



Article from
Innovators & Entrepreneurs
May 2020

VALIDATING YOUR IDEA

PROCESS OF INNOVATION ARTICLE, PART 3

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In the [previous article](#) in this series, I discussed how to generate and vet promising ideas. Once that step is completed, the ideas should be validated. This is a critical step that is often neglected, at great expense. The two primary ways to do this are by prototyping and testing.

PROTOTYPE

In the case of software, this is a partially functional program that can be used to get user or customer feedback.

In the case of a process, a prototype might be a walk-through of the process, which can help you work out the kinks.

In the case of a new product, if a great deal of programming is involved to support it, you can sell it through a few agencies first with the software only partially developed and supplemented by manual processes. This allows you to test the popularity of the product before making a major investment in fully developed software.

TEST IT

With new software, testing involves elaborate and well established processes that any competent software development or process improvement consultant can advise you about. The key here is not to roll out the new software without extensive user testing of the full product first.

With a new process, work with it on a limited basis at first. For instance, if you are introducing a new product development process, just use it initially for one product line. If you have developed an instant issue process for your field force, test it out at a few agencies. Remember the debacle with the new software at the Iowa caucus? It could have been prevented if the new process and software had been tested with a pretend caucus prior to going live.

With major new products, particularly ones you have made a significant investment in, test them in a small market before making a major rollout and be sure to get customer/agent feedback.

FIX AND REPEAT AS NEEDED

Tweak the concept and test some more. Repeat until you like your results! Be sure to have a good training program to go with your rollout, and your innovation will be a success!

This article ends the basic “Process of Innovation” series. We would like you to share how you and those you work with are innovating. If you have been involved with starting up a new business or line of business, we would like you to share your thoughts on how to get such a business established on a solid footing (post funding). If you have a lot to say, note that your submission can be done as a series the way this one was done. Please contact me at mthomson@charter.net regarding your article ideas. Also contact me if you have comments relating to this article, or innovation in general, which you are willing to have published—or start a conversation on our section’s LinkedIn page at <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2932342/>.

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