

# Finding an American Manufacturer

THE TIMING IS EXCELLENT, AND SO ARE YOUR SEARCH OPTIONS

BY DON DEBELAK

**W**ITH ALL of the recent tariffs that have been levied on China, this is a particularly good time to look into American manufacturers.

The site I prefer to start with to find a manufacturer is The Job Shop Company ([d2pcompanies.com](http://d2pcompanies.com)). It has six divisions: Design-2-Part shows, Design-2-Part magazine, supplier directory, JobShop.com, Job Shop Web Design, and RepPlace. A job shop specializes in small production quantities, and typically is ideal for beginning inventors.

Design-2-Part ([d2p.com](http://d2p.com)), America's largest design and contract manufacturing trade shows, are held throughout the United States. Manufacturers looking for business set up and solicit your business, giving you a chance to meet with them face-to-face. In addition, people you talk to who can't help you typically will give you leads of potential manufacturers. They will also give you opinions on the best way to make your product, and possibly direct you to designers or engineers who help inventors get their product ready for quotes from manufacturers.

Other sites to check out: [business.thomasnet.com](http://business.thomasnet.com); [makersrow.com](http://makersrow.com); [industry.net](http://industry.net), and [mfg.com](http://mfg.com).

## What to prepare

Often, inventors going overseas use sourcing agents who put the product in a form where manufacturers can quote on what people need to pay for each unit. You can normally avoid the expense of computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing drawings (CAD/CAM) by preparing: patent drawings that clearly identify each feature with a number; a glossary of each feature, numbered with an explanation of the part; a listing of the materials you want for each major feature; and clear dimensions for each major part. If possible, it will help if you have a model or prototype, even if it is rough.

Besides preparing drawings and models, I've found you will have an easier time if you can explain marketing information such as projected retail price, targeted customers and key competitors. I also recommend you at least submit a provisional patent application, so you can tell manufacturers you are patent pending.

## Trade show networking

If directories don't help you find a manufacturer, visit trade shows in your target industry. Do an internet search for trade magazines involving your industry for dates and locations of those trade shows.

At a show, seek manufacturers with similar products to yours. Talk to the people at the booth to see whether they might be interested in making your product. If the company has excess capacity, it will be willing to talk to you. Sometimes, if you are short on funds, you might be able to convince the company to form a partnership with you.

Often, the company will tell you it outsources its manufacturing. If that is the case, ask which manufacturers it uses; sometimes it will tell you.

Ask the person at the booth if he or she is a company employee or an independent sales representative. If the person is independent, he or she work with many different companies and has many industry contacts. Ask for further conversations to determine whether the person can give you advice about possible manufacturing contacts.

## Consult SCORE experts

Originally called Service Corps of Retired Executives, SCORE ([score.org](http://score.org)) is a free service of the Small Business Administration that helps start-up businesses.

I've found that many of the branches have several retired experts with considerable manufacturing experience willing to mentor you through the manufacturing process. I recommend all inventors check out SCORE. It could save you from making some major mistakes. ☐

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