



## Cuckoo Clock Counsel

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Building better products is a process of ruthless questioning as much as it is of creative thinking. Here we examine the genesis of successful engineering through three requisite questions that must be answered clearly for any chance of success.

Recently I vacationed in Baden-Württemberg in the south of Germany. This is a region of great charm, wonderful living and home to cuckoo clocks. The area also has a history of sustained prosperity and groundbreaking technological advances. It is the birthplace of the automobile (known then as the horseless carriage) and Karl Benz is celebrated as a local hero.

In conversations with my local friends, I questioned them to learn what types of companies are succeeding today, keeping the innovation flag flying with impressive results.

I learned of a local firm who developed faucet aerators in the 1970s and went on to dominate that market for decades. I heard too of a Black Forest-based company who sold industrial thermometers in the 1950s and now leads the instrumentation market for the food processing industry. They also described a company that first dominated the market for the ball points used in pens.

Mercedes-Benz or Porsche may be the known brands of local technology but there are equally successful smaller players engineering products and winning in their respective market places. As I asked more questions, the insights became clearer.

Firstly, the products of these successful companies meet an explicit focused need. They solve a problem. They take away someone's pain.



In product development, we must ask, "**What problem am I solving?**" The answer to this question must be obvious and simple. It must cure someone's pain or you are not designing something of value.

In the product development cycle, a poor primary function will lead to a product being "featured-up" with engineering to compensate

for the weakness. This most often leads to commercial failure.

Secondly, the products of these companies were purchased by all of their addressable market. They were considered good value. With a clear focus on a solution that somebody will want, we must next make it affordable. ***“Will my customers pay for this solution?”***

It is not enough solve a problem or cure pain; you must do that in a way that your customer is willing to pay for and can afford. In product development, target bills of materials and manufacturing costs need to be considered early in development. Building the lowest cost solution possible may seem the obvious choice, but when it comes at the expense of the customer’s experience, it can lead to a product being viewed as inferior.

Finally, the successful companies from this region that later became industry leaders were all early to their respective markets.

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We must ask, ***“When is the right time?”***

While there are stories of inventive products that were too early to market, those are rare compared to the plethora of “me-too” followers that continually play catch-up and leap-frog with the forerunners. Once a market is identified with a solution needed, speedy product development followed by flawless introduction to manufacturing is the winning imperative.

These three requisite questions have sparked innovation and sustained prosperity in the region of cuckoo clocks and provide good counsel. While not the only elements for success, they are some of the most important. And, while simple, they are not at all easy to implement.

As you reflect on how your current product development challenges could leverage these three insights, take action and call Egret Technologies. We look forward to hearing from you.