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Just Imagine

Checklist for Success

Will your new technology be a commercial success? At Invent Resources, we use this six-point checklist to analyze the potential of new products ranging from hand dryers to tornado detectors.

	Yes	No
Does it <i>work</i> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is it <i>protectable</i> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a <i>need</i> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will it be <i>used</i> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is it better than <i>current alternatives</i> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is it better than <i>future alternatives</i> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Were the answers “yes” for your product need? If so, that’s a great start. Clients often come to us with a request for new technology that clearly hasn’t been thought out.

One major U.S. corporation developed these guidelines to help identify the characteristics of a successful consumer product. Their new products must be:

1. **innovative...**
It’s not enough to provide a solution to a problem: the product must clearly solve the problem better than any other solution.
2. **easily understood...**
Do not try to educate the consumer.
3. **obvious...**
Its attributes must be self-evident. The product cannot require marketing to distinguish it from the competition.

Who we are

When your product line needs new life...when you hit a technical bottleneck...when you're looking for ways to polish your manufacturing process...it's time to call on Invent Resources, Inc.

At Invent Resources, our world-class scientists and engineers "**invent on demand.**" Whether you are an individual or an organization, whether your product need is low tech or high tech, we'll work with you to develop and prototype new, proprietary products. We also routinely help our clients obtain and strengthen patents.

Drawing on extensive backgrounds in research, technology and business, our scientists and engineers have:

- guided the development of over 200 products
- received over 100 patents
- formed over 60 licensing arrangements

Our inventions have boosted our clients' total annual sales by several hundred million dollars...Now, just imagine what Invent Resources can do for you.

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4. **low tech...**
Twice as good at half the price.
5. **simple...**
The product must use simple materials and processes. There must be low tooling investment, and it must work.
6. **priced to sell...**
It must qualify as an impulse purchase.
7. **lasting...**
The product must not be too faddish or temporary; it must convey consumer satisfaction.
8. **positive...**
It cannot be destructive, unsafe, harmful to the environment, sexist and so forth.
9. **free-standing...**
It must be independent, not part of a system. It cannot be tied to the success of another product.
10. **available...**
The new product must have an established distribution network. It must have a known retail or catalog source.
11. **desirable...**
It should be irresistible. It can be a "need" but must be a "want" as well.
12. **targeted...**
The product should not appeal to everyone. If it does, there is danger that it will appeal to no one. ■

Inventive Solutions

A Case Study: the XLerator™ Hand Dryer

The Learning Channel recently ran a program featuring “Products You Love to Hate.” Conventional hand dryers ranked #2 in the top-15 list.

It’s easy to understand why. Just try drying your hands in a public restroom: even if you make it to the end of the typical 30-second drying cycle, your hands will still be damp. Then you’re left with two options: endure another cycle, or wipe your hands on your clothes.

Using hand dryers may help the environment—but it’s clear that the public would eagerly embrace a better, faster dryer.

When Invent Resources, Inc., develops a new product, in most cases we’re responding to a client’s request to “invent

on demand.” This is a highly satisfactory way to operate: our clients know what they want, do their market research, and then approach us to develop the technology.



Sometimes, though, it works the other way around: we see an obvious need for a new product—like a better hand dryer—and have a concept for the technology, but we need a corporate sponsor. That’s

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Here, a complete chronology of the XLerator hand dryer:

- 1996** First contact between IRI and Excel Dryer, Inc.
- 1997** Met with Excel President Denis Gagnon.
- 1998** Phase I: developed a feasibility model and established feasibility.
- 1999** Created a method for quantitative determination of hand dryness. Signed license agreement.
- 2000** Phase II: created a production prototype. Evaluated performance in lab and in operating sites. Wrote technical paper and patents (1 pending and 1 issued). Ordered production tooling. Held product announcement and demonstration at trade show.
- 2001** Began production (July). Made first sales (September). First royalties to IRI.
- 2002** Sales continuing at an accelerating rate.
- 2003** First European and Latin American sales projected.

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when we turn to our marketing associates—independent individuals or companies who market our technologies in return for a piece of the action. (They share in any resulting royalties.)

In May 1995, one of our associates approached the largest U.S. manufacturer of hand dryers. After signing a nondisclosure agreement, this company's engineers and executives met with IRI's principals to discuss the concept.

Our proposal: an improved hand dryer that would blow off 85% of the moisture in the first third of the drying cycle and then evaporate off the residual moisture in the final two thirds of the cycle. The total drying time would be 10 to 12 seconds, compared to the 30 or more seconds for conventional drying.

The contact led to no contract. The potential client admitted that the concept could be valid but felt its own engineers could achieve as much without establishing a relationship with IRI. Perhaps they could, but it wasn't difficult to identify an element of "NIH" (not invented here)—a natural reaction that is often present.

IRI then turned to the *second* largest maker of hand dryers in the U.S., Excel Dryer, Inc., of East Longmeadow, Massachusetts. In 1996 we met with Excel's president, Denis Gagnon, to discuss our proposal for a super-fast hand-dryer. In October 1997 both companies agreed to begin development.

To learn more about the Xlerator's design and performance, visit Excel's web site at www.exceldryer.com. ■

Patent Portfolio

Say you own a company that manufactures sporting goods. You have an idea for the design of a new do-it-yourself backyard ice rink. You approach Invent Resources, who develops the technology for your new product.

Now you're wondering: since you identified the need and came up with the idea for the new product, shouldn't you be named as a co-inventor on the patent application?

Coming up with the ideal attributes of a useful new product is not enough. You may recognize a problem, a desirable result, or even a general approach to solving a

problem. But "invention," in patent law, is solving a problem, not identifying it.

So if you haven't provided a workable solution to your identified problem, then you are *not* a co-inventor. Co-inventors must contribute to the invention; otherwise, the patent could be invalidated in a suit if a third party decided to challenge the patent's validity.

Inventions must be defined as a part of the claims made in a patent application: "The claim is a statutory requirement, **prescribed for the very purpose of making the patentee define precisely what his invention is ...**" [from *White v. Dunbar*, 119 US 47, 51 (1886)]. ■

IN THE NEWS...

Advice for inventors: Be focused, but don't go crazy!

Nobel Prize-winner and Bell Labs chief scientist Arno Penzias thinks that one way that smart people act stupid is by being so interested in everything that comes along that they can't focus their attention.

If you're going to act smart as well as be smart, you're going to have to decide what NOT to work on. You also need to make sure that what you're doing is worth doing, and that you have the vision to ask and answer the questions: who really needs what I'm developing, what are the chances of my success, and how much is it going to cost.

Work done without reference to those questions is the self-indulgent work of a fanatic: "The definition of a fanatic is someone who works on the result at all costs, irrespective of its value. He's lost sight of the reason something's being pursued and just pursues it with redoubled zeal. If you're a fanatic, you're going to look at a book, and you're going to study every goddamned thing in the book, every single detail. Most fanatics score very high on intelligence tests."

Fanaticism, says Penzias, is "whatever the opposite of customer focus is." (*Fortune*, January 1996, page 46)