

# Top tips for successful manufacturing development

ONE OF the toughest challenges in bringing innovative products to market is bridging the gap between 'proof of principle' and volume manufacture. And it's a massive hurdle for early-stage businesses who are often integrating new materials, functions and technologies for the first time.

Part or fully-automated production systems can deliver perfect products at the lowest possible price but machine development needs careful managing. Here are top ten tips to get you started:

- Is there an existing solution?  
Customised, automated lines are always more expensive and take longer to develop.
- Figure out your cost justification.  
Establish pay back periods to get a good idea of what you can afford to spend.
- Involve an automation supplier as early as possible. Too many companies wait until product prototyping before considering manufacture. Involve your

supplier for free advice, to identify potential failure modes and avoid costly design mistakes.

- Tell potential suppliers everything you know. If necessary sign NDAs but don't keep prospective suppliers in the dark; they'll just quote for (or even worse supply) something that fails to address the real issues.
- Produce a specification. Many projects are 'less than perfect' through lack of a well thought out specification. Writing a spec is an iterative process but a good supplier can help.
- Be realistic about timescales and deadlines. Take into account acceptance, installation and training. No machine earns its keep from day one.
- Keep development teams small and focused, by ensuring they involve senior-level decision makers and represent your whole business.
- Save costs by paying for advice. If there are uncertainties in your product or

process then establish certainty through feasibility studies. The more you de-risk, the more likely your system will be delivered on time and to budget.

- Hire for track record and experience by bringing in an automated manufacturing company, not a consultant. Make sure they can build what they suggest.
- Keep looking for trouble because problems can arise at any time. And ensure the development team is fully committed to de-risking at every stage.

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**Bringing in an experienced automation company can help shorten time to market**