

BRUCE HAGENAU COLUMNS 06 FEBRUARY 2018

## Successful Ideas



Getting from Prototype to Finished Product: Three Must-Answer Questions

By Bruce Hagenau

Articles about new product development have proliferated across the Internet, offering tips on major considerations ranging from patent protection and cost estimating to prototype development and materials (e.g. drawings; cardboard; molded plastic). Yet, beyond the traditional wisdom, there are questions many inventors never ask themselves—and that aren't often covered in articles about product design, development and launch.

As the owner of a fabrication shop that works with inventors on a regular basis, I have identified many important, less common questions that, depending on the answer, can boost the odds of success for inventors moving from prototype to finished product. The three that follow are among the most important to consider—and answer honestly.

### What's Your Hook?

Product design experts will tell you a product should be unique; marketing experts will encourage you to target your product for a market large enough to provide a solid sales flow. They are both right, because the intersection of these two factors is often where successful products are found.

Nevertheless, before you can put your unique item in the hands of an eager market, it's likely you will need to persuade someone (or some company) to invest in it—lending their money, expertise, manufacturing time and resource, or some combination thereof.

When pitching your product to a potential investor or partner, it helps to have a "hook"—a story so compelling that the person considering your idea is too interested to tune out. What about your product (or the inspiration for it) is truly unusual and engaging? Figure that out and start your presentation with the story. If you can hook someone in the first few minutes—and help them see the product through your eyes—you will increase your chances of success.

### How Should You Define Partner?

For the budding inventor, especially one with an especially compelling idea and background story, the world is full of partners. Companies will "partner" with you to refine your idea or to identify the "right" manufacturer or fabricator for your needs. Other "partners" want to help you market your product, streamline your supply or distribution chain, and perform other activities.

When evaluating these partners, inventors must consider whether they are simply salespeople in disguise. Consider whether they are offering a service rather than a partnership—usually for a fee and with no guarantee of success. Such offerings are not necessarily inappropriate or unhelpful. However, it's easy for an excited inventor to invest in a few of these services and quickly find his or her bank account emptied with little or nothing in return.

Everyone needs a payday to make a living, but prudent inventors will ensure they are receiving real value from any partnerships into which they enter. In my experience, the best "partners" meet all the following criteria:

1. They are widely known to be scrupulous and dedicated, adhering to principles that resonate in today's market. (In the case of manufacturing partners, important principles would include waste reduction, process improvement and environmental stewardship.)
2. They have a track record of performance with products similar to those of the invention. Here, "similar" is a relative term. If the partner will handle marketing, they should have experience not only with the product category but also with the market it will need to reach. If the partner is a manufacturer or fabricator, similarity of process (e.g. injection molding; sheet metal fabrication; component assembly) is more important than the function the product performs.
3. They believe enough in the product to accept "shares" in the product, or a percentage of future profits, as their return.

Finally, if an inventor is considering outsourcing a wide array of functions, the best "partner" may be one with a turnkey process—handling most if not all aspects of manufacturing marketing, distribution, etc. (This assumes, of course, that the partner also meets the above criteria.)

### Are You Globally Conscious?

In today's market, environmental and/or social consciousness are hot. In particular, the demand for products that save water, energy or some other precious resource is growing, and numerous studies show that many consumers prefer products from companies that care. If you wish to fit into that niche, whether for personal satisfaction or market appeal—ensure all your partners feel and act the same way.

For example, assume you have devised a more efficient solar device—one that stores solar energy for nighttime use in a very environmentally friendly way. That's a great start, but when you move into production, you should also consider the external influences that impact your "green quotient." If your fabricator or manufacturer is also committed to lean, efficient production, and your supply and distribution chains are as lean and efficient as possible, your customers will love you and your product even more.

### Final Thoughts

Bringing an idea to fruition (and a waiting market) is hard work. Many people with great ideas follow the traditional advice and still fail. By paying attention to the subtler nuances of product development and marketing, like the examples offered here, inventors with a solid product will enjoy the best possible chance of success.

*Bruce Hagenau is president and co-owner of Metcam Inc. Hagenau co-founded Metcam in 1989, turning a bankrupt sheet metal fabricator into an ISO-certified, advanced metalworking company known for its customer service and lean, sustainable operating model. Hagenau is active in the manufacturing industry, both locally and nationally. He is an Advisory Board Member for Next Generation Manufacturing and founding Board Member of the Technology Association of Georgia (TAG) Manufacturing Society. He has also served as Chairman of the Southeast Council of TechAmerica, a trade association representing over 2,000 high technology companies. Visit [www.metcam.com/](http://www.metcam.com/) for more information.*

TAGS: Prototyping



Check out our latest Edition!

Subscribe for free

Archive



GET A QUOTE

Tweets by @ManufactureMag

**mt Manufacturing Today** @ManufactureMag  
Does your process require a turbo solution? Cascade TEK SVO-10T vacuum ovens ranges between 1 x 10-4 to 10-6 torr. [cascadetek.com](http://cascadetek.com)



**mt Manufacturing Today** @ManufactureMag  
"Fifty percent of jobs our kids are going to do don't exist yet." @LeyboldG is ready, are you? #MillennialMon

**mt Manufacturing Today** @ManufactureMag  
#Conex Cable increases its offerings by adding a #galvanized #steel wire production line [manufacturing-today.com/sections/profi...](http://manufacturing-today.com/sections/profi...)



Embed View on Twitter

## Contact Us

### Manufacturing Today Magazine

150 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 900  
Chicago, IL 60601

☎ 312.676.1100

📠 312.676.1101

[Click here for a full list of contacts.](#)

## Latest Edition



Subscribe for free

## Spread The Love

Google +

Twitter

Facebook

LinkedIn

## Testimonials

"The article Manufacturing Today wrote about us was spot-on. It was a pleasure working with them from interview to published article and everything was as promised." – Jennifer Brozek, inside sales, Koyo Machinery USA Inc.

[Click here for more testimonials.](#)