

Trade Secrets Exposed!

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When Lisa and I started this company 11 years ago I was petrified of running out of ideas because I recognized ideas and new products as our future from the get go. Much to my surprise I found, for every new idea, five more were spawned. These days our biggest problem is not the quality or quantity of new ideas but it is getting the time allocated and securing the right resources for the project.

New product ideas for Baker Drivetrain come from satanic worship that is held every Wednesday at 5:30 in our R&D building. A boiling caldron of Jeffrey Dahmer soup is consumed by our engineers and phone techs (seated on Yoga mats). This puts them in a catatonic state by which they are telepathically plugged into Archimedes, Albert Crocker, Leonardo Da Vinci, William Davidson, Henry Ford, and Michael Jackson.

I've always wanted to be a Devil worshiper but I think it might be more boring than Methodist church. Instead, I get ideas from the sources outlined below. Then the ideas roll around in my head until the time is right. That could mean the market conditions are right or I wake up one morning and just feel like making it happen.

Spotting trends

Like automobiles, cell phones, and most things that are cool, motorcycle design (i.e. configurations) changes frequently. Spotting trends before they become a trend helps us create new product ideas. We also call this a home run. Bringing right side drive to market in 2001 was a prime example of this.

New model changes at Harley-Davidson

The 2006/07 TC96 cruise-drive changes for the Big Twins brought many new opportunities for the aftermarket but it was up to us to establish where the opportunities laid. The big message here is this; anytime the factory changes their motorcycle architecture around, the winds of opportunity blow in the direction of the aftermarket.

Listening to ideas from other people

This is a tricky one. I go to a lot of bike events and meet a lot of people and one thing I've learned is this; you can't judge a book by the cover. Listening requires mental discipline because size, shape, color, age, interest



background, socio economic background, number of teeth, frequency of shower, presence of shoes, or if he rides a metric bike must all be ignored when listening to people. I cannot let their appearance or smell dissuade me from keeping my mouth shut and ears wide open. For example, I've had the guy with the spiffiest Ralph Lauren clothes, pedigreed trophy wife, and Rolex Submariner pontificate the stupidest ideas. On the other hand I've had the street-ripe Florida hobo ride up to me on a rusty bike and give me some killer knowledge and ideas. I've also gotten some good ideas from little kids and hardware store employees.

BAKER employees

Some good ideas come from BAKER employees first and foremost because they're motorcycle enthusiasts. Most of them also interface with the media or customers. The phone tech people take a lot of calls from people that are fired up about the hidden potential of their bike. And there are a lot of great ideas. Then again, there's the guy with the servi-car that wants an 8-speed (five forward and three reverse gears) so he can go 120MPH at Bonneville in reverse.

The couch

I get a lot of inspiration from taking naps on my couch in my office. The nap part is not inspiring but the psychological wonderland between closing my eyes and crashing into snoozeville is very fruitful for churning out the ideas. In that zone, I'm aware of reality but I'm not held captive by its rules, regulations, and commitments. I definitely get my best work done on that couch.

Simmering

Simmering is the final process during which all ideas are collected and their commercial viability assessed. Ideas from trend spotting, new Harley models, other people, BAKER employees, and the couch are all collected. I spend serious couch time with the strong ideas to work the kinks out and improve their commercial viability. In the end, I give birth to the polished/design-ready ideas from my couch. So there it is, BAKER's secret trade secret exposed!

In the end, the effort to conceptualize new ideas is less than 1% of the effort to bring a new product to fruition. To put it another way, ideas are the fun part and making the product a reality requires tons of work. IW