



## Beware the Bruno

WATCH FOR INDUSTRY PREDATORS; FOLLOW THESE TIPS FOR RESEARCH CONNECTED TO YOUR INVENTION **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

**I'D LIKE TO SHARE** my many years of experience in the inventing industry with readers who care to heed.

I began a career in import/export in the 1970s, started working with inventors in 1990, and became a licensed U.S. Customs broker shortly thereafter. I have spoken to inventor groups across the country about developing inventions in China and began contributing articles to *Inventors Digest* in the early 2000s. Please believe me when I say that I've seen the good, the bad *and* the ugly of this industry.

Though examples of the good are apparent with the development of cellphones, 3D printing, drones and GPS, here's an example of the bad and the ugly.

There's a person I'll call "Bruno" who attempts to reinvent himself every few years at the expense of naïve inventors.

About 15 years ago, he contacted me for advice on sourcing one's invention in China. Although I clearly quoted my terms *in writing*, I donated many hours of free advice to his advantage.

A few years and a few minor successes later, Bruno decided to call himself an "expert" and start his series of fly-by-night internet companies—advertising, like many industry predators, "We Help Inventors." That business model is often to take precious bucks from clients and simply introduce them to industry

pro-subscribers—also for a fee from the pro—hoping the industry pros might help the client.

Win-win for Bruno: There was never any follow through and, more often than not, the inventor-clients rarely benefited from said transactions. (Ever wonder why inventor services companies advertise on late-night TV? Airtime is considerably cheaper.)

A few months later, when Bruno accumulated enough bucks to promote his next shady enterprise, the original enterprise would simply disappear from social media, with URLs put on hold. You get the picture. Bruno repeated this M.O. every few years, leaving many disgruntled inventors—as well as peeved service providers.

The only winner here, clearly, was Bruno.

### Beginner suggestions

My advice here is, you have created an amazing invention, so *please* do the research. There is no easy way to develop your product unless you win the lottery or somehow jump through the hoops to get on "Shark Tank," which is no easy feat! (Most inventor TV shows require strong sales.)

Some recommendations:

- Define which industry or group of people might benefit from your invention. Fitness? Medical? Children's entertainment? Be clear. Inventors always love their "babies," but they may not be practical.

- Locate inventor-related internet groups on social media. There are many that do not charge. Facebook has dozens.
- Determine your competitors. Decide how you want to develop your product. Do you want to license your invention, or do you want to manufacture (costly!) and sell on your own—thereby controlling your new business (risky!)?
- Join an inventor club in your state. With the recent pandemic, many meet virtually. You will learn a lot! Networking is priceless.
- This is a huge one. Become best friends with Dr. Google. I employ her dozens of times, every day, for everything. If you learn of a potential partner, or inventor service firm, be logical and ask Dr. Google about everything thereto related. Who's at the helm? Which product categories do they work with? Who are successful inventors they have helped?
- Also consult with Dr. Google for similar patents.
- Another essential tip is to do a background check of this potential business partner or service provider. Does he or she have a criminal record or questionable background? Intelius.com is one such firm. Another is whitepages.com/background-checks. Is 20 bucks a lot to spend to avoid losing thousands?
- Do not sign any contracts without having your trusted attorney review it. Do not ask Cousin Seymour to take a glance, unless Cousin Seymour is a successful inventor—and even he might miss a minor detail that could make or break your ability to become a supplier to, say, Walmart.
- Avoid Brunos!

Nowadays, I rarely manufacture in China (for many reasons, including increased import tariffs and recent international logistics challenges). And because I am semi-retired, I have more time to devote to writing, which I love much more than importing.

However, I still keep a sharp eye focused on this industry with which I've been affiliated for over 30 years. Scammers are predictable. They create fancy websites for little cash outlay and promise the world.

Please don't be that naïve inventor. Take time to do the research. Feel free to contact me at edietolchin.com.

Now, back to the good, the bad and the ugly: Steer clear of the dark-Stetsoned villains. Stay with the verifiable, white-hatted good guys (and in this case, I'm not referring to cyber security). *Caveat emptor*, yada, yada, yada! 🍷

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