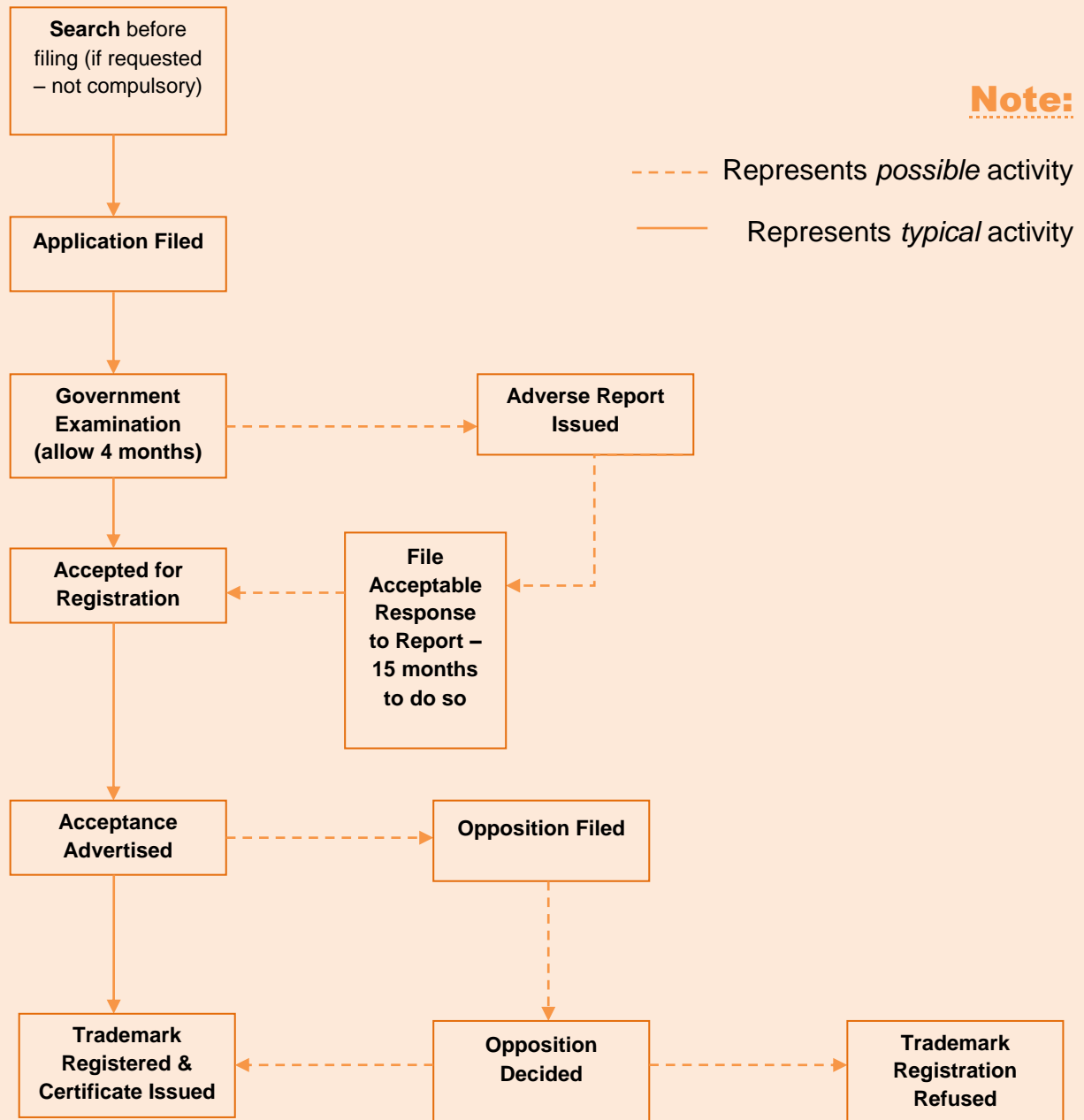
Series Applications (see page 8)	
First class using the 'pick list'	\$645.00
Each additional class using the 'pick list'	\$535.00
First class own specification rather than pick list	\$725.00
Each additional class own specification rather than pick list	\$615.00

Registration & Renewal (see page 12)	
Registration per class	\$410.00
Renewal – first class	\$460.00
Renewal – per additional class	\$425.00

Other Common Fees – your instruction will always be sought. If not listed, please request a quote.	
Hourly fee when applicable	\$220.00
Filing of a Notice of Opposition	\$580.00
Filing request to remove due to non-use	\$580.00
Extension of time (per month or part therefore – application matters)	\$155.00
Extension of time (per month or part thereof) – Opposition matters	\$205.00
Extension of time (per month or part thereof and per class) – Renewal of Trademark	\$155.00
Request assignment of ownership (transfer ownership)	\$155.00

Flow Chart

Following indicates a *typical* application to registration process.





International Protection

There are essentially two ways you can seek to register a trademark outside of Australia:

1. Filing of national applications, directly to each country of interest. (In some cases, this will be the only option); or
2. Through the Madrid Protocol – a Protocol to which Australia is a member. This allows you to file a single application and choose which of the other member countries you wish to apply in. (There are currently around 80 countries available through this system.)

For more information on the Madrid Protocol, please see our International Trademarks Guide.

PRIORITY PERIOD AVAILABLE FOR AUSTRALIAN APPLICANTS

The date of your earliest application (for example, your Australian application) for a particular trademark is known as your 'priority date'. If you file overseas within 6 months of this date you are entitled to claim (in most countries) priority, so that each international application will be treated as though filed at the same time as your Australian application. This will provide you with preference over any application filed during that time with a later priority date. This provides a good window of time to plan and budget for any overseas trademark requirements. This is a strict six month period, and cannot be extended. If you file later than 6-months you will lose the right to claim priority based on your earlier Australian application and each foreign application would then be treated as filed on the precise physical filing date.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY TRADEMARK

A Community Trademark (CTM) extends to all member countries of the European Union and can be achieved by filing a single application (or, selecting it as a single designation under the Madrid Protocol). If approved, you will gain the same level of protection and right as you would by filing into each European Union member separately. However, it's important to note that because it is a single application, a rejection due to a problem in one-member country will affect the entire CTM application.

Important Notes:

Infringement:

- It is the trademark owner's responsibility to monitor for infringement and determine if action is required. Contact our office if you would like information about our monitoring service help identify infringing activity, or, conflicting applications filed after your own.
- If you suspect your trademark rights are being infringed please contact us. There are circumstances that allow people to have defence to any allegation of infringement, so always seek professional advice before making any threat of infringement action. If you have received communication from another party stating that you are infringing their rights, please contact us for advice.

Use it or lose it:

- Remember – trademarks can become vulnerable to removal if they remain unused for a period of time.

Use it correctly:

- Use your trademark the way it has been registered; It is a punishable offense to display a trademark as registered (including by using the ® symbol) if it is not subject of a trademark registration.
- Use your trademark as an *adjective* – it is not a noun – for example:
 - XYZ® Lawnmowers
 - XYZ®

 - We import and distribute XYZ® Lawnmowers
 - We Import and distribute XYZs®

Don't allow your trademark to become generic:

- As a trademark is a 'sign used to **distinguish** the goods/services...' don't let your trademark become the common name for the type of goods/services, as it could then cease to be considered a 'trademark'. In such cases, it may be possible for the registration to be cancelled following an application to the courts.
- A good example of a trademark owner ensuring their trademark does not become generic is Sealed Air Corporation (from USA). This company owns the rights, in a number of countries, to the trademark "Bubble Wrap" and variations. A term a lot of us are familiar with, and use in daily life – however, this company is very good at contacting others that try and use this term as a description of goods in trademark applications and advising that it the term is

a trademark, not a common description and that it needs to be changed accordingly to terms such as “plastic packaging material incorporating air pockets” and similar,

Trading on the Internet:

- Remember that trading on the Internet places you in a global marketplace. Trademark rights apply country-by-country, and use of your trademark on the Internet *could* inadvertently infringe the rights of someone in another country.
- Australia, along with other member countries of the World Intellectual Property Organisation have established guidelines to help protect trademark owners when doing business over the Internet. The guidelines state that a party (from one of the member countries) when allegations are made concerning trademark infringement from someone from another member country, will not be held liable for any infringement up to the time of being notified of the infringement if the following applies:
 - a) The user owns the right to that sign/trademark in another member country, or uses it with the consent of the owner in that country;
 - b) That any acquisition of the right in that sign/trademark, or use of it, has not been in bad faith; and
 - c) That the user has provided with the use of that sign/trademark on the internet, information reasonably sufficient to contact them by mail, e-mail or telephone/facsimile.

Once a notice is received of alleged infringement, liability will still be avoided if the person receiving the notice:

- a) Provides the relevant details to the sending party of their registered rights in their own country; and
- b) Expeditiously takes reasonable steps to avoid a commercial effect to avoid commercial conflict or avoid infringement of the trademark rights referred to in the notice in that Member country.

Importing Goods:

- It is possible to lodge a notice with the Australian Customs Service to formally object to the importation of goods that infringe your registered trademark. Such a process and related law provisions are administered by Customs. Essentially, if goods come in that infringe your trademarks they will be seized by Customs. You will then need to determine whether they are to be released or not – and pay any necessary fees associated. More information can be found at the Customs website [here](#).



More Information

As this guide demonstrates, there are a lot of aspects to trademarks, trademark law and trademark registration. If you have questions not answered in this guide – please contact our office:

Mark My Words Trademark Services Pty Ltd

ABN: 71 153 842 132

Phone: 03 8288 1432

Email: info@mmwtrademarks.com.au

Postal: PO Box 1140
Upwey, Vic, 3158

Web: www.mmwtrademarks.com.au



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AVAILABLE:

- **TRADEMARK FORMS (AUSTRALIA)**
- **GUIDE TO INTERNATIONAL TRADEMARK REGISTRATION**
- **DESIGNS**
- **COPYRIGHT**
- **LICENSING & ROYALTIES**
- **OTHER TYPES OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY**

Disclaimer:

Please note that this publication is provided for information purposes only and is not intended to be legal advice, nor should it be substituted for such advice. Areas of law are complex, and professional advice should be sought prior to the commencement of any action related to trademarks.

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