

# “Get your invention from idea to actuality”

**Dominic List, managing director of IT company Contact Ltd, has a wealth of experience patenting new technology. Here he explains how to register an invention**



**Company:**  
Contact Ltd  
**Founded:** 2005  
**Staff:** 40  
**Turnover:**  
£5.5 million  
**Websites:**  
contact.co.uk  
dominiclist.co.uk

When you have an idea for an invention, it's not always clear what to do to make it a reality. The first step is to do a sanity test on it. We've all got ideas about what invention would be nice for us as individuals, but it doesn't necessarily mean that there is a mass market for it. Take the idea to family, friends and advisers – people you trust not to sell out your idea – and see if they think it's got a valid application.

The next step is to go to the patent office and check that no one has already invented it. Just because your invention is not in the shops, doesn't mean it hasn't been patented yet. More than a million good, patented ideas are sitting waiting for someone to take them to market.

There are a few ways to protect your intellectual property: patents, intellectual property rights, and copyrights. What you need will come down to what you've got. Patents, typically, are for ideas or physical products; copyrights tend to be for things like logos or new designs. You need to decide which category your invention falls into.

You've got to get your invention from idea to actuality. The first step most people go

through – if it's a physical product – is prototyping: building a full working model of the invention. During this process it's very important to document everything you do along the way. This documentation can form part of your patent process and will help if you get to the patent office and someone has presented the same idea as you.

The other thing you need to think about is how you're going to sell your invention. You need to think about that target market. Is the cost of your product something your target market will be able to afford, and what's the life span of the product? Why hasn't your product already been taken to market?

If you haven't got the means to take the product to market yourself, you'll need to take it to other manufacturers, or companies in the field of the product you've designed. Start off with the patent process and then, once you've got that bit of security, you're in a position to take it to potential buyers.

There are a number of useful organisations that may be able to help you: [businesslink.gov.uk](http://businesslink.gov.uk) is good to find out more about the process and both the Business Angels Association ([bbaa.org.uk](http://bbaa.org.uk)), and National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts ([nesta.org.uk](http://nesta.org.uk)) can help you research funding.

## 10-SECOND TIPS

### PROFIT FROM INVENTION:

- 1. Don't put the invention out in the market until all your documentation is ready.**
- 2. Keep a logbook during the patenting process to safeguard your patent.**
- 3. Understand the marketplace and how you're going to present your product.**