Surviving the Reality

Do you have what it take to survive an Invention Casting Call?

Several months ago I had the great fortune to be a part of an invention search soon to become a show aptly named **"Everyday Edisons"** sponsored by **Bouncing Brain Productions**. In each city we visited I got a behind-the-scenes look at what really happens and meet the many great **"Everyday Edisons"** coming up with the new ideas that will enter the market in the next few years.

In most of the cities we arrive at seven a.m. Saturday morning while a line of people are queued up at the studio front door. The faces of these motivated early risers show an eagerness to see their dreams become reality and they take no chances of arriving to the show late. Some carry boxes, some notebooks while others carefully guard devices covered with blankets or plastic trash bags. Once the **Bouncing Brain Productions** contest staff is inside and takes their places, the doors open, forms are filled out, waiting rooms fill up and we all become part of an operation that will take most of day.

At these invention contests, also known as casting calls, hopeful inventors are asked to bring their product ideas and inventions in to compete for a shot at winning the grand prize – having their idea successfully commercialized with royalties. After the entry paperwork is taken care of, everyone starts by presenting in front of a preliminary screening panel. If the idea is compelling enough based on several criteria - commercial viability, patentability, etc, the finalists move on to the next round to be videotaped in front of a panel of experts who decide the winners. The taped interviews may be used for shows aired at a later time and can attract those with hopes of reality show stardom, but the dedicated inventors know the real reason for entering is a chance to win sponsorship for full development and marketing for their idea or product and a percentage of the royalties.

Louis Foreman, president of **Enventys**, a successful product development company based in Charlotte, North Carolina, heads up the final judging panel that has expertise in patent law, product engineering and business development. Their combined experience in successfully bringing new products to market helps them evaluate and decide which ideas to bet on for further development. Out of hundreds of ideas, inventions, and products seen by the screeners in each city, only a small percentage moves on to videotape with this panel.

I was amazed that some contestants were given a second chance. **Bouncing Brain Productions** and **Enventys** followed up on several promising ideas and products to help make them a reality, even though they didn't make it to the finals for the show. The inventor's idea didn't meet the show's criteria but they still had a shot at development assistance.

But here's why this contest is unique. **Foreman** points out that **Everyday Edisons** differs from most reality shows seen on TV from the standpoint that **Bouncing Brain**

Productions doesn't humiliate people or try to poke fun at their ideas for the sake of creating entertainment. "The judges and screeners provide helpful insight to assist inventors in perfecting their ideas," he said. "In fact, all those that made it through but were rejected afterwards received preliminary patent reviews to show what was already on the market. This potentially saved these inventors thousands of dollars and perhaps helped them avoid getting scammed."

It's no secret that the romance of hitting it big with just an idea has the ultimate appeal to potential inventors. Whether they win or not, this type of reality show actually provides them with something much more valuable – a *reality check.* Turning an idea into a successful product takes into consideration numerous factors such as market size and appeal, patentability, safety, ease and cost of manufacturing, and ultimately, potential profitability. The rule that *"it takes money to make money"* is just as true in new product development as it is in any other business venture so the contest organizers take the final decisions very seriously.

Here is my Top Seven Observations:

1. Number one disqualifier – ideas that were already in the public domain. Only patentable ideas have a chance of winning.
2. Not every idea was suitable for filming due to complexity or specialized markets, but may have been given a second chance outside of the show. Products that were not suitable for the general public were eliminated.
3. Ideas having weak design patents or weak utility patents offered no intellectual property protection, important criteria for dominating the market and did not make the cut.
4. Contestants were overwhelmingly appreciative that they had the chance to participate, have their ideas considered, and learn from the process.
5. Some contestants followed the show to other cities to get another shot at consideration.
6. A very small number of contestants were not happy to be eliminated and tried arguing or bullying the screeners and/or staff to try to improve their chances of winning. This never worked.
7. Too many inventors had been scammed by any one of several *"invention development companies."* These stories were always heartbreaking - many of these inventors lost hundreds or thousands of dollars for useless patents, useless books, superficial search results, or worse – nothing at all.

12 Important Steps to Take Before Deciding to Enter an Invention Search Contest

1. Do a simple online search using any one of the search engines to see if the idea is already in the public domain as an announcement, product, or patent.
2. Do a patent search for prior art using the USPTO.gov site.
3. Investigate the company running the contest.
4. Make sure that you understand the legal aspects of entering the contest by having a lawyer review and comment on the contest's contract.

5. Be prepared to use the presentation time to briefly identify exactly what the idea, invention or product is and what it does - no selling or scenario is necessary.
6. Prepare presentation materials or prototypes
7. Practice and time your presentation
8. Allow time to answer questions.
9. Practice answering questions about your idea
    - When did you come up with the idea?
    - Are there any other co-inventors?
    - Have you told or shown the idea to anyone else outside of your immediate family?
    - Have you documented your idea in an inventor's logbook?
    - Have you created and sold the idea?
    - How does it work? Be brief.
10. Arrive early to allow time for taping as a finalist.
11. Be prepared to deal with winning or losing.
12. Contact an inventors' support group in your area and learn the secrets of successful product development.

Over the course of the contest I was very impressed with **Bouncing Brain Productions'** professional treatment of the contestants**.** The staff was always courteous and patient with the inventors who were at times suspicious or intimidated by the screening and judging processes. As someone who volunteers time to help educate inventors on how to be successful in the Charlotte, North Carolina area, I was personally thankful that the contest was all about the inventors and the inventions, and not about pitting the contestants against each other in rude and emotional ways.

In each city we visited we saw ideas that were great because they were simple and others that were simply great. For all of the inventors out there, my advice is to never stop coming up with ideas that can solve the problems in everyday life and then learn about what it takes to create a financially successful product.

Remember the *Inventor's Success Formula* –

Inspiration + Market Potential x *Resourcefulness* = Success

Your inspiration and hard work in the form of a new product may be worth entering in the next invention casting call in a city near you. And if you survive the waiting, the forms, the questions, and the judging, you may even see your dream idea become reality.

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