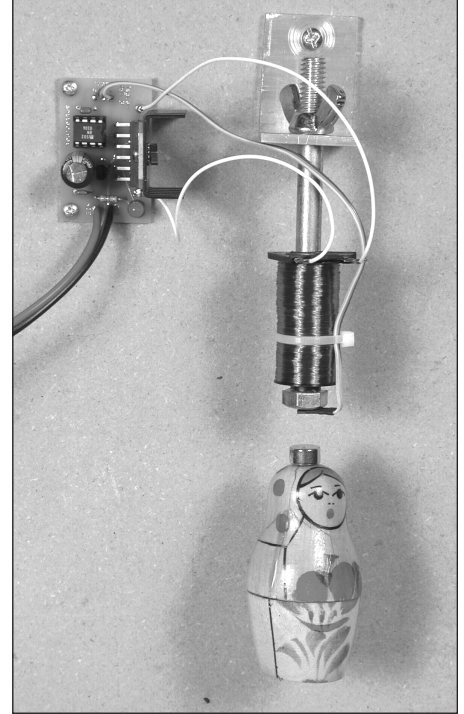


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INVENTORS TYPICALLY HAVE dollar signs in their eyes and the holy fire of unbridled enthusiasm for their newly hatched ideas. But, generally the expectations exceed the reality. There are many ways to profit from your invention, and sometimes it's practical to skip the patent process altogether and just get down to making money. If you have a product that can be made cheaply in your home workshop and sold to a limited market, you may have found a nice little revenue stream. Just be certain that your idea does not have mass-market appeal, which would make patent protection essential.

Less CAN BE more

by **Guy Marsden**

Last year I became interested in the concept of magnetic levitation. I wanted to see if I could float a magnetic object **above** a magnetic base to create an interesting artwork. I quickly learned that the theory of floating an object magnetically from below proved to be impractical. I found a patent on this type of levitation and realized it was extremely complex. I contacted the inventor and was later hired by the owners of the patent to do R&D for them on that design - but that's another story!

Undaunted, I proceeded to design my own circuit for magnetic suspension that would float a magnet **beneath** a controlled magnet. After two weeks of intense effort I designed a very simple circuit that worked. It used relatively unusual and expensive components in a unique configuration. For this reason there would be no value in patenting my design since other patented variations exist. Also, the high priced components used in my version made it impractical to mass-produce.

I was so tickled with the effect of floating a small plastic pen beneath a controlled magnet that I approached an electronics hobbyist magazine, *Nuts &*


Volts, to see if they would like to run an article about my design. The article was published in September 2003 and included a link to my web site where readers could order the complete kit to build my circuit themselves.

I invested \$500 to produce a small batch of kits and crossed my fingers that they would sell. I also built a web page that offered various configurations including a fully assembled and tested version. I included "click to buy buttons," courtesy of PayPal® (www.paypal.com) that made it easy for folks to place an order online.

I was delighted when orders started arriving within days of the magazine hitting the street. My web site statistics showed a jump from 20,000 hits/week to nearly 40,000! I kidded with my wife that my e-mail in box had gone from "You've got mail" to "You've got MONEY!" Now, when an order confir-

mation arrives via e-mail from PayPal, I simply box up the parts and instructions in a Priority Mail box that is free from the Post Office then I print a shipping label with postage using the USPS web site.

Direct marketing via the web has the potential for building a substantial income. If you have a simple idea that you can produce affordably, you may want to consider this direct approach to making money. Remember there are no set rules concerning how to bring an invention to market - it's all up to you. With minimal funding and a few hours a week to operate, you don't have to quit your day job to bring in some extra income. My entire kit business occupies a small folding table in the corner of my home office!

Less can
be more! 

Guy Marsden designs and develops electronic prototypes for inventors and artists and creates artworks in wood and electronics. He also makes handmade wood furniture. Contact him at guy@arttec.net.

