

How to build your invention and sell it

Have you invented something? Do you want to get it made? What are the first steps you should take? Brady Forrest, Vice President at Highway1, PCH's incubator program gives his advice.

If you have a great new product idea or invention, what are the first steps you should take?

First, assemble a team of people you know and trust. Second, build a prototype, quickly. It doesn't have to be perfect. The most important thing is getting something into the hands of customers to test. And that is the third most important thing you can do, test your prototype, test your assumptions. Do customers like it? Is there a clear want or need for this product from people other than you? Is the market big enough to build a business? Then repeat this process, refining the prototype as you gather user feedback.

If you have designed a prototype, what are the best ways to test this design?

Overall, you want to test whether or not you are providing value to your customer. Look to online forums and social media for people willing to participate in an alpha or beta test. Make sure to thoroughly think through the test ahead of time to identify what exactly you need to learn, and how best to test those assumptions.

Are there prototype manufacturers in Ireland or do you have to go abroad?

We are seeing many firms in Ireland working with local universities. At [PCH](#) we are actually working with Dublin City University on a series of hackathons and have held three to date. These weekends led to the development of some brilliant ideas – a connected cash register which counts money in real-time; a Bluetooth connected tape measure designed to reduce clothing returns for online retailers by helping customers find the right fit first time; and a connected pharmacy refrigerator.

What pitfalls should be expected in this process?

Prototyping can take a lot of time, and you will hit many dead ends. It's better to go through these growing pains early in the process than to ship a product no one wants.

Are there ways to make the process smoother?

Work with quality people, move fast and pay attention to the test data. Don't lie to yourself, take the feedback from user tests. Be ready to discard that feature you loved and your test users hated.

What about patenting designs/products, is this easy to do?

Preliminary patents are easy to file and might be worth it in the long run, but don't let the lack of patents prevent you from moving forward. More ideas die because of lack of attention than because they were stolen. You should consult your own local counsel to make the decision that is right for your company.

What are success rates in this area like?

Less than 1 in 100.

What are the most available routes to market? What are the options?

Most companies will need to choose between two fundamental choices, whether to be venture backed or to bootstrap the company. Bootstrapping takes longer and you are mostly reliant on crowdfunding to launch, but founders hold on to the equity. If you are venture backed, then you should try to raise some money early so that you can optimise your product and invest in branding and marketing to prepare for your launch, whether that be a crowdfunding campaign or otherwise.

Are there any cool, affordable ways to promote/market a new product?

One of the easiest things is to get to know reporters, bloggers and influencers in your product category, especially those local in your area. Build relationships with them. The first conversation you have with the media shouldn't be on the day of your launch. Websites like [Product Hunt](#) can be very helpful and, of course, Amazon.

Any other advice, please?

Work with people you know. Consider working on a simple project together before moving forward with a company. Founder disputes are the number one killer of startups.

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About Brady Forrest

Forrest is Vice President of [Highway1](#), PCH's accelerator. You can see his day-to-day work with hardware startups on Syfy's Bazillion Dollar Club (to be released autumn 2015). He co-founded Ignite, a global talk series, and is part of the team currently organising Ignite San Francisco. Brady is a venture advisor to 500 Startups and helps arts organisations via CAST-sf.org, the community arts body which purchases and leases space for the exclusive use of nonprofit organisations in San Francisco. Formerly, he worked on a number of projects at O'Reilly Media, including the Radar blog, Web 2.0 Expo, Where 2.0, ETech, and Foo Camp. Most years, you can find him on the playa.