

Competition: have you got a big idea?

Award-winning young British designer Paul Cocksedge shares his top tips on how to develop and launch a product – and a fabulous competition gives you the chance to bring your new idea to the market

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British designer Paul Cocksedge. Photograph: Mark Cocksedge for the Observer

1) Be flexible. When I meet young designers, they often say: "I have all these ideas, but they need investment..." Why not look out for cheaper ways of doing things? You can create a barrier for yourself if your idea requires a lot of money for a particular tool, or injection moulding in China. When I was starting out, I made my light, Styrene, out of polystyrene cups that I bought cheaply and cooked in ovens. It was a really low-tech process.

2) It really helps if you can communicate your ideas. I work with so many different types of people – people from all over the world, people without a

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design background – so for meetings or phonecalls, it's key. Your ideas should speak for themselves, but people love to hear the story behind them.

3) It's essential to know about business. I have a business partner, Joana Pinho, who I met at college. I hear people say: "I haven't got that skill..." But you can network, and find that person with a business brain.

4) It's a tricky time for anyone starting out. We all have to react to the change in economic circumstances – and that's a great thing. So be resourceful. I made my iPhone speaker, Change the Record, from vinyls that record shops were about to recycle. It's an affordable product – and it's inspired me to start a collection, using local industries, which I'll sell online.

5) If I've got a problem, I'll make it the last thing I think about before I fall asleep. In the morning, I always have a solution. Sometimes it's not a brilliant solution, but it's a start.

6) Meet people. When I was starting out, I was carrying my lamp around shops to show it to them, and on my way someone who had a beautiful house stopped me in the street and we made a deal and he bought it. Plus, the more connections you make, the more you'll learn. I spent the year after I graduated developing work in Ingo Maurer's studio and that's what led to my breakthrough.

7) Don't just talk to other designers about your work – an outsider's perspective is really important. I've always found it refreshing to have the opinions of my family and friends – their thoughts are refreshing, and sometimes sharper, because they see an object for what it is.

8) Don't panic. It's hard when you're starting out because you want to fast forward and make money and be "established". But everyone loves creativity and as a designer that's your skill. Never forget that.
paulcocksedge.com

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