

1. Focus on your customers

The importance of understanding what your customers need cannot be overstated. By understanding your customers, you can make it easy for them to buy from you, which can make a huge difference to your bottom line. The only problem is – how do you do it? The best method is to simply talk to them, not just about your products, but about the problems or needs that those products address. You might find out that you need to develop a slightly different product that addresses a basic problem more efficiently, or there might be something on their wish list that you could add to your product that would make it more competitive. Taking time to talk to your customers can be one of the best investments you ever make.

2. Understand your market

Taking a long, hard look at the market you are operating in, and your place in it, can help identify areas of competitive advantage for your business. What do you deliver that no-one else can? Remember, this is not just about your products, but the whole customer experience. If you can identify what makes your offering unique, and promote it well, it will make a huge difference to your sales.

Overall market trends can be complex, and it might pay to get some advice from professional analysts on this subject (look at Brand Development on www.spin.uk.net for further information).

3. Add value, not cost

One of the primary benefits of good design is its ability to add value to a product without necessarily adding cost. In this context, adding value to your product might be incorporating additional features without increasing tooling budgets - or improving its appearance to make it more desirable to consumers. You might also like to look at ease of use, maintenance, storage and performance. Adding value to your product like this can give you a serious edge over the competition. If you would like to know more about how we can help you add value to your products, please call us on 01235 833785.

4. Make your product stand out

In a crowded market, products don't just need to look good to win sales, they need to be different from the competition. 'Differentiation' is one of the most important roles of product design. Good design can help build your brand, create a coherent product range and generate a lot of positive attention. Car builders are particularly good at this – think of Audi with its large front grille, or the iconic form of the Mini.

Where possible, plan your products as a range, not one at a time – this will enable you to create a stronger market presence (again, think Audi) and increase the value of your brand – all of which will help your sales figures.

5. Diversify your range

Diversifying your product range can make a huge difference to your sales, particularly if you can use your experience to reduce development risks and timescales. Most businesses have the potential to move into new market niches alongside their own, but it often requires a 'creative leap' to recognise them. For example, one of our clients had built a very successful business making digital door locks, and then diversified into cupboard locks – with spectacular results.

The secret of this approach is to stick to what you know, and what you have built your reputation on, but apply it elsewhere. We would be happy to arrange a meeting to discuss which areas you might diversify into, possibly with some of our colleagues from the SPIN network (www.spin.uk.net).

6. Innovate

Innovation is key to success. If you can generate ideas that make a significant difference to the way your product works, is built, is used or even disposed of, you can put it in a new class above the competition. Famous examples are Dyson and Apple, but smaller innovations can also make a huge difference to your sales. To discover how your company can innovate, assemble a team of people to think as widely and creatively as possible about what you do and how you do it. Involve engineers, marketing staff, sales people and – yes – some good designers...