So you have a great idea, and you dream about it making *TIME Magazine*’s annual list of the year’s 25 best inventions.¹ Now what? Of all the good ideas, the best ones solve problems—and not just any problem—real-life problems that real people experience. So, first ask, *Does my idea solve a problem?*

This series of articles will help veterinary entrepreneurs learn how to turn a terrific, problem-solving idea into a business. An entrepreneur is defined as someone who takes an idea, develops a business around it, manages the business, and assumes the risk for success; an entrepreneur says, *This is wrong, and I am going to do it this way instead.*² (See *Problems Solved & Money Made*, page 30.)

**Example of a Prototype**

- **IDEA**
  You would like to create software that could easily transfer a prescription onto a calendar with reminders for pet owners.

- **PROTOTYPE**
  Tell 20 of your clients about the idea and ask permission to put their pet’s prescription into their cell phone calendar. Follow up after the prescription is dispensed and gather feedback on their experience.

**How Big Is the Problem?**

Understanding the size of the problem is important to determine if your idea can become a viable business. You should talk with a variety of target customers to gauge the impact of your idea and validate that it is a problem that needs to be solved. Turning an idea into reality can be a difficult, challenging journey, and you will have to make sacrifices and work really hard. Not only will you
If your goal is to be a millionaire, starting your own company is not the easiest or most reliable way to make millions. When you incorporate passion into your work, however, you will likely experience more meaningful success than money will ever bring.

**What Is Next?**
If you are still reading this column, I presume you are serious, so you should now get to work and build a prototype. (See [Example of a Prototype](#), page 29.) Depending on the type of business you are contemplating, you will need to test the idea or product first to validate that it actually could be turned into a business. I recommend you do so before you quit your day job and/or take out a loan.

Most people have heard of Zappos. To test their concept, they built a prototype website with photos of shoes from various mall stores. When they received an order, they would run to the mall, buy the shoes, and ship them overnight.4

One more question.

**Should the Idea Be Shared?**
Many entrepreneurs will say, *I could tell you my idea, but then I would have to kill you.* Here is the deal—chances are very high you are not the first person to think of this idea, and keeping it to yourself will likely make your journey as an entrepreneur longer and more expensive. You may get left behind completely.

On the other hand, you will gain more if you share your idea and work with others because collaboration and conversation will likely open doors.

Ideas do get stolen—remember Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook5—so it is important to be strategic about sharing your idea. An idea
alone is worth nothing because it is just a dream at this stage. The true value is in the execution, yet turning the idea into an actual product is the hardest part. When you share your idea, other people’s thoughts, spins, and twists will likely spark more ideas and identify problems you may not have initially considered. Before you get too far, share your idea with anyone you trust who will listen, because that may make your vision more clear and focused.

Once you begin building the product itself, things change, and your idea needs to be protected. Now your roadmap (ie, the execution details) is valuable and at risk for being stolen. Use nondisclosure agreements and DocSend, a service that allows you to see who views your document and for how long, while you continue to collaborate strategically as you build your company. (See Resources.)

**Conclusion**

When I started my company, I was looking for a new way to help clients remember their pet’s monthly parasite prevention. My idea was to develop an app that would allow my practice to send clients a reminder via push notification to their smartphone to give their pet parasite prevention the first day of each month.

In the prototype stage, my practice sent clients a manual text message on the first day of the month and gathered feedback to see if clients were more likely to take action because of the text message rather than the current system, which was a sticker on their calendar. When clients told me the new system was effective, my idea became the beginning of a business.

**Editor’s note:** Part 2 of this series will explain minimum viable product and the lean start-up method.

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**Resources**

- How I Built This [podcast]. Raz G. National Public Radio. [npr.org/podcasts/510313/how-i-built-this](http://npr.org/podcasts/510313/how-i-built-this)
- Startup School [podcast]. Godin S. [earwolf.com/show/startup-school](http://earwolf.com/show/startup-school)

**References**


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**FUN FACT:** Stacee lives on a rural Colorado ranch with horses, ducks, chickens, dogs, cats, and a husband.