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5 March 2026

To all the Members of the AIPPI - UAE National Group

5th Circular/ 2026

Trade Mark Searches in the UAE: What You Really Need to Know

We are pleased to share our 5th circular for 2026, authored by Mona Saleh, offering insights into how the UAE Trade Mark Office ('TMO') search function works and, more importantly, tips and tricks on how to use it intelligently to get the most out of your searches.

A trade mark availability search in the UAE is often described as straightforward; run a word, check the results, assess the risk.

In reality, the process is far more strategic.

Understanding how the UAE Trade Mark Office ('TMO') search function works and more importantly, how to use it intelligently, can make the difference between a meaningful clearance exercise and a misleading one.

This article breaks down:

- How UAE trade mark searches actually work
- What they capture
- What they don't capture
- How to maximise value from a single search

1. Searches Are Run Per Class

In the UAE:

- Official searches are conducted per class
- Official fees apply per class
- Each search is limited to that class only

However, one of the most under-utilized features of the system is that you can include up to six variations of a mark under one class without incurring additional official fee.

This is where strategy becomes critical.

2. How the UAE Search Mechanism Works

The UAE TMO search portal looks for words that are included in or incorporated into marks on the register. It does not search for words that are conceptually or phonetically similar (unlike searches on third-party databases, which are not the subject of this circular, this circular focuses on how to optimise the use of the current UAE search mechanism and its database).

For example: if you search WHITE CAR; the system will retrieve marks that contain the words WHITE and CAR, either together or separately. But it will not retrieve:

- CARS
- WHYTE
- KAR
- Phonetically similar words

These variations or phonetically similar words need to be specifically included in the search.

3. Using the Six Variation Rule Strategically

Because phonetic equivalents are not captured automatically, the six variation entries available should be used wisely. Using the same example earlier, if your core mark is WHITE CAR, a smart search strategy might include searching the following word variations:

- WHITE
- CAR
- KAR
- WHIT
- WYTE
- CARS

This allows the search to capture a broader range of potentially relevant earlier marks under a single official fee. The system will then retrieve marks containing any of those words, even when combined with other elements.

4. Arabic: Translation vs. Transliteration

The UAE Trade Mark search system does not automatically retrieve Arabic equivalents of English-language marks. Unless Arabic wording already appears in the underlying records, it will not be captured through an English search alone.

For this reason, Arabic variants should often be considered as part of the six permitted search entries. Their inclusion, however, is not automatic, it requires judgment as to whether Arabic will add meaningful insight to the clearance exercise.

Using the example WHITE CAR, a balanced search strategy might consider:

- The Arabic translation and/or transliteration of “WHITE”
- The transliteration and/or translation of “CAR”

“White” carries a clear meaning. Its Arabic translation may therefore be commercially relevant when assessing potential conflicts. At the same time, testing its transliteration may also be informative particularly if the mark may appear phonetically in the marketplace.

By contrast, translating “Car” into Arabic may add limited value in some cases. If the brand is more likely to be used as a sound-led or brand-led element, transliteration may better reflect how the mark would realistically be encountered in trade.

In practice:

- **Translation** is generally useful where a word conveys meaning or where the client’s branding strategy anticipates semantic resonance in Arabic.
- **Transliteration** is often more relevant where a term is brand-driven, coined, or used for its phonetic identity (for example, invented or fanciful marks).

Importantly, the decision is not made in isolation. It should be informed by:

- The nature of the mark
- The risk being tested
- The client’s anticipated use in the market
- Input from the client’s marketing team, particularly where Arabic branding, packaging or advertising adaptations are being considered

In some cases, both translation and transliteration may be included in the search, even where only one is ultimately intended for use. This is not redundancy; it is a deliberate risk-mapping exercise to identify potentially relevant earlier rights that could arise through meaning, sound or market perception.

Sometimes translation enhances clarity. Sometimes transliteration does.

5. What the UAE Search Does NOT Show

Official search results are limited. They will not reveal:

- Logo/device elements
- Stylisation
- Colour claims
- Full list of goods/services specifications
- Detailed mark's status
- Renewal status
- Examination objections or conditions

The report provides only basic filing details. To properly assess potential overlap, particularly in broad classes, it may be necessary to obtain a certified copy from the TMO upon payment of the applicable official fees. Alternatively, as a free option, third-party databases can be used to conduct searches and obtain additional information on a particular identified mark. Some of these databases are accessible free of charge, while others require an annual subscription. It is also worth noting that certain databases are limited to published trade marks only.

6. Additional Practical Limitations

Other points to be aware of when conducting searches:

- The search covers both pending applications and registrations
- It captures marks filed up to the previous day
- Some results may not appear due to technical indexing issues
- The system does not confirm whether marks are filed in colour or black & white

Again, certified copies may be required for clarity and/or a search into a third-party databases.

7. Possible Future Changes

The UAE Ministry of Economy & Tourism ('MOET') and the TMO are currently considering enhancements to the search mechanism. Among the options under review are:

- Expanding functionality;
- Maintaining free public access with limitations; or
- Retaining the current structure and fee model.

Further updates are expected as policy direction develops.

Final Thoughts

An official UAE trade mark search is not just about entering a name into a portal. It is also about:

- Choosing the right variations
- Deciding when translation/transliteration matters
- Knowing when translation/transliteration adds value
- Understanding what the system misses

When approached strategically, a search can provide useful insight into potential risks. Without such an approach, its inherent limitations may mean that further checks or analysis are required to form a more complete view.

This circular outlines the current UAE search mechanism and explains how its database can be used more effectively. It is separate from any additional searches you may choose to conduct on third-party databases for your own purposes or on behalf of your clients. As practices and client needs may vary, this circular is not intended to recommend what searches should be carried out or which databases should be used.

Thank you.

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