# D2M

# THE SECRETS TO FINDING THE RIGHT PRODUCT DESIGN PARTNER

The Complete Insiders Guide

# Introduction

I've been involved with turning ideas into reality for 20 years and worked on over a thousand products. I even developed and launched my own pushchair with John Lewis so I understand the complete journey. During this project, I commissioned designers for all sorts of elements such as: Point of Sale display design; Brand development; demo videos and packaging. I learned a lot about how to find the right creative partner for all elements of your project.

This pdf guide seeks to bring together the knowledge I have gained from: running my own product design firm; experience from other agency founders and my own experiences as a client to help you select the right product designer or product design company to develop a new product. These guideline also apply to commissioning any creative piece of work that you might need for your business.

Your product design company is likely to heavily affect the future success of your new venture so it is worth spending some time getting the right partner.

I wish you every success on the exciting journey of commercialising a product – there's nothing else like it!

# Introduction to the Author

Phil has been involved in product development for 20 years having studied Industry Design & Technology at one of the UK's leading engineering universities. Phil graduated with a 1st Class degree with honours and within 5 years of graduating had set-up his own Product Development Company - D2M.

D2M has supported hundreds of entrepreneurs and SMEs over the last 12 years to bring new product innovation to market. Phil is well connected within the industry and continues to develop D2M's processes to ensure the best chance of commerical success for the products his team helps to develop.

Frustrated with the tricks, and sometimes outright scams, used by product development companies Phil continues to produce videos, guides and resources to help people choose the right trustworthy product development partner.

# 10 essential considerations

## When selecting the right product design partner

**01** Have they got the skill set to do everything you want them to do?

**02** How much experience does the lead designer on your project have?

**03** Are they going to manage your risk?

**04** Do you like them?

**05** Does the design team have direct experience in the same sector as your product?

# 10 essential considerations

**06** Are they interested in your success or just winning the next design award?

**07** Does the design firm develop products with feedback from your target market?

**08** Will the product be designed with manufacturing in mind from the beginning?

**09** How big is the team?

**10** How's their knowledge of the whole process?

# LET'S GET INTO THE DETAIL

**Have they got the skill set to do everything you want them to do?**

If you want to get your product all the way into production you don't want an agency with skills only in concept development and ideation.

If your project involves electronics then you will need a designer who has experienced in integrating pcb's, battery housing and electronic components into housings.

A lot of people choose a design firm for their product that has experience developing similar products. For example, if you are designing a golf trolley then you will want your designer to have skills in designing folding structures, wheeled goods and aluminium framework.

**How much experience does the lead designer on your project have?**

The lead designer on your project is critical to its overall success. If the designer is just a few years out of university and you have a complex project, you might want to be cautious.

There is a lot involved in designing a new product from ergonomics, usability, market insights, styling, material selection and many other considerations. Experience of designing multiple products right the way into production is critical to ensure that the design for your product is effective, appealing to the target market and manufacturable at a acceptable price.

**Are they going to manage your risk?**

If your prospective design partner isn't talking about risk and if they have no plan to minimise your risk then be very careful as this will all be down to you and may decrease the chances of a successful outcome.

New product development is inherently risky but these risks can be minimised if the company is experienced in planning your product development journey to tackle the main risks first.

Normally this will involve technical feasibility, certification and testing requirements, manufacturing viability, market needs, commercial viability, route to market and potentially patent searching.

Very few designers are experienced in this type work. Most simply get stuck into designing and prototyping but this can cost you dearly as there is no point developing the wrong concept.

**Do you like them?**

This might seem like an odd thing to say, but you will be working with your product design firm for a good few months and maybe even several years if you are developing a range of products.

Rapport and mutual respect make a big difference to this going well.

If you have a bad feeling about the company from the beginning, then pay attention to this as it is only likely to get worse.

Taking references is a good way of checking this out. Ask questions of previous clients about how they handled it when things went wrong and whether they still get on with their lead designer and the wider team.

# Time:o:stat

Representative:

Anthony Cherry

£250,000 per year in sales of the original Timeostat product

Forecast to complete over £1,000,000 in total sales this year through all four Timeostat models now on the market

"Excellent service. Helped me take my idea for a landlord specific thermostat from design through to the marketplace."

**Does the design team have direct experience in the same sector as your product?**

Often experience of designing in the same sector will be invaluable. For example, if you have a mother and baby product, some understanding from your design consultancy in that sector could be helpful. This might mean that they understand the various margins and therefore can help design to a specific cost that will mean you get a sensible financial return.

Sector knowledge also mean: knowing the competitors; understanding the key points of retail buyers when purchasing your product; what the market gaps are or what preferences your target customer has when purchasing.

This type of knowledge will often result in a more commercially viable product and potentially connections to suitable retailers or distributors.

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**Are they interested in what success looks like for you or are they just interested in winning the next design award?**

Have a look around at various design companies. They often talk a lot about the awards that they have won for their design work. But did you know that most of those awards they actually paid for? Almost all design awards require a significant entry fee or for the entrant to buy a table at an expensive awards ceremony.

I don't know of one design award that is handed out for designed commercially successful products. For your project, it is likely to be more important that a commercially viable solution is produced than you win some design award.

**Does the design firm develop products with feedback from your target market?**

A designer or design firm that thinks it knows best is less reassuring that a well-researched company that will ensure (as much as possible) that what they are designing is appealing to your target market.

Unfortunately, creative designers often get carried away and simply believe that they know best. However in this matter, the customer is always right as they are the ones you hope will part with their hard earning money to buy your product.

Integrated, detailed and professionally conducted market research is critical to ensuring that the concept you're developing will be well received by your target market.

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**Will the product be designed with manufacturing in mind from the beginning and do they have manufacturing contacts?**

Both of these elements will be critical in reducing time to market and reducing further development costs later in the process.

Input from manufacturers early on can make the world of difference to your tooling and unit cost in production. Gone are the days when a designer would finish the development and simply let a production engineer work out how the heck to manufacture it.

Always make sure your product designer has taken products to production previously and will be designing with professional input from manufacturers to ensure a smooth transition into production.

## How big is the team?

A large team of 10+ designers might imply that your project might not be that important to the design company if it quite small and relatively low value.

If there's only one or two designers in the agency then your project might get unforeseen delays if they get busy or ill. Also there won't be many creative designers to bounce ideas off or to come up with alternative suggestions.

## How's their knowledge of the whole process?

If they are just design process focussed then you will get less added value than if they have an overview of the whole process and contacts for elements like IP protection and testing.

Choose your design partner based on what you're trying to achieve and therefore what support you need in more than just design and prototyping.
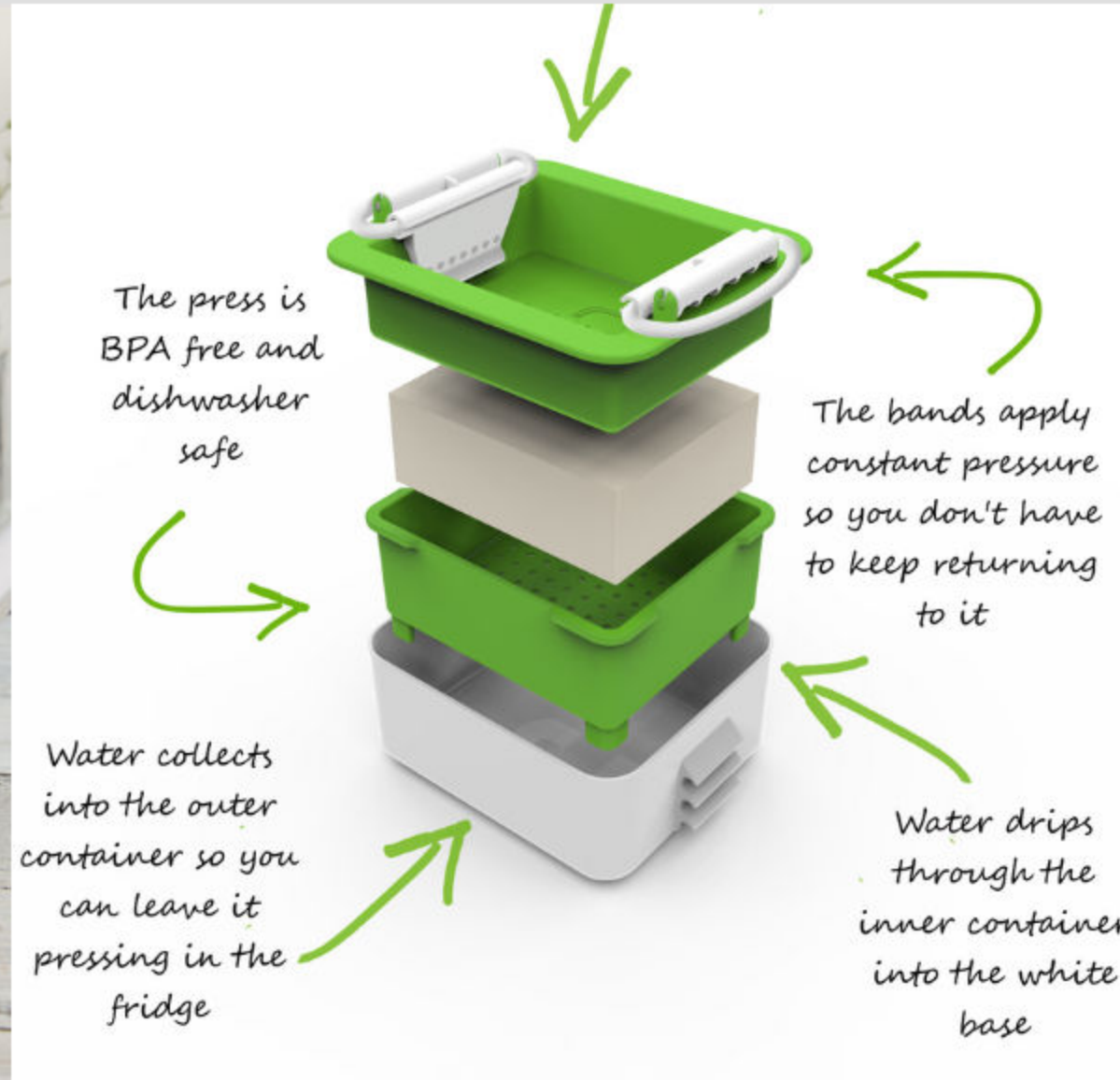
Available at amazon

Tofuture

50,000 sales per year.

Selling on Amazon and also in Lakeland
Over 7000 incredible reviews

Representative:
Adam & Suzanne Kittow

Customer reviews
★★★★⯨ 4.7 out of 5
7,332 global ratings

| 5 star | | 79% |
|--------|--|-----|
| 4 star | | 14% |
| 3 star | | 4% |
| 2 star | | 1% |
| 1 star | | 2% |

The press is BPA free and dishwasher safe

The bands apply constant pressure so you don't have to keep returning to it

Water collects into the outer container so you can leave it pressing in the fridge

Water drips through the inner container into the white base

# Secondary considerations

**A** What their values as a business?

**B** How does their structure work? Are you dealing with the designers or account managers?

**C** How does payment work? Is it full payment up front, split payments or a step by step process?

**D** What are their terms and conditions? Does all the IP belong to you at the end of the project?

**E** What are their lead times and the projected overall timescale for completion of the project?

# APPROACH

We would always recommend a minimum viable product approach. Launch something that is viable and then innovate that product further rather than continual scope creep that pushes the launch date back. You can always launch further generations of your product with more features and functionality once you have revenue coming in and you've proven your market from the first launch.

Choosing a product design consultancy is a critical element of your project. Take your time over it, request references and speak to 3 or 4 different design agencies before taking your final decision. After all better to get it right now.

Product Development Journey
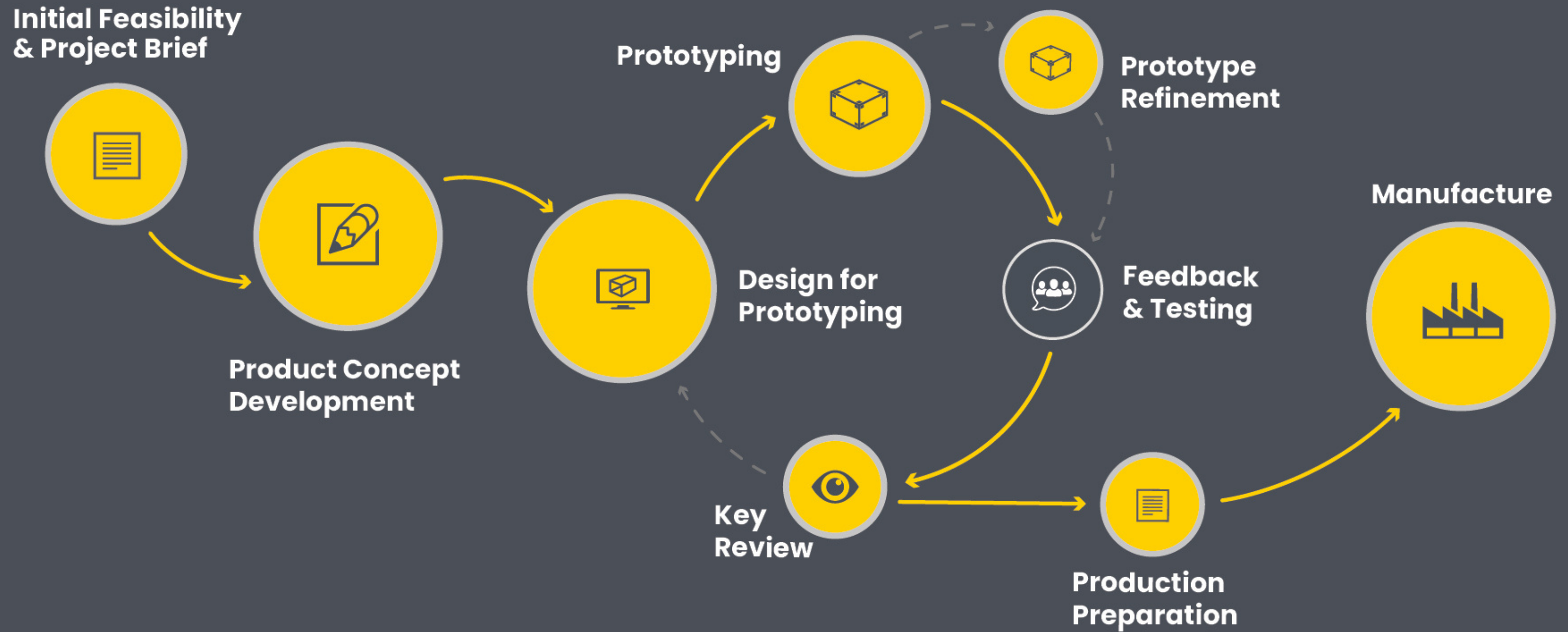
# TRICKS TO AVOID

There are unfortunately some tricks, scams and outright cons that product design companies use. Watch these videos to make sure you don't fall into these traps.

Biggest Design Agency Con:
https://youtu.be/11h2MQvNwLk

Product Development Company Scam:
https://youtu.be/I5vVn-thAaE

Product Design Company Big Secret:
https://youtu.be/2OdqXfBH3Mc

# OTHER SCAMS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Invention Promotion Companies - Mainly US based these companies charge anywhere from £7000 - £20,000 claiming to be able to get you a licensing deal for your product. Inevitably they take your money and then stop returning your calls after a few months and you never hear from them again.

Licensing Agents - A little like invention promotion companies they charge around £4000 to put your idea in front of a network of decision makers in businesses looking for new concepts. Again I've yet to hear of someone who has used these companies and got a positive outcome.

Fake Design - Some design companies charge a lot of money to develop concept renders of your product but without telling you that there is no substance to the design. They haven't designed the internal components or designed it for production but instead simply created a shiny picture of a concept. You then end up paying again for a proper design company to make the design viable.

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# Freelancer versus Agency

## Freelancer Advantages

» Often significantly cheaper than an agency.

» Good - if you know exactly what you want to develop and you just need a designer to follow instructions.

» Often a freelancer can fit around your schedule and orient their working hours or location to suit you, particularly if you're a valuable client.

» No account managers or handlers in the way between you and your designer.

## Agency Advantages

» Reliability - having a team means your less dependant upon one designers capacity to deliver your project.

» A team of designers bring more ideas, skill sets, knowledge, experience and approaches to get you the best end product.

» An agency is more likely to be able to support you through all stages of your project from concept to production.

» Agencies often have more advanced facilities and better prototyping equipment.

Review:

★★★★★

5.0 · April 25, 2022

# Stewart Golf

Representative:

**Mark Stewart**

"I have worked with Phil & D2M numerous times over the past 10 years or so on various projects and will continue to do so. Phil and his team have an excellent working knowledge of pretty much all manufacturing processes and have contacts with manufacturers globally to make things happen. D2M are also clear on project timelines and managing expectations which is key in product development."

Stewart Golf are now one of 100 fastest companies in the UK according to the Sunday Times