

How Not to Bring Your Product to Market

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“What else are you going to do with your life?” -- Steve Baer

Abstract

A concise diatribe based on hypothetical personal experiences of the authors, concerning some of the many ways not to market a new product idea (such as a hypothetical mathematical and/or artistic modeling system, the similarity of which to the product known as Zometool is purely coincidental).

We're Not Worthy

Okay, let's call a spade a spade. We're not experts in the exciting field of how not to bring your product to market. There are lots of folks that have done a better job than we could. (Like, who can hold a candle to Colgate² Kitchen Entrees, Harley Davidson Perfume, Windows Vista³, the Santa Dreidel...? Or the unalloyed genius of people like John DeLorean, Hank Paulson or Charles Ponzi?)

We only wish to share our modest experience in this ever-expanding body of knowledge. So we offer the following three rules: (1) Design a product that can't be made, (2) Make sure there's no market for it, and (3) Do it all yourself. And of course the mother of them all: (4) Just don't do it. Four rules; we *meant* four rules. Or something.

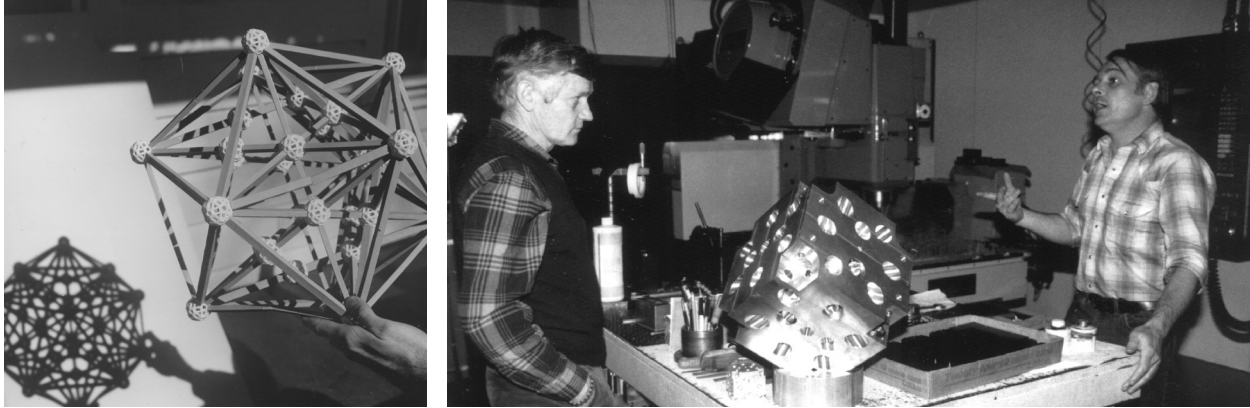


1. Design a product that can't be made

Suppose, hypothetically, that a critical component in your design is impossible to produce using conventional know-how, let alone economically. Like, you need a hollow sphere molded in one piece. You build a hand sample and show it to a tech guru who laughs you out of his office, “Most guys design parts that can be actually made!” Undeterred, you make a bunch of the parts by hand⁴ (see rule 3). It takes 2 hours to make one. You need 60 of them for one product. You'll show *him*.

Suppose you cook up a tool design that *might* work in a perfect world, where +/- .0002” (+/-50 microns) is a reasonable tolerance, and machine parts never wear.⁵ You proudly share your models and drawings with toolmakers from around the world (see rule 3(c)). The German guy says, “It can't be done. But if you try, only a German has the precision to build it.” The French guy says, “Impossible. But if you attempt it, only a Frenchman has the finesse to create such a thing.” The Chinese guy says, “It's hopeless, but only the Chinese can build something you could possibly afford.” You get the idea.

Actually, you don't get the idea. You send your designs to every machine shop in a 100 mile radius. Most won't even look at them. One offers a quote of \$500,000 (\$250,000 down and a \$250,000 bank letter of credit) for a one-cavity tool with no guarantee it will work. Finally, one guy says, “I think I can do that.” Now you're in trouble. You should have listened to everybody else.



A kit that took only about 200 hours to produce (left) and machinists that could ruin your life (right).

2. Make sure there's no market for it

What better way not to bring your product to market? Prove there's *no* market! You don't have to re-invent the wheel (see rule 3. again). Just design a product for which you have to *create the market*. Like the Intel engineer that got the idea microprocessors were becoming so cheap it was possible to market a personal computer. He shared the idea with his boss, Gordon Moore, who asked what people would do with it. "Well, a housewife could keep her recipes on it." "Great! Just what the world needs: a \$3000 recipe file!"

Suppose you have the bodacity to believe it can be sold in an existing market, say, the toy market. You make appointments with the big boys and girls (i.e., New Product V.P.s) from Mattel, Fisher Price, etc. at international toy fairs⁶. Like something out of a Giraudoux⁷ play, *they make you* sign non-disclosure agreements (see rule 3(c) again). You do your song and dance, and in 30 seconds you can see they'd rather be reading a seed catalog. Their response: "It's too abstract, no post-lobotomy play value, blah, blah, etc., even if it *could* be made." Undaunted, you grease their egos by praising their latest hits: an edible gumball machine, Baby Bag-of-Glass[®], microwavable pets, etc., and pump them for market information. It helps if you're pretty.⁸ Or know a bunch of bad jokes. But on the average, you can keep them talking for a couple of hours.

You ask, "Would you be interested if I could make and sell 20,000 units per year?" "Then you don't need us." Whoa. Now you're an expert in the toy market. Nothing can stop you! You'll just...

3. Do It All Yourself!

So who needs OPB and OPM⁹? You're young, passionate and you know what you're doing. Like my ass chews gum. On the other hand, if you knew what you were doing, you wouldn't. Which is the whole point of this paper. *Think* about it. Anyway, doing it all yourself is a highly evolved and complex business discipline, but it boils down to a few comprehensive practices:

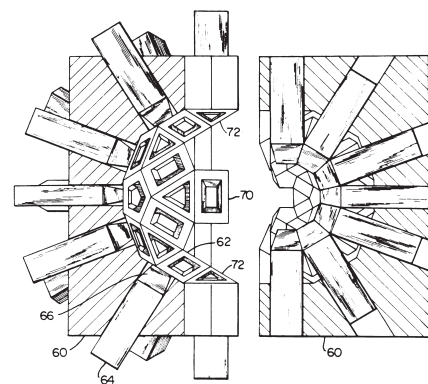
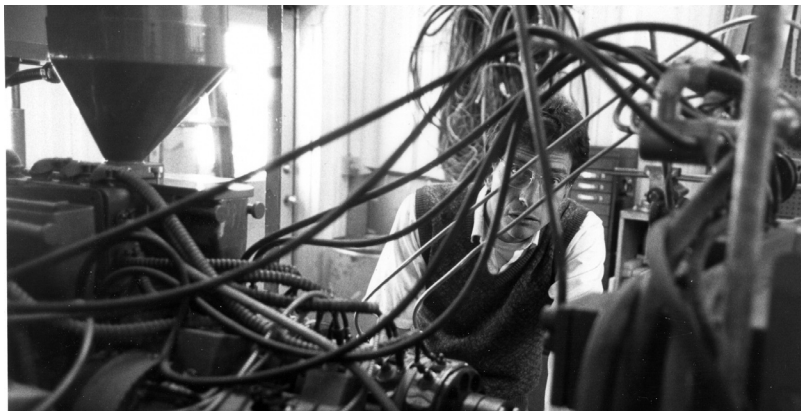
(a) Be undercapitalized -- This is easier than you might think. If you're not undercapitalized when you start, just wait 5 minutes. And no matter how much of your own money you're willing to throw away, you'll still be under-*human*-capitalized. No, you're smarter than that. You'll build your business with a crack team of experts: people like you. So, be sure to...

(b) Choose a team of like-minded people -- After years of introspection, you discover you're an artist. That's what qualifies you to market your own products. Of course. So who do you work with? A bunch of other artists. Of course. (Who's better qualified to run a business?) And because you're an artist, you...

(c) Trust everyone -- Like, marketing gurus who already know exactly how to sell your product. “It’s just like selling sushi!” “It’s just like selling soap!”¹⁰ Well, who knows? *They* don’t. And don’t bother protecting your intellectual property. The easy way is *just don’t do it* (see rule 4). The hard way is to get a patent and fart around for 17 years while it expires. Or get in a snit with a friend over a trademark while it goes generic (think: zipper, aspirin¹¹). You can save up-front expense by dispensing with contracts and other stupid legal stuff: an excellent way to fail. You spend all your money (and a lot you don’t have) on lawsuits¹². Or just trust the people who tell you it can’t be done. Give up and proceed to rule 4 for the 3rd \$#%&ing time.

(d) Build your own plant -- This is going overboard, but if you’re hard-core enough to manufacture, at least you’re selling a few units¹³. Fear not, you can still destroy any hope in the market if you make sure to...

(e) ...lose money on every unit you sell -- Easy as pie. Just think, “I can sell this for twice as much as it costs me to make (especially since I’m doing it myself -- I might even make \$15 an hour!).” Ninja, please.



A fool doing it all himself (left), after patenting a tool that couldn’t be built, let alone operated (right)

3.1 Keep your product unknown

It is particularly important to nip in the bud any possibility of word-of-mouth marketing, lest your product become the talk of the town. This is tricky, but we offer some useful strategies:

(a) Use an obscure name: The name should be difficult to pronounce or interpret and, preferably, easily misspelled. The point is to make it hard to remember/communicate (you get extra points if you use somebody else’s trademark (see 3(c), above)).

(b) Evade description: You may be tempted to avoid describing the product altogether, but this may be difficult to get away with. As a workaround you can come up with an incomprehensible description, such as: “It’s a 61-dimensional hyper-cubic lattice projected onto 3-space”.

(c) Obfuscate: Design your product so that it’s hard to categorize (is it a toy, an educational manipulative, scientific modeling tool?) and make sure to offer no clarifications.

(d) Don’t segment the market: Assume all your customers are the same: just like you!

(e) Master your domain: Spend thousands registering hundreds of domain names with every possible idea for a brand, product name or tag-line. But whatever you do, don’t update your web site regularly.

3.14 Here are other great ways to not bring your product to market, that we're too lazy to organize: believe that if you build a better mouse trap the world will beat a path to your door, don't take it to market until it's perfect, we mean *really* perfect (honestly, is it really as perfect as it can possibly be?), have no sense of humor (a sure way to kill anything fast), and believe everything you think. And did we mention...

4. Just don't do it

Even if you follow all of our bad advice, you may still manage to bring your product to market and retain your sense of humor. So the *real secret* of not bringing your product to market is *just don't do it*. Go back to your hammock, compose a symphony, read Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, devote the rest of your life to number theory, learn a new language, enter a monastery. Because if you *do* do it, it takes more time, more money, and more perseverance than you can imagine... (and it's worth it.)



Be sure to choose people just like you for your team and your customers (or in our case, what's the dif?)

5. Oh, and one more thing

Start off with a little, and as you progress, faith will grow. Love your product, and love the people with whom you work, and (hey!) love your customers! Have faith in your product, and faith in its value to humanity, and faith in the highest power. Whatever, in the humblest way, reflects the highest power's perfection and love for all things, *will* be manifested.

"I am a great and sublime fool. But then again, I'm God's fool, and as such, all his works must be contemplated with respect." -- Samuel Clemens*

Endnotes

[1] "Stodgy Humorless Bastards" [2] Yes, the toothpaste company. [3] Or Windows *anything*, for that matter. [4] O.k., suppose 3D printing doesn't exist yet. If it does, we recommend Shapeways.com instead. [5] "How *did* we do it?" you might ask. Our peer reviewers did. The answer is: easy; we just atake chico ponge va. [6] Spielwarenmesse in Nürnberg, and the New York Toy Fair [7] i.e., the Madwoman of Chaillot: "Little Man -- 'Take it, please take it, it's all the money I have! ...(pause)... Well, aren't you going to give me a receipt?' Capitalist: 'Little man, people like us don't give receipts, we take them!'" [8] *Purely* hypothetical, in our case. [9] Other People's Brains and Other People's Money [10] Any similarity to persons, living or dead, is purely intentio-- oops, we mean coincidental. [11] Zipper originally trademarked by B.F. Goodrich. Aspirin is still a Bayer trademark in about 80 countries, but was declared generic in the U.S.; Bayer also lost their trademark on "heroin." [12] Also "The suicide of time," according to Thomas Edison [13] In our case, building a plant was the cheapest way to support our Zometool habit. *thanks to Marc Pelletier