



The Complete Maker's Guide

Step-by-step instructions to design, source, and produce your product idea (+ more!)

MADE IN THE USA VERSION


**LEARN TO MAKE
A PRODUCT**

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Welcome, Maker.

Congrats on beginning your product journey!

If you're like most people, you're full of ideas and eager to get to work on all of them. This guide is designed to walk you through each phase of making a product in the USA, from formalizing your design to finding trustworthy partners to coordinating shipments. It will help you break up your workflow into manageable tasks, understanding the industry's best practices at each turn.

The process of turning a concept into a manufactured good is best summed up by the phrase 'simple, but not always easy'. The basic steps, available shortcuts, and missteps to avoid are similar across product categories, but each project inevitably comes with unique challenges and setbacks.

When you encounter problems, it's important not to view them as a sign of failure or an indication that your idea is too hard to execute. I have worked closely with hundreds of makers as they bring their products to life, and I can assure you that a few bumps are a normal part of process!

While momentary frustration is inevitable, feeling stuck and hindered by 'what you don't know you don't know' is not. Neither is entering unknown territory without a map or compass. And losing your valuable time and money because of avoidable errors or lack of experience is certainly not necessary! By using this guide, you are setting yourself up for success.

My goal with the Maker's Guide is to provide you with a roadmap that takes you from A to Z. From an idea in your head to a sellable product. From manufacturing novice to pro maker. I'll provide the instructions; you bring the persistence, creativity, and grit needed along the way.

When a great product idea is paired with the right guidance, you can make magic happen!

I look forward to seeing your brilliant ideas become a reality.



Liz

Liz Long

Creator, Learn to Make a Product



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Some Instructions for Using the Guide:

1. Read through the entire checklist at least once before getting started. This will orient you so you know what to expect next.
2. There is an approximate time allotment for each phase, however some phases can happen simultaneously. For example, you could work on your branding and search for a product design partner at the same time.
3. Most people complete the entire cycle in 6-12 months. Naturally, this can vary depending on time and budget constraints. Situational factors like extensive product testing or long lead times can also affect your schedule.
4. Don't rush a phase simply because you think it is taking too long. For example, there is a certain degree of luck involved in finding good suppliers. Some people stumble on just the right one early in their search, while others have to do more digging. Rushing or skipping steps could save time in the short-term, but cause/bring about long-term setbacks.
5. You may choose to tackle the steps listed in this guide in a slightly different order. That's okay! The checklists provided are not necessarily linear; being aware of each step is the most important requirement.
6. While this checklist is indeed comprehensive, it may not address the more minute, specific steps required for your particular project. When in doubt, ask for help from an industry professional.

Let's begin!





Table of Contents

GETTING STARTED [05](#)

PRODUCT DESIGN & DEVEVELOPMENT [07](#)

SOURCING..... [12](#)

PACKAGING & LABELING [15](#)

SUPPLY CHAIN SHIPPING [19](#)

STORAGE & FULFILLMENT [21](#)

COSTS & PRICING [24](#)

PRODUCTION [29](#)

FEEDBACK & MAINTENANCE..... [32](#)



Getting Started

Lay the groundwork for a successful project journey.



Time to allow:
1-3 Months

DONE?

☐

1. Create a Product Outline

Outline your product concept to guide your design and manufacturing decision. Create a simple document with the following info:

- » Brand Name
- » Product Name
- » Offerings (size range, color options etc)
- » Ideal Price
- » Ideal Customer
- » Competitive Advantage(s) (what will set you apart from competition?)

2. Design Your Brand

Create a Logo and any other necessary branding items that will influence the design of your product (list below).

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Hire an Expert: Most people need a graphic designer for this step. Ask your network, search [LinkedIn](#) and [Behance](#), or visit [Fiverr](#) for affordable options.

- » Logo
- » Icon (simplified version of logo)
- » [Brand Color Palette](#)
- » [Style Guide](#)
- » Custom Graphics for Fabric or Other Material



Pro Tip: Customizing the color or printed graphic of fabric and other materials can require higher minimums when order. If you're not sure you have the budget for this type of customization, skip this design work until later.

3. Evaluate Your Competition

What can you learn from your competitors? Are there things you want to emulate, or weaknesses you can improve upon? Update your Product Outline if necessary.

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Getting Started

4. Evaluate Intellectual Property

Is your product innovative in some way? Does it meet the criteria for a [utility or design patent](#) to protect your ideas?

DONE?

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Hire an Expert: If you're concerned about privacy, contacting a patent attorney who specializes in international patent law will help you understand your options.

5. Test Your Proof of Concept

Poll your target market to confirm your planning efforts are on-track. Volume is key, so speak to as many potential customers as possible! Getting feedback from 50-100 people might require some elbow-grease, but could prevent you from investing in design and manufacturing activities that don't turn out to be fruitful.

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Tips for collecting feedback:

- » Be clear about your target customer. Asking people who are too far outside this demographic may provide you with unhelpful information.
- » Think about where your demographic spends time online. Platforms like Facebook make it easy to target groups like 'parents', 'outdoor enthusiasts', 'pet owners' etc.
- » Request feedback via an online survey, poll, focus group, or by having one-on-one conversations.
- » Invest if needed. Ex: a virtual assistant to help manage collection efforts or incentives for participants (i.e. \$10 gift card or a wine & cheese night focus group).



Hire An Expert: Makers with ample budgets may opt to hire a market research firm to help them with this step.



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