



Intellectual Property: Types and Cybersecurity Risks

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What it is

Intellectual property, or IP, is a broad term for creations and commercially valuable knowledge that the law may protect. Common categories include patents for inventions, copyright for original creative works and software, trademarks for brands, and trade secrets for confidential methods, formulas, designs, or business information.

How protection works

The right and its duration depend on the type of IP and the jurisdiction. Some rights arise automatically, while others require registration. Trade-secret protection depends heavily on reasonable efforts to keep information confidential. Contracts, access controls, records of authorship, and licensing terms help establish ownership and permitted use.

Cybersecurity risks to IP

- Phishing, insider misuse, cloud misconfiguration, and compromised suppliers can expose source code or designs.
- A stolen trade secret may lose practical or legal value even when the original file remains available.
- Backups protect availability but do not stop unauthorized copying or publication.

Practical protection

- Classify valuable information and grant access only to people and systems that need it.
- Use MFA, encryption, logging, data-loss controls, and clear offboarding procedures.
- Record ownership, licenses, and disclosure agreements with qualified legal guidance.
- Prepare an incident plan that covers evidence preservation, notification, and containment.

Protect the information, not just the file

Identify which designs, source code, formulas, media, trademarks, or business methods are sensitive and who genuinely needs access. Apply version control, least privilege, approved collaboration tools, and logging to repositories and export locations. Encrypt transfers, review third-party access when a project ends, and keep recoverable backups. A copied screenshot, cloud share, email attachment, or build artifact can expose the same intellectual property as the original document. Use [encrypted file transfer](#) for external exchange and investigate unusual bulk access before treating it as ordinary productivity.

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