

**Q.** I have developed a great new product (or an idea for a new product), how do I get it to market?

**A.** Terrific! An idea's a good start. But an idea, without knowledge of how to make it work, is not patentable. Besides having "a great idea," you will also need to know how to turn the idea into a money-maker. You must be able to present an illustrated description of a specific useful product, which achieves a desired objective, in sufficient detail to enable others to make and use it. Even then, not every invention is patentable.

To do so, inventors or small business owners must address several issues. First, there should be an invention evaluation. There are organizations (and universities) who offer new product evaluation services for a fee. You can submit an invention, or simply an idea, to them for their confidential review. You should receive a feedback report with specific comments professional advice that helps you decide if you should continue with, modify, or abandon your idea.

Next, investigate patenting your product. Patenting can be an expensive process. The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) offers inventors the option of filing a "provisional application" for patent prior to submitting a non-provisional patent application. This was designed to provide a lower-cost first patent filing in the United States. The advantage is that the inventor is protected for up to 12 months while testing his/her product before deciding to pursue a full (regular) patent.

Product development is the act of refining your invention into a product that can be manufactured and offered for sale at an attractive price. After producing a prototype, you will test it. These steps allow you to determine if the product works the way you intend and if its cost to manufacture is in line. By this time you should have enough information to decide if your product is a candidate for further investment. If so, show it to vendors and backers.

And finally it's time to negotiate with your manufacturer to produce a minimum quantity for sampling. Use these samples to do market surveys to see what retailers and consumers think of your new product. Visit retail merchants that would carry this kind of product. Demonstrate a sample to these merchants and see if they think it would sell.

There are invention development firms that promise to help inventors develop, patent, and promote their ideas so they can be commercially licensed or sold. While many of these organizations are legitimate, some are not. Proceed with caution and when in doubt, seek the service of a registered patent attorney or agent. For more information go to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office website at [www.uspto.gov](http://www.uspto.gov).

The Invention Commercialization Service of the Thomas Walter Center for Technology Management in the Ginn College of Engineering at Auburn University performs this service. You can contact them at [http://www.eng.auburn.edu/center/twc/ICS/index\\_print\\_preview.htm](http://www.eng.auburn.edu/center/twc/ICS/index_print_preview.htm)