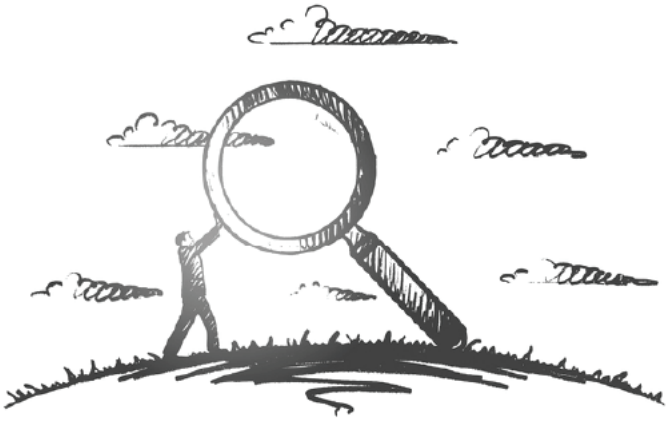
PHASE 2

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Understanding your options

Research is just formalized curiosity

-Zora Neale Hurston



Having discovered your direction, you need to corroborate your premise. However disruptive your thinking, there are plenty of reasons you may need to reconsider: maybe the problem isn't big enough to really make an impact, or someone's got there first.

The research and analysis phase is really about testing your thinking and establishing a baseline of expertise in the area you're looking to enter. You may find the problems you discovered in the first phase to be evolving as you research - and that's exactly the point.

While some of this falls under the traditional banner of 'market research', it's important to conceptualize it as a much broader form of analysis. Most supply chain problems could be solved in a number of ways, and that means your understanding of 'the market' needs to be as wide-ranging and imaginative as possible.

Technologies, for example, can be applied in a wide range of ways; just because the Internet of Things isn't being used in your area doesn't mean it won't be, and you need to be aware of that threat (or possibility) as early as possible.

Don’t be afraid to go back to the drawing board

The most essential factor in the research phase is openness. Too often, we see teams get stuck in the quicksand of a promising idea. And if that’s you, research can be deadly.

Without openness, you’ll end up ignoring information that points you in a better direction and wasting a lot of time in the process. To quote David Ogilvy, you’ll end up using data ‘like a drunkard uses a lamppost - for support rather than illumination’.

Five questions you should know the answer to

1. Why is the that problem you solve important?
2. Who are you building the solution for?
3. How big is the market for a solution?
4. Where is your most direct competition?
5. What are the key attributes a solution requires?

PHASE 3

STRATEGY AND IDEATION

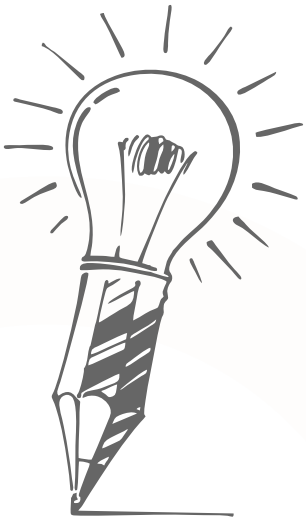
Designing solutions

If I have a thousand ideas and only one turns out to be good, I am satisfied

-Alfred Bernhard Nobel

Having determined your problem and nailed the research, you are ready to start imagining ways of turning them into a solution. This can be both the most exciting and the most frustrating part of the process.

There is no short cut here - if there was, we'd all be building billion-dollar businesses. However, there is a simple approach to generating ideas that may prove helpful in getting your creative juices flowing.



Ideas are connections

Ultimately, ideas are just combinations of existing things: robot-driven micro-fulfillment centers are a transformative concept for eCommerce brands. But at its core, it's really just the combination of robotics and warehousing.

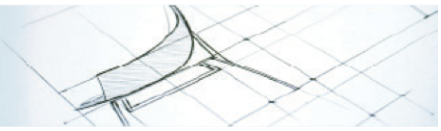
We often mythologize the creative process, as if Steve Jobs or Elon Musk were otherworldly prophets. But the truth is, every great idea - no matter how disruptive or brilliant - is a simple connection between two things. And taking the mystique away from them is vital to allowing you the freedom to explore the possibilities of your product without feeling intimidated.

This is the beauty of the structured approach to product development we're taking: you should now be armed with both a compelling set of problems (phase one) and a robust knowledge of the industry and technologies (phase two). So generating ideas is as simple as experimenting with combinations.

PHASE 4

PROTOTYPING

Building the basics



> Testing leads to failure, and failure leads to understanding.
>
> *-Burt Rutan*

Now that you have your idea, it's time to start really putting it to the test. Prototyping is all about building a sample or model of your solution in order to see how it functions and discover weaknesses - or ways it could become stronger.

There are a number of different approaches to prototyping, so it's important to determine which is best suited to your solution. If, for example, you are looking to improve the User Experience of reverse logistics, a 'paper prototype' will likely enable you to glean valuable insights without incurring great expense.

However, many solutions will require more time and resources to build a prototype - and will likely cost even more than the final product to build. If this is the case - as it would be, for example, if your solution involves hardware - you need to try and ensure you get the greatest value from the process.

Start the process with clear expectations

To get the most out of prototyping, you need to have a clear understanding of what you will and won't be able to learn from the process. Too often, prototypes are built with an expectation that doing so will inherently improve the product. But the reality is, you need to continually be challenging the prototype in order to get real value from it.

This is why bringing multiple stakeholders into the process is so vital: by engaging them with a real product they can interact with, you will both build enthusiasm and receive new perspectives on the idea. These can be the most valuable insights because supply chain solutions are generally highly complex - and therefore smaller teams have a harder time seeing every angle of them.