

Products that Sell: Five Secrets Every Inventor Should Know

Armed with these insights, you can ensure your invention evolves into a successful new product with mass-market appeal.

1. The most successful products solve a problem. You may think you have a great idea, but if it doesn't solve a real problem, then you'll have a tough time generating interest. A good rule of thumb when brainstorming a new idea is to look for the problem first. Find out where consumers are experiencing pain, and then find a way to relieve it.

- **Example:** If a manufacturer designed a special blend of potting soil that made it so people never had to water plants, the new potting soil would be solving a problem. People would no longer need to remember to water plants or spend time caring for them. On the flip side, if that same manufacturer designed a special blend of potting soil that was red instead of black, the manufacturer isn't really solving a real problem as the color of potting soil does not present a problem to most consumers.

2. Products that are dependent on another product are cumbersome. Innovation leads to change which leads to better products. Manufacturers are constantly improving their products to keep existing customers and attract new ones. If you create a product that depends on another product or attaches to another product, you run the risk of becoming obsolete. Stand-alone products are generally more appealing and easier to market over the long run.

- **Example:** If you create an attachment that fits on a lawnmower, your attachment will only work as long as the size and measurements of the lawnmower never change. So while you may have a good idea that solves a problem with that make and model of lawnmower, it's better to stick with a free-standing product that is self-supporting.

3. Sex appeal sells. Even when you're talking about a hand saw. Consumers are attracted to products both for what they do and how they look. The more bells and whistles you have, the more appeal your product has. Plus, it needs to look sexy, too. Color and design play a big part in a product's success. This is especially important if your product is not the first of its kind. You need to be able to differentiate yourself and stand apart from all the other choices available to consumers.

- **Example:** Anyone can make a shower head, but a shower head with 10 different settings and an adjustable neck has more appeal and will typically sell better in the mass retail market. It doesn't hurt if it comes in chrome, white and black, too.

4. Market research doesn't have to be expensive. One of the most important aspects of launching any new product or service, market research is often skipped or overlooked because people think it costs too much. But in reality you don't have to pay exorbitant amounts of money to conduct good market research. You don't even need to hire a firm

to do it for you. The best market research is often based on input from friends and family. After all, they are consumers, too.

- **Example:** Once you have an idea, talk to several friends, family members and even co-workers about your product. Come up with a short questionnaire and ask them to honestly rate your idea. Ask them whether they think it solves a problem, if it's appealing and if they'd buy it. Tell them to critique your product idea as well – find out what it doesn't solve and what they don't like about it. Then make changes based on the majority opinion.

5. A test market is right in your backyard. Another common misconception is that you have to take on the big guns right away. Not so. Targeting small community retailers is a great way to gain valuable insight and sales experience that will build the foundation for mass-market retail success later.

- **Example:** If you have designed a revolutionary new garden hoe, try approaching two or three locally owned hardware stores. Set up a meeting with the owner, and tell them you'd like to solicit their opinion about your new product. Bring along your prototype and a video demo of your product in action, and ask for feedback. The best outcome, obviously, would be if they agreed to sell a few of your products in their store. But if nothing else, they will give you great advice on how to make your product better. Then, once you meet with a few owners, take their advice and make improvements to your prototype. Then come back and try again! Don't give up. Persistence pays off and will have you headed for success in no time.

To take your invention to the next level, visit <http://www.gardenweasel.com>.

Source: Ben Stark, Vice President, Marketing/Advertising, for Faultless Starch / Bon Ami Company.

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