



The Complete Maker's Guide

A Step-by-Step Checklist for Designing, Sourcing, and Producing Your Product Idea (+ more!)

MADE OVERSEAS VERSION



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 abroad--from formalizing your design to finding trustworthy partners to coordinating shipments. It will help you divide your workflow into manageable tasks and provides a clear understanding of 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 as a source of support, 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 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



learntomakeaproduct.com

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. This guide focuses on producing in Asia, since it is the most common destination for outsourcing from the USA. That said, the steps provided can be used towards any production location, from Guatemala to Bangladesh to the UK.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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 just stumble on 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.
6. 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.
7. 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!



Must-Know Info

Outsourcing carries a unique set of advantages and risks when compared to manufacturing domestically. We'll discuss them throughout this guide, however the following topics are so crucial to your success, they deserve their own section!

Supplier Or Agent?

As you come across potential factory matches, what you might not realize is that some of these options are not actually a physical manufacturer, but an agent instead.

An agent is someone who acts as a liaison between foreign buyers and a network of local suppliers (or just one supplier). They are a middleman, and like all middlemen, there are certain ones who bring value to the supply chain and others who need to be cut out. But you can't figure out which is which if you don't know you're working with an agent in the first place!

We'll talk about ways to confirm if you're dealing with a supplier or agent more in this guide. What I want you to remember up front is to keep your radar on as you are sourcing. Unfortunately there are people who try to pose as factories for fraudulent purposes. Others disguise their agent status because they believe it makes them seem more legitimate. There are also unauthorized agents (the factory does not know they are reselling goods and services) and those who are simply inexperienced. Agents who fall into these categories need to be avoided.

Vetting

Carefully vetting partners is always important, but even more so when working overseas. This is because the distance between you and your partner, combined with a lack of legal protection, can make it difficult to seek restitution. Litigating disputes in foreign countries is expensive and complicated at best and not possible at worst. Usually major corporations with deep pockets are the ones who are able to pursue legal action with overseas suppliers, not new makers on limited budgets.

This is not to say the risks aren't worth the reward. Plenty of people do business successfully outside of the USA! Paying close attention to the vetting tactics provided in this guide and doing your due diligence when sourcing will minimize problem situations.

Requesting Samples

Photos and/or verbal confirmation from a supplier that they make the item you're sourcing are not sufficient prerequisites for placing an order. Even a small order!



Requesting Samples (con't)

With everything you do, from ordering fabric to plastic parts to packaging, always request an *in-person sample* before buying. Something you can see and touch and test with your own two hands. If this requires you pay the vendor an additional sample charge or a sample shipping fee, remember that it's better to make a small investment up front than lose a bigger one later.

If a supplier pushes back that sampling is not necessary or that you are delaying the process, it's a good idea to look for someone else.

Shipping Estimates

The cost of shipping goods and materials into the US from other countries varies greatly according to the size and weight of what you're sending along with the shipping speed and carrier you've selected.

Because the cost of shipping can significantly affect your bottom line, it's important to estimate freight costs along with the costs of the products you plan to import.

You can do this by asking potential factories for a ballpark shipping quote or by contacting a freight forwarder for an estimate. Instructions for both are included in the guide.

Pre-Ship Inspections

Quality control takes many forms, with the most accessible tactic for new makers being the pre-ship inspection (PSI).

The purpose of a PSI is to check your finished products or materials prior to having the factory ship them to you. Equally as important, you want to carry out this inspection before paying your balance payment.

Most suppliers ask that you put a deposit down to start an order and pay the balance before the goods ship. Because the deposit/PSI combo allows you to inspect goods before they ship, it prevents you from paying in full for bad product and paying for shipping costs you can't recoup. It also helps you maintain leverage in order to ensure a supplier fixes any quality problems you discover during the inspection.

If you are on a tight budget and have limited funds for quality control, conducting a PSI is the single most important QC activity you can do. Instructions for finding companies who provide this service at a reasonable rate are included in the guide.





Table of Contents

PLANNING.....	07
PRELIMINARY DESIGN.....	09
SOURCING.....	13
FORMAL DESIGN.....	23
PACKAGING & LABELING.....	27
SUPPLY CHAIN SHIPPING.....	31
STORAGE & FULFILLMENT.....	37
COSTS & PRICING.....	40
QUALITY CONTROL (QC).....	45
PRODUCTION.....	47
FEEDBACK & MAINTENANCE.....	51



learntomakeaproduct.com

© 2017 LIZ LONG ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Planning

Lay the groundwork for a successful project journey.



Time to allow:
1-3 Months

1. Create a Product Outline

Create a document with the following:

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

DONE?

2. Design Your Brand

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



Hire an Expert: Most people need a graphic designer for this step.

- » 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? How does your target price and planned offerings compare to the competition? Update your Product Outline based on your findings (if necessary).



learntomakeaproduct.com

© 2017 LIZ LONG ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Planning

4. Evaluate Intellectual Property

DONE?

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



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.

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.*



learntomakeaproduct.com