

Proper Preparation for Production

Or, how to get that invention or new product ready for mass-production in China.

By Edie Tolchin, EGT
Global Trading

This brief report covers preliminary steps to make sure your product is safe BEFORE embarking on the tremendous undertaking of manufacturing.

Your Aunt Molly, who is a whiz at sewing, will stitch your prototype. Since your invention is a special baby blanket made out of the newest fibers that, according to your own research, will soothe your baby to sleep,* you figure you'll just grab some of that new fabric from the big-chain fabric store, some matching thread, pretty buttons and even prettier ribbons. You get some thin foam rubber for stuffing the blanket, and then have Aunt Molly do her magic. You now have what you think is the perfect prototype.

You've consulted with your attorney on intellectual property issues and you're ready to have a small batch made in China, so that you can set out to marketing the first run on your own. You're now ready to contact some factories in China – right? WRONG!

First, all products made for babies and children under 12 years of age (even many consumer products in general) MUST be evaluated by an independent safety testing lab before even considering the sourcing process. There are numerous reasons why. First, IT'S A LAW. (The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act – go to <http://www.cpsc.gov/en/Regulations-Laws--Standards/CPSIA/The-Consumer-Product-Safety-Improvement-Act>).

Using the above blanket as an example, you and I may look at the prototype – even after you've tested it on your own child – and say, "it seems perfectly safe!" But the trained eyes of the independent

safety testing labs will find, at the very least, six concerns with your invention:

- 1) Buttons (sewn-on) = choking hazards
- 2) Ribbons may also be choking hazards, no matter how securely they are affixed to the blanket
- 3) Thread? How strong is it, and what type is it? Polyester, cotton or nylon? Monofilament?
- 4) Flammability issues. Not too many people smoke near their babies nowadays, but you never know...
- 5) Stuffing (i.e., foam rubber or new materials) automatically calls for the requirement of the special "Law Label." Remember purchasing a pillow, cushion, or comforter and seeing that intimidating label that reads, "Do not remove under penalty of law"? Well, HOW and WHERE do you get this label? (Ask me.)
- 6) Toxic chemicals and lead: What types of dyes were used in the fabric? What type of plastic was used in the button? Were the buttons painted with anything harmful?

A product Design Evaluation (DE) with an independent safety testing lab is the most useful tool you'll ever obtain before sourcing and manufacturing in ANY foreign country, especially in China. It may even change your mind about having the product manufactured "as is," as disappointing as it seems. You may ultimately even need to completely redesign your invention, or sadly, start from scratch.

The DE will provide you with the following information all in a concise, thorough and detailed report-form:

- 1) Recommendations for modification of any potential hazards that only someone trained in these issues would be aware of.

- 2) Government regulations for imported merchandise will be addressed, such as proper marking and labeling. (US) Customs and Border Protection has steep penalties for violation of these regulations! This is definitely something your prospective factory must be advised of.

- 3) A list of both recommended AND mandatory production tests, which you will unquestionably need to arrange.

Consumer safety is the most important issue nowadays; and you'll surely want your new business to be protected by Product Liability Insurance. Try to obtain some without having a fully evaluated, and ultimately tested new product? Think of the ramifications of just one lawsuit from a disgruntled consumer. Surely you've heard of the recent nightmare Product Recalls from the Consumer Product Safety Commission for lead levels and other toxic chemicals in children's products? Go to <http://www.cpsc.gov/en/Recalls/> for examples.

I have always considered the Design Evaluation a vital guide for beginning any sourcing project. To arrange for a Design Evaluation with one of the labs I work with, or to arrange a sourcing and manufacturing project, please contact me as follows:

Edie Tolchin - EGT Global Trading
"The Sourcing Lady"(SM)
P. O. Box 5660
Hillsborough, NJ 08844 USA
Phone 845-321-2362
EGT@egtglobaltrading.com
www.egtglobaltrading.com

We can discuss the next steps required in order to prepare for the sourcing process, including what constitutes the "perfect" prototype.

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EDIE TOLCHIN, “The Sourcing Lady” (SM), “invented” EGT Global Trading in 1997, with a goal to link U.S. inventors with Asian manufacturers, to provide an exclusive import service for sourcing, quality control, production testing and safety issues, manufacturing, international financing, air/ocean shipping, customs clearance arrangements, and dock-to-door delivery.



BERNADETTE MARSHALL, is the president of NB Graphics & Associates, Inc. specializing in the preparation of design and utility patent drawings and trademark illustration nationally and internationally over the past 23 years. Ms. Marshall can be reached at (770) 640-1500, or found online at: <http://www.nbgraphics.com>



JOHN RAU, President/CEO of Ultra-Research Inc., an Anaheim, CA-based market research firm, has over 25 years of experience conducting market research for ideas, inventions and other forms of intellectual property. In addition, he is a member of the Board of Directors of Inventors Forum, based in Orange County, CA, which is one of the largest inventor organizations in the nation. He has been a contributor to *Inventors Digest* magazine since 1998. E-mail: ultraresch@cs.com
Phone: (714) 281-0150

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Mark R. Cantey

MANAGING EDITOR
MARK R. CANTEY

Mary Dickson

ASSISTANT EDITOR
MARY DICKSON

Taylor Higgins

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
TAYLOR HIGGINS

Sarah Hudson

ART DIRECTION AND LAYOUT
Sarah Hudson

For Advertising Contact Us At:
info@InventorsDigest.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Andrea Simon
Edie Tolchin ←
Sarah Hudson

INVENTORS DIGEST LLC

PUBLISHER:

Louis Foreman
VICE PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Mark Cantey
VICE PRESIDENT, INTERACTIVE AND WEB
Matt Spangard
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