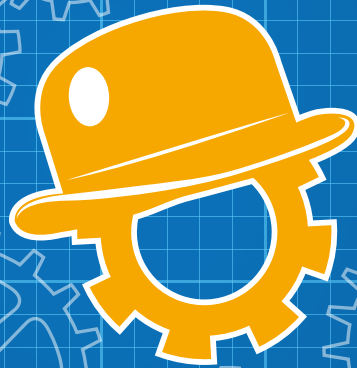


STEP ONE BLUEPRINT

*How To Validate Your Invention Concepts
Without Spending a Dime*



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PUBLISHED BY:

AON Invent
3407 Bella Vista Way
Bella Vista, AR 72714

First Printing 2015, Revised 2017
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ABOUT AON INVENT

AON Invent began as an outgrowth of All Product Design, a full-service consumer product engineering and design firm founded by Andrew Bojie. APD works with many of the estimated 1400 consumer-goods manufacturers that maintain offices in Northwest Arkansas, to better serve the world's largest retailer, Walmart.

Once individual inventors discovered APD, they began hiring Andrew's team to engineer their concepts for prototyping. Eventually it occurred to Andrew that he had never seen any of those inventions for sale in stores. Being an inventor himself, he was familiar with the pitfalls of bringing a product to market, and he began to wonder if he was contributing to the problem by assuming his clients' concepts were viable.

In 2012 Andrew had a chance meeting with Larry Robertson, an entrepreneur whose career spanned sales, marketing, and product innovation in several industries. They discussed the "innovation paradox" as well as the major problems with most invention submission companies. It became clear that something needed to be done.

They spent the next year assembling a team of experts who have been decision makers in hundreds of new product launches for companies that include Walmart, Sam's Club, and the Home Shopping Network. Together they have created an efficient system for identifying a viable concept and getting it into the hands of companies that own shelf space in its related category.

AON Invent is committed to providing inventors with honest, inexpensive, professional assessments of their concepts. Our desire is to help inventors avoid wasting years and fortunes on ideas that we believe are destined to fail, while helping those with commercially viable concepts get to market in the shortest period of time.

STEP ONE BLUEPRINT

Congratulations! By reading this guide, you are taking the first of many steps on your exciting journey as a product innovator.

If you are like me, you probably consider yourself a creative person who is always thinking of new and better ways to do things, envisioning improvements to products and services you use everyday. Some of your ideas are bad; some are pretty good; then, every once in a while, you realize you've stumbled onto something truly great. With a rush of excitement, you start considering prototypes, filing patents, and dreaming about the day you will look down upon your production line as shipments roll out of your factory and millions of dollars roll into your pocket.

What most inventors don't realize at first is that this traditional pathway to market through manufacturing is fraught with financial risks, administrative challenges, steep competition, and a high chance of failure. The good news is that there is a better way! Licensing your ideas to other companies lets you focus on the most exciting aspects of your business (creating new ideas and getting paid) while leaving the manufacturing, marketing, sales, distribution, and customer service to others. Every day I speak with inventors who spent several years trying to "build their own airline," when all they really needed to do was catch a ride on someone else's plane!

It is this second, emerging pathway that we focus on at AON Invent. With speed of innovation now driving the global economy, and new products churning faster than ever, consumer product companies are starting to look beyond their own walls to meet the demands of being first to market. This has created unprecedented opportunity for inventors, yet this approach is not without its challenges.

The number one mistake we find among would-be inventors, and the reason we wrote this guide, is that in their excitement inventors tend to skip a simple but important step between "have idea" and "develop/pitch idea." They tend to innovate backward, creating a product to solve a problem that bothers them personally,

without first verifying that it bothers the market at large. They dream up a product without thinking about who will use it, how, or why. Then they build a prototype, file a patent, and start calling on consumer product companies - without first identifying the market, qualifying the market, or even knowing whether there is a market. Not surprisingly, ideas developed this way fail almost every time.

Five Questions To Ask Yourself

Ideas are a dime a dozen. This is a hard truth all inventors must face. An idea has little value in the real world until it is actually *in* the real world: benefiting consumers and generating revenue. The first step, once you think you have a great idea, is to evaluate your concept by answering the following five questions.

- 1. Does my invention solve a problem/satisfy a desire that other people think is worth solving/satisfying?**
- 2. What value does my invention offer that other products do not?**
- 3. How does my idea compare and contrast with other products in the market?**
- 4. Who is the primary customer and how large is the market for my product?**
- 5. What are the estimated manufacturing costs per unit?**

Much the same way being in love allows us to willingly blind ourselves to character flaws in the other person, being too attached to our ideas can blind us to the flaws in our product concepts. As you answer these questions, it is crucial that you allow yourself to be brutally honest and diligent in your research.

If you ever meet with one of our product experts for a professional consultation, he will assign your concept a rating between one and three stars. Our most successful

“three star” product submissions have been the ones that appeal to wide markets, create value that exceeds the shelf price, solve problems in a unique way (wow factor), can be owned (patentable), and can be made at reasonable cost (profitable).

A Brief Word About Patents

There is a common misconception that being “first to apply” for a patent entitles the applicant to patent protection. *This is simply not true.* In order to legally apply for a patent, the applicant must be the actual inventor, and the invention must be either a totally new concept or a substantive improvement to an existing invention. Additionally, the invention must not be in the public domain or “obvious” to persons familiar with the subject matter (schooled in the art). If the invention is already in the public domain (being sold or offered for sale, advertised or exposed to the public in any way, including the media), it is NOT eligible for patent protection.

Many first-time inventors are so eager to protect and develop their invention, they either totally overlook the possibility someone else may have beaten them to the punch, or they do not take the time to search for “prior art” and end up wasting a lot of time and money - resources they could have used elsewhere, perhaps their next invention.

Do The Research: Marketplace

Companies are only interested in licensing ideas they are convinced will sell. To be convinced of that, they must see how your idea fits into the existing market and how it is unique. That’s why it is so important to do your homework first.

What if I told you that you had access to multiple resources worth trillions of dollars,

STEP ONE BLUEPRINT

connecting you to all the information you need, and that they are available in your own town and local public library? Retail stores provide a wealth of information about the market for your invention, and the internet makes it very easy to answer any questions that cannot be addressed through personal observation.

- 1. Start with a trip to the store.** Pick 2-3 retailers that sell the category your invention belongs to and go on a field trip: at least one “niche” store (often found in malls and older downtown areas) and one “big box” store like Walmart, Target, Home Depot, etc. Bring a small notepad and camera and search out existing products most similar to your idea (most managers won’t care if you take photos, and if they do, you can always say you’re collecting ideas for a gift).

Assess features, functions, strengths, weaknesses, prices, variation in design, and packaging for each. Ask department managers and clerks which items are best-sellers and which don’t sell at all. Note which items have the most shelf space or featured end-caps. Take your time and really observe the merchandise and how shoppers interact with it.

- 2. Go online.** Search through customer reviews for the products you found in stores to help determine who might buy your product, how they might use it, where they might buy it, and how much they might be willing to pay for it. [Amazon](#) is a great site for this. Look for blogs and forums where people are talking. Evaluate how your idea compares to the nearest competition and determine your unique selling proposition: what pain point it addresses that others do not.

Next search [Google](#) for similar products, perhaps not found in stores, by using “description” as well as “intended use.” For example if your invention is a water bucket, you might search for portable water containers, hand-held water containers, etc., as well as solutions for its intended use, such as transporting, storing, and mixing small amounts of water and material such as sand, dirt, etc.

STEP ONE BLUEPRINT

Next, go to www.google.com/images. Click on advanced image search, type in your keywords and phrases one at a time, and scan the results for any images that seem relevant to your idea. Click those images to link to their web pages, where you can usually find more info. Finally, go to www.google.com/products. Do an advanced product search for each of your keywords and phrases, scan the results, and click on web pages with more info. Now that Google provides sponsored results at the top, you may have to browse through 5-10 pages to hit upon more unique items.

- 3. Explore other sources.** Consumer magazines, mail-order catalogs, trade catalogs, trade publications, and trade shows can provide additional sources of valuable information. Often industry publications are the best way to find both the size of your potential market and the manufacturing contacts for the handful of big companies that produce most of the products in a given market. If you can speak with a production manager, they can sometimes give you a rough idea of your manufacturing costs and whether your concept would be an easy adaptation to their existing lines (less expensive) or if it would require significant retooling (very expensive). Of course, this depends on a million little details. Our team of engineers explore the manufacturing process in great depth, should you engage our services.

Do The Research: Intellectual Property

After you have evaluated your concept and verified a market for it, you will need to make sure someone else doesn't already own your idea. The internet makes it very easy to do your preliminary prior art search for free. You may have even come across this already while researching other products. Nonetheless, it's a good idea to repeat the Google searches listed above with this new focus in mind.

STEP ONE BLUEPRINT

Next, visit the [US Patent and Trademark Office website](#). If you have not been to this site in recent years, you will probably be surprised to see how user-friendly it is. The USPTO is a tremendous resource for any inventor, but if this is your first effort to take an invention to market, you will want to spend as much time as it takes to read through all of the applicable material. There is a treasure trove of useful information. While the site is easy to navigate, I want to include some direct links to areas I feel are among the most important:

- 1. Quick Patent Search:** <http://patft.uspto.gov/netahtml/PTO/search-bool.html> Here you can do a simple search for “prior art” to see if your idea has already been claimed by someone else. This level of search is by no means definitive since it does not include “unpublished” or “provisional” patent applications, but it will give you the opportunity to review patents that have already been issued.
- 2. Scam Warning:** <http://www.uspto.gov/patents-getting-started/using-legal-services/scam-prevention>. This is not directly related to your patent research, but I felt we should mention it here, since we’re talking about the USPTO site. Unfortunately, not all invention service companies have your best interest at heart, and the internet is full of stories that explain why the [Federal Trade Commission](#) and USPTO post warnings on their websites. AON Invent is a new company, legally established in January 2013, led by a team of product development veterans determined to provide each customer with the highest quality professional service possible. We remind ourselves every day that **even one complaint is one too many**.

If you learn that someone beat you to market with your exact idea, you’ll certainly feel disappointed, but it’s better to find out before you spend any of your hard-earned money on something you can’t sell. To look at it in a positive light, you can feel validated knowing your idea is already on the market, you are now an expert in a consumer product category, and you are free to get to work on your next great idea.

STEP ONE BLUEPRINT

On the other hand, if you've made it this far with a viable product concept, a validated market to which you can sell, and IP ownership tentatively up for grabs, congratulations, **and by all means take action right now before someone else does!**

If you want to forge ahead on your own, we have a number of free resources for inventors on our website, AONinvent.com, which I invite you to check out anytime.

If you see the value in having a team of experts working with you to bring your product to market as fast as possible, I invite you to join us for a Step 2 Invention Assessment and Consultation. Click the link below for more information and to schedule your appointment today.



GO TO STEP 2

Conclusion

I really hope that you have found our Step 1 Blueprint to be of great value in your invention ideation process. It excites me to know there are still people like you who are actively contributing to the repository of American innovation. If you have any additional questions about this guide or if you have suggestions for how it could be better, please feel free to reach out to me directly at 1-479-855-6699.

Warm regards,

Larry D. Robertson