

IS YOUR INVENTION GREAT, GOOD OR GOOD ENOUGH?

The Proof Is in the Profit **BY JOHN G. RAU**

“Without question, the greatest invention in the history of mankind is beer. Oh, I grant you that the wheel was also a fine invention, but the wheel does not go nearly as well with pizza.” — DAVE BARRY

For your new invention to be a commercial success, does it need to be great, good or merely good enough? Humor columnist Dave Barry put the debate in perspective when he wrote, “Without question, the greatest invention in the history of mankind is beer. Oh, I grant you that the wheel was also a fine invention, but the wheel does not go nearly as well with pizza.”

Definitions of “great” include “remarkable in magnitude, degree or effectiveness;” “markedly superior in character or quality;” and “important, highly significant or consequential.” Inventions that have changed the world are easily classified as great.

In comparison, Webster defines the term “good” as “possessing desirable qualities; adapted to answer the end desired; promoting success, welfare or happiness; serviceable; useful.” An idea characterized as “good” would be one that accomplishes the end result, promotes success and is useful. My personal choices for inventions that are at least good, if not great, are the TV remote control and the garden hose that doesn’t kink.

Inventor Frank Stapleton, author of *How To Make Millions With Your New Idea*, suggests the following five characteristics of great inventions:

- 1. Meets a specific need:** Does your invention solve a problem? If not, what is it supposed to do? Is it a widespread problem? If not, then it could be too narrow in scope.
- 2. Creates a demand for itself:** Sometimes people don’t know what they want until they see it. Other times, the need is there but no one has created the supply. If your idea has merit, it will create a demand for itself.
- 3. Appeals to a basic human need:** Every good invention idea makes some kind of appeal to human need. Maybe it’s a matter of improving upon an earlier development, but if it doesn’t provide for some practical human need—even if it’s simply for entertainment—then it won’t wash.
- 4. Improves its users’ lives:** You want your invention to make a mark. The best way to do that is to improve people’s lives. If your invention can do that, it’s got merit.

5. It’s practical and easily conceived: Your invention has to be practical. Too pie-in-the-sky and people won’t understand it. If it’s not too complex, there’s a chance your idea will catch on. As Stapleton points out in his book, “I’m not saying if your invention violates any of these principles then it’s no good. A complex idea may very well still succeed if it meets all four of the other criteria, but this is my own list of what it means to have a ‘great’ idea. Great ideas have the potential to make their inventors a lot of money.”

Other perspectives on what constitutes great, good or good enough ideas follow:

Penelope Trunk, in an article titled “How to Tell if You Have a Great Idea,” says:

- You need an addressable market.
- You need to solve a problem for that market.
- There needs to be a way to make money.

Business News Daily contributor Kim Ann Zimmerman wrote in the article “Got a Good Business Idea? Here’s How You’ll Know”:

- It is innovative or offers a twist on an existing product or service.
- It is indispensable, even if people don’t know that they need it.
- It is exciting in its execution.
- It solves a problem. The problem should be significant and something that impacts a large group of people.
- It has the potential for expansion. Is your idea something that can grow either geographically or through product extensions?

Dharmesh Shah, in an article titled “How To Pick The Right Idea For Your Startup,” suggests:

- Your idea needs to do at least one of three things, namely: make something difficult easy, make something expensive cheap or make something that entertains.
- Choose something with a “big market pain,” in the sense of providing users with a solution to a major problem or issue of concern to them.
- Choose something through which you can empathize with its users.

In reality, as evidenced by the preceding advice, your invention idea doesn’t have to be great, good or good enough. It simply has to meet a need or provide a solution to a problem that people are willing to pay for. 📌

John G. Rau, president/CEO of Ultra-Research Inc., has more than 25 years experience conducting market research for ideas, inventions and other forms of intellectual property. He can be reached at ultraresch@cs.com.

