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Inventors Guide

You've downloaded this guide because you want to know more about how to turn your ideas into a viable product, which in turn will hopefully make you money.

We're going to tell you how to do this in a no-nonsense way which will ensure you are fully clued up, so you won't make the same mistakes as many other people.

What a Great Idea!

So you think you have a good idea? Then don't tell anyone. Not even your dog. The biggest mistake you can make is to disclose your idea without protection. As soon as you put your idea in the public domain, you may be unable to get your intellectual property rights protected (registered designs can be in the public domain for 12 months before an application for registration is made).

Before taking things further, you need to ask yourself a few questions:


- What problem is my idea solving?
- Who would buy it?
- How many people would buy it?
- Who are your market competitors?
- Why is your invention better than what's currently on the market?

If you can't answer many of these questions with conviction, you need to do more research. But, if you can answer these questions confidently, then it's onto the next stage.

Is it New?

Just because you've searched on Google and can't find anything, it doesn't mean to say it's not been invented. Thousands of people file patent applications every year without being successful at taking the product to market. The only way to get a good idea of whether it's original is by doing your research. It sounds dull, but it could save you a lot of time and money.

The first part of your patent search should involve looking on ep.espacenet.com ; the European patent office. This website holds a worldwide database of patent applications. Now this site can be a little tricky to navigate around, but once you get into the 'quick



search' section it's very simple. Just type in the key words relating to your product and search the results. Be warned, you may have thousands to look through.

If you do this and find a patent application which contains your idea, then unfortunately there's not a lot more you can do. Leave it behind and think of another one.

If your espacenet search reveals something which looks a little bit like your idea, but isn't quite the exact same thing; you need the help of a professional patent attorney. They will look at the existing application and your idea to see whether there's a way around it. Pd-m use professional patent attorneys which can give their opinion, and do the entire search for you for a small fee.

Before approaching a patent attorney; ensure they are from a reputable company. Patent attorneys are bound by law not to disclose any information about your idea to anyone. If you still feel nervous, ask them to sign a non-disclosure agreement. This is basically a document which gives you the right to take someone to court if they don't abide by the terms.

Pd-m can recommend professionals who can provide a tailored non-disclosure agreement at a small cost.


If your search on espacenet reveals nothing, then it's onto your local library. If you don't have the time to do all this research yourself, our patent attorneys can save you the hassle.

Large city libraries have business and patent departments which, for a small fee, will do another search on databases that espacenet can't access. They will then send you a list of all the potential patents which might cause you some bother. Look through them all and make a judgement whether or not it's ok for you to continue, or whether to stop here. You may need the advice of a patent attorney at this point to help you decide what to do.

Protect Now or Later?

There are several types of intellectual property (IP) including patents, designs, trademarks and copyrights. The main types of intellectual property pertaining to products are patents and designs. You can find out more on these and other types IP on www.ipa.gov.uk. Looking on this site and seeking advice from a patent attorney will help you understand what types of protection are most suitable for your idea.

Once you have decided the type of IP you need (and can afford) you need to decide when to take the step in registering it. There are a number of things you should know which may inform your decision.

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- Once you file a patent, you have exactly 1 year before you have to pay anything. The clock starts ticking, and in 12 months time you need to be in a position to either proceed and pay the fees, or let it go.
 - If you do not get any form of protection, there is a risk that someone could beat you to it while you wait. It doesn't matter if you thought of it first: there's no way of proving it.
 - You are able to do a certain amount market research without disclosing any product details, and so IP is not necessarily crucial at this stage.
 - Filing a patent effectively makes your idea public, and gives competitors an insight into what you're doing. This is why many large companies do not file patents as they want their business to be completely secret (NASA files very few).
 - Patents are difficult to get granted, but once they are, it gives the owner the right to a 20 year monopoly.

Develop your idea

When you have done all the research, and made a decision when to file for intellectual property protection, it's time to develop your idea. If you are lucky enough to be able to produce a decent prototype in your garden shed then do so, but many of you need help from companies like Pd-m to transfer your idea into a working product.

This is not by any means a cheap process; a high level of skill is required to turn even the simplest idea into a product, so you may need to apply for some funding assistance.

By contacting your local Business Link www.businesslink.gov.uk you will get plenty of advice as to which funding you may be able to apply for. Pd-m has in the past been successful in helping individuals secure funding in order to proceed with product development.


Whoever you approach for help, get a non-disclosure agreement signed. This is essential if you have not yet filed a patent or design registration. If you have filed some form of protection, it's not so crucial, but many would recommend you should do it anyway.

Once you have got a prototype of some sort then you need to decide which route you are going to take with it.

License or Manufacture?

Inventors often choose to try and license their product rather than manufacturing it themselves because it is a cheaper and safer option.

Licensing works by allowing other parties to use your intellectual property; they manufacture and sell the goods on your behalf. You then receive a percentage of the



sale price. The percentage all depends on the product, how much it costs to make and how much it can be sold for.

This type of arrangement is much less stressful but the monetary rewards are obviously less.

Taking the decision to manufacture yourself needs to be an informed one. The complexity of the task varies with what product you are producing, where you are manufacturing and where you plan to distribute. Pd-m specialises in handling these types of complex projects and so you needn't worry about project managing the supply chain. Call us for a chat and we can work out how we can help.

Now that you've read this, the enormity of the task you are about to set out on may have dawned. To be a successful inventor, you need to be focussed and very determined. If you think you have these skills; and an idea that might be on everyone's shopping list, waste no time and start now!

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