



Identifying Winning Products

A guide to identifying and developing great products successfully.

There are three critical problems that confront anyone trying to undertake product development:

- › Identifying a winning product before you have made it.
- › Finding the ingredients of success.
- › Getting your team seamlessly integrated.

Product development should be something your whole business is involved with, not just the R&D team. Creating a structure that enables you to deliver a unified

product that is cohesive in the way it is developed, manufactured, and communicated will end up winning for both yourself, your team, and those who use your products.

This document sets out a practical approach to identifying and developing winning products and how you can focus on your team to get the best end result.

Our approach has been developed from 15 years of successful experiences across a wide range of industries.

Developing products is hard

The market and context of your product are constantly changing and evolving. You are competing against skilled people who are trying to solve the same problem as you and are likely to have more resources than you, but there is hope.

The right idea?

No amount of hard work can make up for pursuing the wrong idea. Having an idea with a strong point of difference that tackles a real problem or opportunity, and which can be easily understood by others makes, it a lot easier downstream. Choosing well what to invest yourself and your resources into are your most important decision.

More does not mean better

Small, agile teams have been proven to be able to succeed where many large teams have bailed. They achieve this by thinking differently and approaching problems in new ways. They are better at adapting to change quickly.

Research is not negotiable

Research is simultaneously your tool for risk management and for deriving insight. It will build a better platform of understanding that will drive the creation of new ideas and insights. A lack of research can take you in the wrong direction that, at an early stage, can be fatal.

Product integrity is paramount

Your product reflects your company, your staff, your attitude, and your brand. Creative, original work validates products with integrity, will underpin your company values and will help build sustainable success.

New is not always better

Being new is not what matters the most. Sometimes clever, well-resolved use of existing technology or ideas can yield surprising results.

Don't expect a welcome mat

Changing the rules or disrupting a market can force a change in people's behaviour that requires education. You can easily find yourself falling outside of or in between existing standards and regulations. Larger companies may take time to understand what you are bringing to market and may be resistant to change.

Perseverance and self-belief

Perseverance and self-belief are important traits to have in order to overcome the many challenges you will face when successfully commercialising your products and business.



The recipe for success

Success is driven by three key factors. Using recipes as analogy, we can look at how these things affect what we do.

01

Raw Materials – Your Resources



If you make an omelette with free range, freshly laid eggs, or you can use 20-day old supermarket eggs. You will get a very different result — and flavour.

Your raw materials are your resources. Making sure you have the right resources to deliver what you want is essential. This starts by clearly understanding what type of people you need and taking a practical and careful approach to the solution.

02

Process – Your Structure



Pumpkin soup is a simple, well-loved dish in winter. You can make it simply by boiling pumpkin in water, which is fine. However, if you chop the pumpkin up and roast it and then boil it in chicken stock, it will create a richer and more complex flavour.

How you choose to undertake your work, the framework, process, and sequence will have a bearing on the outcome. Structure is not about gaining control but having the right approach and doing things at the right time.

03

Timing – Your Decisions



Cooking a well-aged steak at the right temperature for three minutes each side delivers a very different result the same steak cooked for 10 minutes each side.

Timing is vital to being successful. When executing your designs, you need to consider the timeline in which everything needs to be completed. This can take practice, but, like a perfectly cooked steak, you will soon know your favourite way to serve the dish.

Observation is free

In relative terms, success is characterised by a few things falling in line at the right time. These things are usually external and not defined by us; however, observation is free.

To the observant, these trends, changes, and opportunities could be translated into something meaningful that could underpin successful product development. Don't underestimate the power of these discoveries. Even if events haven't turned out the way you had planned, learn from the experience.

Get into place

Being able to identify successful opportunities ahead of the curve is about getting out of your chair and getting into position to see events as they unfold.

If you stay hidden away making assumptions, you run the risk of missing something valuable. This could be the difference between a good product and a great product.

Take Bryn Evans, a documentary photographer. He travelled to war zones all around the world to capture the pure essence of major events. He wasn't afraid to get five feet away from the action in order to get the right result, no matter the potential threat. It's because of this passion and positioning that his photographs tell such a powerful story. You should take the same approach when conducting research; do everything you can to get yourself into the right position.

A great place to start is meeting the suppliers, contractors, and potential users of your product to get a real understanding of what they can do for you (or what you can do for them). Face to face interaction is crucial, especially in the initial development stage. Getting up close to the action builds trust; you can set your parameters and expectations, and greatly lessen the chance of misunderstanding. If other team members will be working alongside external people, take them to meet up as well. Journeys like this will always be a lesson learned.



Bryn Evans, War series



'Originality was prized above technique'

– The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting

Be original to the point of eccentricity

When developing new products, you need to filter and interpret information in a different way to your competitors. Otherwise, how will you define your product as something different? Being original sets you up to capture value for your business.

It's easy to follow in the footsteps of other successful businesses, but it won't get you noticed. You will know you are doing something different when you and your team are pushing boundaries. This means prototyping, talking to people, gathering information, sourcing materials, photographing their creations, testing products, and so on. In doing this, your product (and working process) will naturally progress over time, resulting in something often very different from where you started off.

While doing this, it's important to be aware that your ideas don't end up like possessions. Ideas are often a battleground for egos, where objective information has no place; yet objectivity is a central ingredient for making good decisions.

At the start of every development, we deliberately conduct research as opposed to idea generation (which can be hard for a company that is based on ideas!) It helps us discover those rich and original ideas.

As outlined in our resource 'Generating Insights', research is the biggest driver of insights and idea breakthroughs. Creating a work culture around research-driven design is the best way to the top. If you have put in the right groundwork, then you will know if you are holding onto a dead idea.

TIP

Be honest with yourself; the battle over 'my idea is better than your idea' is good for no one.

Go broad, not deep

One of the biggest mistakes you can make in the development process, is jumping in too deep, too quickly – you need to take the time to survey your surroundings before you choose a point of view.

There is a risk with getting fixated on one idea – it can be a bit like taking a photograph at F2.8. If you have a short depth of field, you can only see what is directly in front of you. Whereas if you take the photograph at F22, everything is in view; you can see the foreground, background and everything in between.



F1.8 - Short depth of field



F22 - Wide depth of field

Applying this theory to product design, the goal is to cover as much ground as possible and look at as many different things as possible. Often, it's the relationships between these 'different' things that provide the greatest insight. Forgo a narrow macro (that is, a close up view) in favour of a wide angle view.

To look at the whole picture, you need to identify what is occurring and the relationships between various elements.

Look into areas like:

People	Life cycle	Standards
Structure	Packaging	Compliance
Consumer	Distribution	Cost
Gatekeepers	Risk	

And look at all of these within the same continuum. By increasing your depth of field and assessing these elements side by side, you will be able to identify that nugget of gold when it comes to making your product stand out from the rest.

Can you make a business out of it?

There is one simple question to ask, even if you're an existing business: could you make a business out of it? Weighing up the pros and cons and surveying the landscape is imperative to a successful business.

Here are some things to consider:

- › Is it a growth category or is it in decline?
- › Are there regulatory changes that could affect the product positively or negatively?
- › What are the purchasing values?
- › Is there more than one market you could enter?
- › Could you extend your offer without a lot of effort?
- › Is it gridlock at rush-hour or is it an open country road?
- › Can your team resource it and support it into the market?

Lead or be led

Asking questions is circular; it has a habit of leading back to more questions. When developing your product, you need to get off the fence and take risks in order to have the most successful result.

People like the idea of user-led research because it provides what they think is validation of an idea. If you deliver someone what they think they want ('think' being the key word), you run the risk of being led down the garden path and creating something that is potentially a flop.

With strong research and a structured development process, you are able to advance projects in ways the client (and even yourself) could never have envisioned in the beginning. Developing successful products takes leadership and this means opening yourself up to exposure.

Let's liken this to climbing. Following someone who has laid out all the protection is safe and (in relative terms) easy. But having the opportunity to lead a climb changes the way in which you behave and act.

Exposure is that feeling in the pit of your stomach that if you slip, there will be consequences; each step, simply enough, is loaded with an extra dimension or risk.

The advantage of this is that, although difficult at first, leading gets easier once you know how to do it. Your idea of 'exposure' changes and the more you do it, you gain a strong confidence that you can get your team to the top.

TIP

Be confident to step up and be ready to lead your team to success.



It starts with your team

Creating successful products means having a powerful team behind you. Many companies segregate their staff into the different stages of development, but this is counterproductive and, frankly, outdated. It's all about collaboration and customer experience.

Some companies spend millions trying to create a seamless, 'authentic' experiences, but this is often something that can't be fabricated. Here's an example: the farmers market. You arrive and peruse the goods. You are able to speak to the farmer, ask him about his produce, where it is grown, the process and people involved, and so on. And he will passionately give you every answer you are looking for. The same goes for your company.

Someone who experiences your products and services does so in one stream. There are no dividing lines in the service that they are paying for – they're just after their product. So why create a segregation when there doesn't need to be one? Bring your team together and allow them to work equally with one another.

In short, if product development is central to your business, bringing all the key people to work together on a project makes a lot of sense. Here's why:

Understanding

Having an integrated team means they understand the programme, they understand the research, they understand the reasoning behind what they are doing and as a result, they believe in the product.

Staff morale

Healthy team relationships develop from working together. If everybody is on the same page and level of understanding (or at least developing their knowledge base with every endeavour), then their self-confidence develops in leaps and bounds – benefiting the client, the company and themselves.

Unfortunately, there can be some resistance to this type of approach as it forces people to communicate, be open and transparent, and change the way that they work. If someone stands up against you, ask them to justify why they think they don't need to be involved. Again, ideas are like possessions that have no time for objectivity. There won't be many logical reasons to support working in isolation.

Communication

An integrated team means no lengthy hand-off. It cuts the chances of miscommunication and misunderstanding and lessens the risk in weak third party briefing sessions.

Increased speed to market

If everybody knows what they are doing, it increases your speed to market. Working together collapses the usual stagnant, linear process into a concurrent and dynamic process.

Internal Momentum

Many companies want external validation – it makes no sense. You have to create internal momentum.

To be successful, your team needs to have the self-confidence to feel successful. Your confidence rubs off on those whom you present to – you can change their minds.

People enjoy being involved with companies that look successful and have strong cultures. Make things exciting, encourage staff morale, boost self-confidence and start at the start. In short, you have to do something that comes more naturally to an Australian – you have to believe your own hype.



Project Structure

To have a successful team, you need to set a clear brief and project objectives to help drive your thinking and decision making. Defined milestones and outcomes mean you can honestly assess progress.

Although it is important to set a clear pathway, it is also important to stay agile and be able to adapt your structure when feedback or changes come in. You must assess all information being delivered and watch that wires aren't being crossed.

Summary

Developing new products and taking them to market can be a difficult endeavour. Here at Locus Research we have developed a structure that pushes us to get the best results we possibly can.

In saying this, the methods are always changing. So be agile. If you remember the following points when your product is in development, you will be sure to create something fantastic.

01

Prepare

Don't rely on assumptions. Developing a strong research base to build off means a better understanding. Understanding is important to insight. Build a platform of proof and be confident in your information

03

Be open minded

Cast the net as wide as you can; consider alternatives and don't be constrained. Be open minded. Be Objective. Be data driven.

02

Be generative and iterative

Leave the details until later – the colour of your tagline can wait. Build your products, test them, push them and always move forward.

04

Work together

Work with the strengths of your team and get them working together; no one benefits from working with tunnel vision.



Your Notes & Ideas



Change is the only constant

Developing a new product or service and taking it to market is one of the most difficult things you can do. There are a lot of variables and things are constantly changing. We have developed processes that recognise this and work with it, not against it.

The first principle of innovation: change is the only constant

Creating a culture that rewards dynamic thinking and embraces the likely event of change will deliver benefits for your company. It is important to celebrate the concrete milestones alongside a team's flexibility and embracing a plan that can change with opportunity. This document reinforces what we believe are the four tenets of innovation:

Research

Pursue knowledge, to drive understanding and insight.

Structure

Create a structure to support your activity that is capable of change.

Culture

Encourage a culture that rewards dynamic behaviour and thinking.

Creativity

Often has the solutions to change so encourage it in your workplace.



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We believe in the power of research to explore, learn, discover, and create.

Our cross-functional design team uses research to deliver insights, develop products, and improve the outcomes of innovation in business.

We are a product development and innovation company that works with you to deliver world class products to market.

Curious about how we can help you and your business? Get in touch.