

## The Business of Lip Balm - Patent Insights

For many countries January marks the coldest month of the calendar year. These cold temperatures can be tough on people's skin; with our skin moisture dropping and leading to cases of dryness and inflammation. There are a variety of products available to safeguard against the negative effects of cold weather on the skin, with many people seeking to protect their lips from dryness and cracking using lip balms.

Using patent data as our guide, we investigate the current developmental trends in the field of lip balms, and if this can give an insight into its future.

### A Brief History of Lip Balm

Humans have been using lip moisturising techniques as far back as 40BC, with Egyptians being noted as using a mixture of beeswax, olive oil and animal fat to provide care to dry or chapped lips.

Homemade remedies have prevailed ever since, with households in the 1800's even being advised to utilise their earwax to obtain healthy, moisturised lips. Luckily technology has moved forward, and today lip balms are primarily based off of a variety of naturally obtained waxes.

The invention of lip balms as we know them today, in the form of a solid stick, can be accredited to Dr Charles Brown Fleet in the early 1800's. His product, which was wrapped in tin foil rather than a tube, would go on to be named ChapStick and become one of the most synonymous brands within the industry. This business venture was not an instant success however, and Dr Fleet sold the rights to John Morton in 1912 for \$5 due to poor initial sales.

### Assessing the Field

For a broad patent analysis, we can utilise the classification "A61Q19/001 Preparations for the care of the lips".

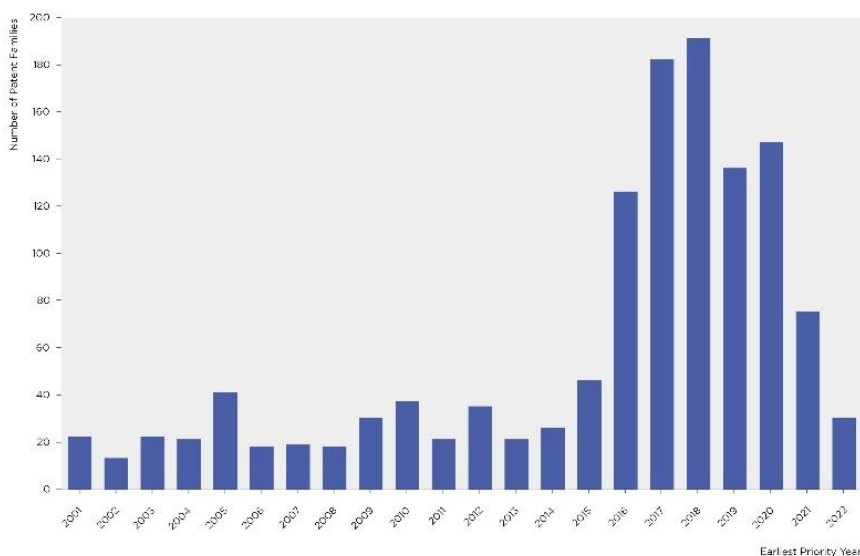


Fig.1, Earliest Priority Year vs Number of Patent Families for A61Q19/001, created using PatWorld.

© PatWorld 2023

Earliest Priority Year vs Number of Patent Families

As shown in Fig.1, this appears to be a relatively small technology area, with the classification containing approximately 1500 patent families. The graph highlights a sharp increase in priority filings within this classification, with numbers rising from roughly 20 in 2014 to almost 200 in 2018, indicating that lip care could be a key growth area for its size. The trajectory of this growth may have been affected by Covid-19 and may take a few years before we see a more stable indication of its development.

## Global Reach

Please note: this map does not show EPO or WO patents, which can total a significant figure

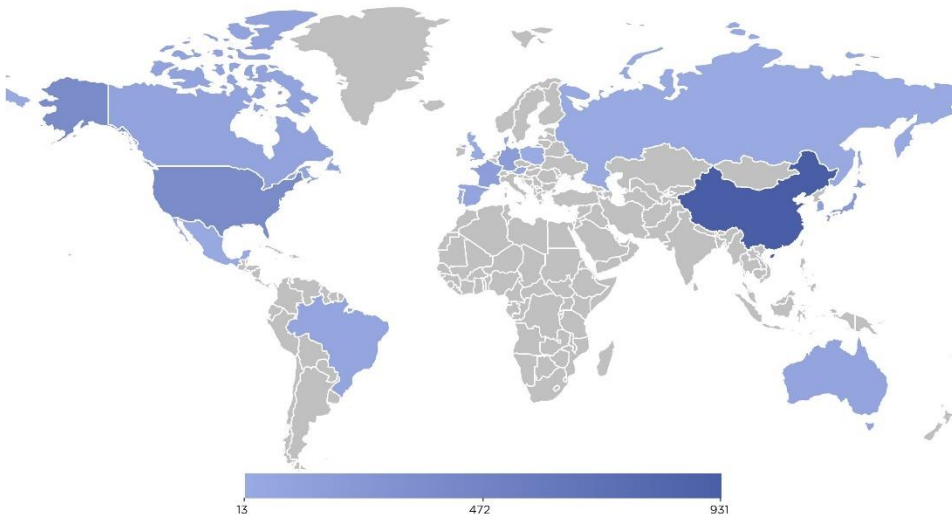


Fig.2, Patents by Publication Country, created using PatWorld

Publication/Application Country vs Number of Patent Families

© PatWorld 2023

Fig.2 highlights the most frequent publication countries for this technology. As shown, China holds a significant stake in this field, with a larger range of patents than any other country, while the US holds the second highest number of patents. These two countries are notably the global leaders in industrial output.

## The Business of Lip Balm

The key assignees holding patents within this technology are displayed within Fig.3 below.

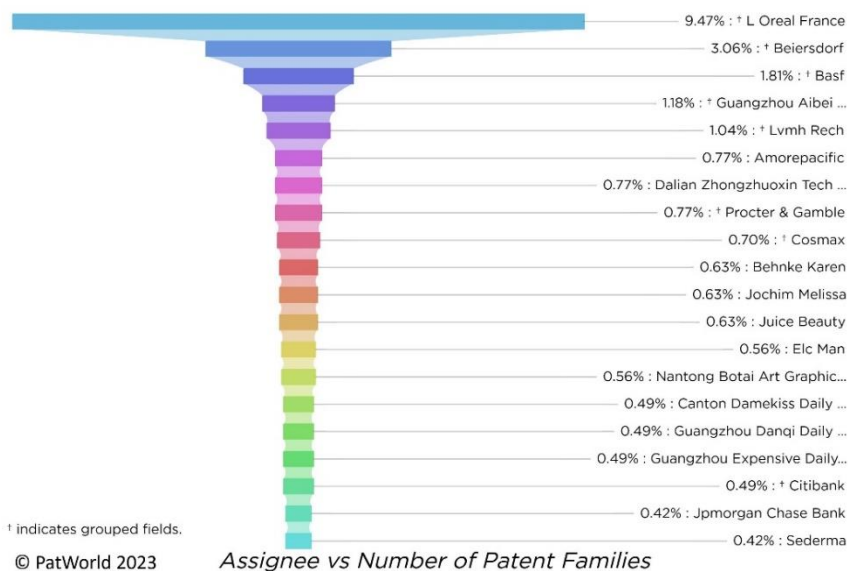


Fig.3, Assignees vs Number of Patent Families, created using PatWorld

† indicates grouped fields.

© PatWorld 2023

Assignee vs Number of Patent Families

The main player within this field by some margin is L'Oréal, the world's largest cosmetics company. Rounding out the top 3 is skin care company Beiersdorf, owner of Nivea, and chemical company BASF. These companies are based in France and Germany; countries which are respectively the world's first and seventh largest exporters of beauty, cosmetics, and skincare products.



L'Oréal, the largest cosmetics company, and most active player in this field, have strong holdings in all concept areas asides from Vitamin E usage. This seems to be an area not explored by most key assignees, with Dalian Zhonghuoxin Technology Service having the highest interest of the eight key companies currently exploring this technology route.

Jojoba oil and Vitamin E could be considered areas of key development going forward, with only half of the key players currently exploring these concepts.

All key assignees appear to utilise beeswax as a wax portion of their lip balms. Other waxes are captured within this data, with carnauba wax the next most frequent and candelilla wax being the least used of the options highlighted within the chart.

### Key Development Areas

Finally, we can try identifying the key development areas for this field by analysing the IPC classifications and key concepts associated with the data set of patents.

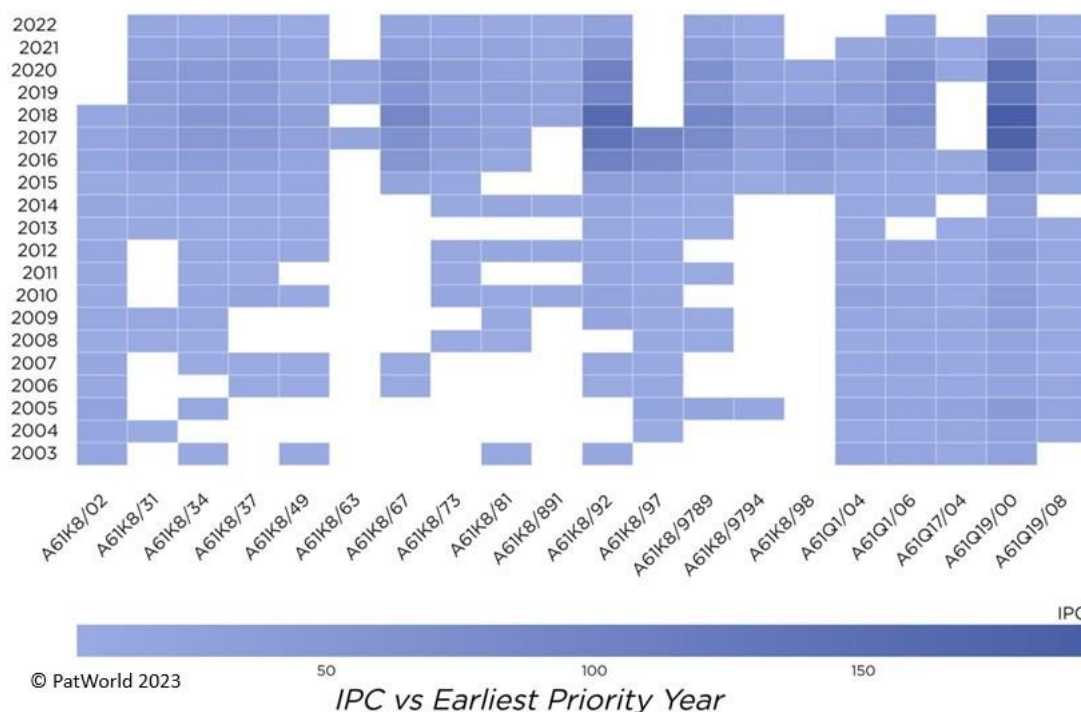


Fig.6, IPC vs Earliest Priority Year, created using PatWorld

For most classifications there is minimal variation over the 20-year analysis period, with a common increase occurring in line with the rise in publications from 2016. This may be due to the size of the technology area; and if the field continues to grow, we could expect to see more variation from a wider patent base.

There are a variety of newly utilised classifications over this period. The recent introduction of “A61K8/9789 Magnoliopsida” and “A61K8/9794 Liliopsida”, may reflect a shift in the technology area towards the use of flowering plants, while “A61K8/63 Steroids; Derivatives thereof” may also be of future interest.

As identified from Fig.5, Vitamin E could be considered a potential growth area, something that is reflected by the emerging use of “A61K8/67 Vitamins”, one of three classifications that finds new, consistent use from 2015, in line with the increase in priority filings.

## Patents of Interest

Away from the information provided by these charts, we can manually filter the data set in order to identify other potential trends and patents of possible interest.

One key function not highlighted within the charts is UV filter lip balms, which act to protect the skin from solar activity. This technology has been on the market for a while, with over 10% of the data set claiming UV protection or SPF. An example being WO2017074895A1; a lip protectant that comprises “at least one UVA sunscreen and/or at least one UVB sunscreen.”

Mirroring the popularity of milks in general cosmetics, lip balms have seen a similar uptake in incorporating a variety of types of milk into their compositions. There are a range of benefits to utilising milk in skin care; from the exfoliating properties of lactic acid to the array of vitamins they contain, with vitamins being a previously identified key growth area. Maintaining a small but frequent inclusion in the data set from 2003 onwards, compositions claiming the inclusion of a milk now account for roughly 5% of these results. One such example being CN108969462A, which relates to a lip balm containing 30 parts by weight of goat milk.

A recent development in the field is the emergence of cannabis infused lip balms, their rise in popularity coinciding with the US’s relaxation of its marijuana laws. This is truly an emerging technology; the inclusion of cannabis or cannabinoids present in the claims of only 1.5% of this data set, with the earliest priority date being 2013. US10639260B1 is one such an example, relating to a lip balm composition containing “petroleum jelly, camphor, menthol, phenol, beeswax, and cannabis”, where the cannabis may have a THC concentration between 15 and 30%.

## Conclusion

Although a relatively small technology area, it is apparent that this could be considered a growing field, specifically if it continues its pre-Covid trajectory.

There are a number of “major corporations” acting as key players, however asides from L’Oréal there is no other company with a large hold on this market. There is also significant interest from China, and this is replicated in the amount of China based companies highlighted in the key assignee charts.

In terms of the future, it is apparent there has not been significant variation in the field up to this point, however that seems to be changing with the emergence of utilising flowering plants, steroids, and vitamin E. As the technology area continues to grow, we could expect to see more variation, with cannabis infused lip balms an example of a recent change in the market that could have greater influence as time progresses.

*Article by [Daniel Di Francesco](#), IP Manager at Patent Seekers. He is an expert in undertaking FTO, Patentability and Invalidity searches, covering all types of subject matter with specialism in the chemical field.*