

# DEFINING IP

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To protect your company's intellectual property, you have to understand what is valuable to your company. To do that, you need to be able to define intellectual property for yourself.

When asked to define IP, most CSOs can't really do it, says Scott Nelson, former vice president of security at AOL Time Warner. "If you ask 10 companies to define what their intellectual property is, you'll get the same definition, but you'll also get 10 different ideas about what's important to *them*," Nelson says. "It's amazing—no one knows for sure."

According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, IP is defined as creations of the mind: inventions, literary and artistic works, symbols, names, images, and designs used in commerce. At a more granular level, IP includes but is not limited to proprietary formulas and ideas, inventions (products and processes), industrial designs, and geographic indications of source, as well as literary and artistic works such as novels, films, music, architectural designs and webpages.

In legal terms, IP generally falls into four categories: patents, copyrights, trademarks and trade secrets (see ["I've Got a Secret"](#)). Intellectual property registered in one of those categories with state and federal agencies is protected by law, and if infringed upon or otherwise abused, the perpetrators can be prosecuted.

But IP can also be something broader and less tangible, like an idea. If the head of your R&D department has a eureka moment during his morning shower and then applies his new idea at work, that's intellectual property too.