

Inventor's Associations

The term *mark* comes from the carnival midway. Any time a scam operator (the *rube* in carneyspeak) had significantly lightened a prospect's wallet, he would give him a friendly exiting pat on the back. Along with an encouraging "Gee Fella, that s too bad."

Unmentioned and unbeknownst to the lightenee was the fact that the rube had secretly dipped his hand into a hidden stash of powdered chalk before the pat on their back. And thus *marking* a large "X" on the lightenee and identifying him as worthy of special treatment by the next rube on down the line.

Eventually, every non-rube who so much as entered the carnival midway area became known as a mark. And were contemptuously treated as such.

Stay off the Midway

These days, we do not have too many marks left. So, you just substitute the term *inventor* instead. Any time the "inventor" context crops up, you are assured of an uneven playing field very much comparable to a carnival midway or a casino floor. A scene which is intended primarily to (A) liberate as much money as possible from the mark, and (B) keep the status quo exactly where it is.

The foremost reason to studiously avoid any "inventor" context is the totally absurd popular mythology that now surrounds patents and inventing. Nearly all of which is dead wrong. To prove this to yourself, just mention the word "patent" at any party and then observe the ludicrous disinformation heaped upon you. Then challenge them to name *one* single individual anywhere, anytime, *whom they personally know* that, in a small scale context, has shown a net positive cash flow from their patent involvement. A cash flow that was worth the time and effort.

No, the windshield wiper guy hasn't collected yet. That Sears wrench dude wasted his entire lifetime by tilting at windmills. To me, Hyatt acts just like a rube. Tesla died a pauper. The patent system drove Armstrong to suicide. And Edison was a ripoff artist who scored most of his bag by simple theft, using the most ruthless gaggle of renegade patent attorneys ever assembled anywhere.

So much for urban lore.

Out of some *six million* patents filed to date, I have yet to find *one* example of a lone individual who has profited from patents. On the other hand, my patent victim files are bursting at the seams. Putting my money where my mouth is, a free new *Incredible Secret Money Machine II* to any subscriber who is able to personally claim a worthwhile

positive net cash flow from their patent involvement. Done by them as an individual or small scale startup.

As a mark and not a rube, of course.

The second largest reason for the uneven playing field is the patent system itself. As we have seen in [CASAGPAT.PDF](#) and in the *Blatant Opportunist* reprints: *Any individual or other small scale involvement in the patent system is virtually certain to end up as a net loss of time, energy, money, and sanity.* Your state lottery is often a better investment.

Very simply, patents almost always are inappropriate, counterproductive, time-wasting, vibe-destroying, and totally unnecessary tools. At least when misapplied within most tech startup contexts.

As we have seen before, it is fine to act as an *industrial product developer*, run a *prototyping house*, be a *concept consultant*, or work as an *evaluation specialist*. All of these play useful roles in society for which, at least occasionally, you might end up being quite well rewarded. These are also the roles which you should be striving towards.

Now, I simply cannot fathom why anyone would ever purposely refer to themselves as an "inventor". This is the equivalent of pre-chalking yourself before you enter the carney midway. Which leads us to Horschnoggle's first and second rules...

RULE #1– Do not ever, under any circumstances, refer to yourself an inventor or behave like one. For doing so will open you up to interminable scams. Don't even let anyone else so much as suspect that you are capable of inventing or successfully marketing anything.

RULE #2– If you ever have to associate yourself with any inventor's resource, use a fake name and wear a disguise. Remember that you are simply an impartial observer and a disinterested outsider. You are neither a mark nor a rube. You are an individual seeking new contacts, resources, and networking. While avoiding the stupidities.

The "Meadow Four" Metaphor

It seems that there are an incredible number of obscure inventor's associations and organizations out there. It took quite a bit of digging, but many of them show up in our nearby *Inventor's Associations* sidebars. You probably will be interested in these for potential markets and for use as local networking contacts.

Just remember that any group has goals that are often different from, and possibly in direct conflict with, those of its paying members. Sadly, very few of these groups have

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ever heard of my new *Incredible Secret Money Machine II*. Sigh.

The groups strongly remind me of a pasture or a meadow. They do tend to arrange themselves as *wolves*, *sheep*, *shepherds*, and *watchdogs*. Let's look at each resource group in turn...

The Wolves

Everybody picks on poor old lobo. Yet *canis lupis* gotta eat. And they do cull the herd of the weak, the infirm, or, in this case, those abysmally naive and the monumentally dumb.

The wolves, of course, are all of the invention marketing outfits. You can get a complete list of these by cutting out all those fine print classified ads in *Popular Science*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Entrepreneur*, and similar places that scream "Inventions Wanted".

Just as a typical vanity publishing offprint forms the kiss of death for a first novel, many invention marketing firms will be the kiss of death for any developable product. These outfits are basically hired guns, who, for a price up front, do perform various services. Such as patent searches, data filings, press releases, or invention fairs. You already know what an invention fair is – That is a place where you go to steal the few good ideas and laugh at all the rest of them.

You normally would not ask an ad agency if you needed an ad. Nor any used car dealer if you needed a car. Nor a mugger if you needed mugged. So what answer would you expect if you asked some invention marketing firm if your new idea was worthy of development? Give me a break.

The wolves are largely responsible for all of the absurd popular patent mythology. That quarter you sent in for your inventor's idea kit from a classified *Popular Mechanics* ad in the seventh grade has done vastly more damage to far more people than you could possibly imagine. The entire "Get an idea" – "Patent It" – "Beat the cash-waving Fortune 500 companies away with a stick" – "Retire rich and famous" outright ludicrousities can all clearly get traced to these insidious, and despicable classifieds.

One of the largest and oldest of these invention marketing firms has reluctantly decided (possibly with the slightest of federal nudges) to include their track record with their original mailings. The odds of them licensing

some accepted and prepaid idea has been 100:1 against, and the odds for useful positive cash flow weighs in at 700:1 against. Of those few which did show positive results, most of them flat out were not worth the effort.

Now, some people may be appalled at these figures, but they sound about right to me. Successfully turning any raw concept into a positive cash flow is one very rough row to hoe. These odds may in fact be much better than you can do on your own.

In many ways, the wolves are just selling wish fulfillment and dreams. Again similar to a vanity publisher or, for that matter, an X-rated vid rental.

If anything, I pretty much admire the wolves rather than condemning them. After all, a well executed scam can be a joy to behold.

And an art form unto itself.

Typical inventors who actually use these invention marketing firms have already preshot themselves in the foot before they've begun and literally do not have a snowball's chance in hell of accomplishing anything.

Almost certainly, your "new" and "unique" idea is not. Chances are that others have plowed this ground long ago. If not, "synchronicity" just about guarantees that lots of others are now thinking along the same lines.

Over the years, I have developed many ideas and concepts. Several of which I have or continue to receive royalties over. And continue to center my lifestyle on. Countless others of which have failed miserably. On the basis of my own track record and on those of some winning associates, I strongly feel that the following are absolutely essential if you are going to profit from a concept or idea:

You must already be a reasonably experienced industry insider. Who is eventually capable of turning into a guru or expert.

You absolutely have to aggressively subscribe to all of the more popular industry trade journals.

You must know and love all of the mainstream industry tools and their supporting math, along with all of the theoretical underpinnings.

You must tune in to the related trade groups, the scholarly organizations, on-line resources (especially Dialog), and industry shows.

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You must be aware of the legislative, political, competitive, and marketing realities of the target field.

You must be in a target area where innovation by individuals on a small scale is welcomed, rather than being regulated, legislated, or adjudicated excessively. Put another way, if it is automotive, forget it.

Your preproduction prototypes must be in or beyond their advanced beta testing stage and have to clearly fill some unique need or perceived need in the mind of the end user.

And, of course...

You must studiously and religiously avoid all contact with the patent system in any way, shape, or form.

I very strongly feel that omitting any of these core requirements can cause your new idea or concept to fail. And many users of those wolf resources fail on all counts, let alone on just a few of them.

The Sheep

The sheep are the actual inventors themselves. There are hundreds of local inventor's organizations and clubs. Some will stand on their own. Others are the individual chapters of state-wide umbrella orgs.

The quality and utility of a local sheep group can vary all over the lot. Some can give you genuinely useful contacts and unique access to lots of otherwise unavailable resources. But others might be dominated by one or two strong personalities clearly a few chips shy of a full board. Yet others are pretty much the equivalent of a gambler's action committee that is lobbying for anti-static casino rugs and more comfortable slot machine handle covers.

By and large, many of these sheep organizations can be highly useful resources. But they often will fail to address all the key idea development issues. Which are...

A tendency to grossly and obscenely overvalue unproven and undeveloped ideas; Assuming patents are central to idea development, rather than an avoidable, costly, risky, and unneeded sideshow; that others are as excited as you are about your concepts or will place your interests over their own.

Failing to recognize that a patent is only the legal right to sue someone in a costly civil action; that very few patents ever show a positive net cash flow; and that even fewer patents are unbustable with a diligent enough search for prior art in obscure enough places.

Not recognizing that the only three responses to a "you are violating my patent" letter is to ignore the letter; to bust the patent; or to obsolete the technology. Besides the side effects of permanently pissing off your potential best customer and making yourself an enemy for life. The utterly unthinkable possibility of voluntarily paying patent royalties simply does not ever come up.

Assuming that big industry (especially the Fortune 500 companies) are actively seeking new products. In reality, most large organizations studiously avoid all change and categorically refuse to look into any outside submissions because of potential liability hassles. Innovation always comes from individuals and smaller firms.

Trying to play for the spectacular (and nonexistent) big win. Rather than accepting simple and solid returns over and over again. An average well developed idea should typically return around \$400 or so. If you are playing at million to one odds, then you don't want to put more than a dollar of time or effort up for every potential million in your expected returns.

Forgetting what the word "new" means.

Assuming that others are willing to pay more for a mythical and unproven sheet of paper. Instead of buying the solid risk reduction of delivered and fully beta tested working pre-production prototypes and artwork.

Forgetting that not less than 95 percent of any survivable patent search must be done in the industry trade journals, scholarly publications, and on-line resources. The patent system is the last place to look for prior art.

Failing to recognize that trying to profit from the patent system takes a lifetime total commitment to courts and courtrooms, lawyers and legal hassles. Compared to lots of creative and useful time you spend in the lab actually developing and improving products.

I suspect that there are a lot more sheep groups than we have shown. When we cleaned the list, a very few asked not to be included. Well, one actually. He assumed I was ripping him off. And several other listed ones prefer a low profile and asked their phone be omitted.

The Shepherds

The shepherds are the bureaucrats. Government entities who'll promote inventions and inventing. Often for their own greater glory and aggrandizement. And, just as real shepherds, they sometimes will fleece their flock.

Or eat them.

The shepherds could be university or college based. Or federal and state government. Or else local chamber of commerce and science fair groups.

I guess the worst things I've got against the shepherds is that they lack an utter and total sense of reality since they are dealing with other people's money, and that they are directly responsible for perpetuating all of the outrageously

absurd myths that surround inventions and inventing.

They also tend to do all the wrong things for the wrong people for the wrong reasons. And, almost always, they'll cost far more than they deliver.

Properly used and recognized for what they are, though, these shepherd groups can be a most valuable and useful resource for you. But do use *extreme* caution.

The Watchdogs

This final group is much smaller than the others. The watchdogs have dedicated themselves and their lives to protecting the sheep from all of the wolves. And from the shepherds as well. These are lone individuals running data base and newsletter "supergroups" that collect and compile and advise the other groups.

I now know of only two watchdogs and they both do exceptionally good work: Bobby Toole of *Professional Invention Counseling* and Raymond Watts of the *Inventors Assistance Program*. Note that their watchdog services are primarily for inventor's organizations and not specifically for lone individuals.

Special thanks to the late Bobby Toole, whose original list was carefully updated and cleaned for our directory.

For More Info

Although I have spent an awful lot of time and effort verifying these names and numbers, a few bugs are likely to remain. Please let me know about any problems that may crop up. I'll upload the corrections on-line.

Related patent avoidance solutions can now be found at www.tinaja.com/patnt01.html.

And, of course, bunches more on viable, proven, and successful alternatives to patents and patenting appear in my *Case Against Patents* reprint package. And in my revised and *Incredible Secret Money Machine II*, available per my nearby *Synergetics* ad.

At this writing, an attempt is being made to convert the patent system into a "first to file" fiasco. Otherwise known as the Patent attorney and patent examiner's relief act of 1992. I am very much in favor of this legislation in that it will once and for all stamp out any remaining vestige of credibility of the US patent system, at long last revealing it for the utter and total ripoff it is for virtually all lone individuals and small scale startups. ♦

UPDATE: An updated and ongoing inventor's association list is now maintained by *Pacific Northwest Laboratory* via (509) 372-4270 I've left most of the names and numbers the way they were as a historical record. Most useful inventor's organizations now have a strong Internet presence. Check www.tinaja.com/patnt01.html for the latest info.

Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 35 books and countless articles. Don maintains a US technical helpline you'll find at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all his own books, reprints and consulting services.

Don has a free new catalog crammed full of his latest insider secrets waiting for you. Your best calling times are 8-5 weekdays, Mountain Standard Time.

Don is also the webmaster of www.tinaja.com You can also reach Don at Synergetics, Box 809, Thatcher, AZ 85552. Or you can use email via don@tinaja.com

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