

Blueprints for Growth

Ideas to Help Industrial Producers Build Profitable, Sustainable Growth

We help industrial manufacturers develop products their customers love, competitors respect and stockholders applaud... using new tools to uncover customers' deepest needs. Then we get out of the way.



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What is New Product Blueprinting?

Imagine you are having a house built. When finished you might say, "I wish we had run wiring for outdoor patio speakers," or "Too bad the evening sun washes out our TV screen." Or you might routinely hear guests say, "What a great idea! I never would have thought of *that*."

What's the difference? *Creative foresight* and a *detailed plan*. With creative foresight, you develop a crystal-clear picture of your finished home in your mind before the first block is laid. Foresight doesn't develop quickly; you need time... and help. An architect might spend hours asking you questions such as, "What hobbies does your family enjoy?"... "How do you entertain guests?"... "What type of cooking do you do?"...

Let's say you now have a mental picture of your dream home. Are you finished? Hardly. You must communicate that picture to your builder, and that requires a detailed plan—a blueprint. Scribbled notes and verbal descriptions can't transfer nearly enough information to ensure that your foresight *becomes* your home.

You are the Architect

With New Product Blueprinting, your customers are the homeowners and you are the architect. You patiently and expertly work with them to create a mental picture of something that will excite them. Then you carefully reduce this creative foresight to a detailed plan that the builder can execute. This is important because, as it turns out, you also happen to be the builder. Here's the interesting part: Unlike a homeowner that signs a contract with the builder, your customers can wait until your product is finished and reject it if they don't like it!

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The Value of a Blueprint

Imagine You are Having a House Built...

For best results, you'll use creative foresight and a detailed plan

1. Creative Foresight

- You develop a crystal-clear picture of your finished home in your mind
- You allow enough time to imagine, fine-tune and focus this picture



2. Detailed Plan

- You give enough detail to the builder so your foresight *becomes* your house
- Scribbled notes for instance, would not transfer nearly enough information



ground." You would think. In fact, many use internal meetings to decide what their customers want. Others develop new technology and push it towards their customers. Still others just keep building the same thing over and over, making minor tweaks from time to time.

When pressed about this strange state of affairs, some producers say they don't really know *how* to uncover what their customers want. That's a fair assessment and one that can be remedied. Others say customers don't know—and therefore can't tell them—what they want. I believe that's a wrong assessment we should address.

You Can Do More in B2B

It is true that consumer-goods buyers often don't know what they want: They'll just recognize it when they see it. But buyers of B2B goods nearly always know what your product should do. They may not be able to tell you *how* your product should do it, but that's your job, isn't it? When a B2B buyer considers how your product impacts his world, he can bring to bear his formal education, years of job experience, hours of focused attention and personal motivation to succeed in his career.

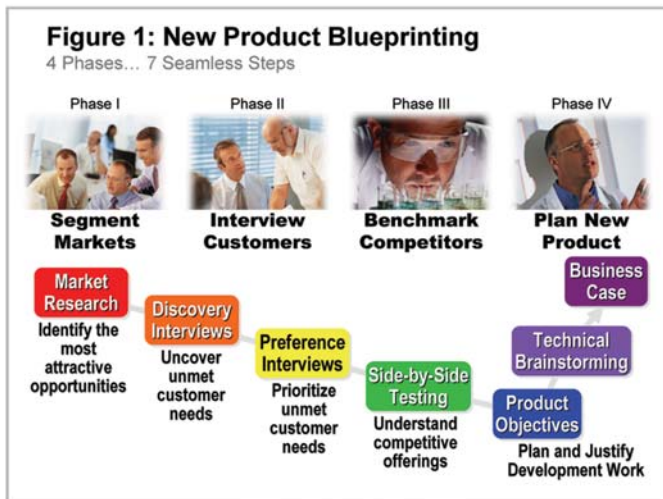
In most cases, though, the B2B buyer doesn't bring these impressive resources to bear, because the supplier doesn't ask him to. Imagine if your architect stopped in to see you for half an hour, spent 15 minutes talking about the big game, and the rest of the time showing you pictures of houses he had built for others. Later, when the house failed to please you, he simply dismissed it saying, "Well that buyer just didn't know what he wanted."

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New Product Blueprinting deeply respects your customers' knowledge and requires new skills on your part to access this knowledge. And it occurs *before* you begin actual product development, thereby saving you from squandering enormous resources. When a team uses New Product Blueprinting, it actually moves through four integrated phases (Figure 1) covering seven steps. Does seven steps seem like a lot?... Consider two points.

Is This Overkill?

First, you only apply this process for major new products. A market-facing team might have 1-3 major projects underway at any point... perhaps finishing the business case on one, interviewing for another, and starting market research for a third. But the *mindset* trickles down to all new product development. So even for small projects, people will question whether customer needs have been fully explored, competitive positions understood, etc.



Second, 30 years of research in new product development points to one headline: "We're doing poor up-front work." But rather than add resources to do this, shift resources *up and out*: "Up" by spending less time in product development and more in product design. "Out" by talking less to ourselves and more with customers.

Let's take a quick tour of the seven steps:

Step 1: Market Research Beautiful product development in an ugly market segment makes no sense... so sift your potential opportunities early and cheaply. You'll do this with internet-based market research, combined with simple but effective screening tools.

Step 2: Discovery Interviews Two-person technical-commercial teams interview customers in incredible depth, using divergent-thinking techniques. Your goal is to enter the customer's world and uncover unspoken and unimagined outcomes that will excite him.

Step 3: Preference Interviews In a second set of interviews, you *quantitatively* prioritize customer outcomes that are most important and least satisfied. You drive out your internal bias with hard data... and kill your project if the customer isn't *eager* for change.

Step 4: Side-by-Side Testing You compare your best off-the-shelf products with your competitors' best. This baseline helps you attack their weak spots, avoid blind-siding later, and *optimize* pricing... only possible when you understand all your customers' alternatives.

Step 5: Product Objectives You now have a wealth of "outside-in" data from interviews and competitive testing. Your project team uses this data to create a blockbuster product design in which specific customer outcomes are targeted and the market reaction predicted.

Step 6: Technical Brainstorming You've got the "what" (your product design) but must now consider the "how"... preliminary technical paths to pursue. This internal brainstorming includes technical solutions that come from outside as well as inside your company.

Step 7: Business Case Would a venture capitalist fund your project? Twelve points must be addressed in every Blueprinting project. This drives out assumptions, bias, omission and wishful thinking *before* you begin heavy spending in the product development stage.

While all seven steps are important, the centerpiece of New Product Blueprinting is the customer interview. When you interview your customers in a manner expressly designed for intelligent, interested B2B buyers, you come across as caring and competent. That not only opens the door to great new product designs, but marks you as a supplier with whom they'll want to do business.

Learning More...

AIM, Inc. works with major B2B producers who see this front-end work as a competitive advantage to be mastered... not a job to be outsourced. We use a proven implementation plan that combines a skills-intensive workshop with follow-up coaching and tracking. To learn more, visit www.newproductblueprinting.com, email information@newproductblueprinting.com, or call 330-715-8709.