

# How To Bring Ideas To Life

A free guide for passionate people who  
want to make ideas happen.

# about this guide

Thank you for downloading the free IdeaMensch guide on how to bring ideas to life. Over the past year, we have interviewed hundreds of people and have learned some incredibly super valuable lessons. One question that we always ask is “How do you bring ideas to life?”

Here is a compilation of some of the most insightful answers that we have come across. They come from some incredibly smart people, ranging from the world’s most popular blogger to the gentleman who started Craigslist. Some are long, some are short, some are instructive, others are inspiring; all are meaningful.

If you want to learn more about the people who are quoted, just click on their names and you will be taken to their interviews. This guide does not look good printed, because it’s not meant to be printed. Let’s be kind to our environment and read this on screen.

This guide wouldn’t have been possible without the hundreds of people who have been featured on IdeaMensch. In addition, we would like to thank our growing community who have done everything from editing interviews, doing outreach and promoting the heck out of every new interview. Without you, this would be no fun. Thank you.

If you have any comments or feedback, we are all ears. Thank you for checking us out, and good luck with your ideas.

Make it happen.

# about IdeaMensch

Ideas are a beautiful thing. They excite, they inspire, they energize, and entire economies are built on their backs. Without ideas, there is little to get excited about.

Ideas are everywhere. And everybody has ideas. But it takes a special kind of person to take an idea and actually bring it to life. Those people exist within large companies, small companies, schools, nonprofit organizations and in a garage or basement near you. They live in small towns, large cities, in the U.S. and all across the world.

The one thing they all have in common is a passion for ideas.

Some are repeat entrepreneurs, some are CEOs of large companies, and others are normal people who are burning the midnight oil trying to bring to life an idea they carry with great belief.

We don't feature people because they are famous or successful. We feature people who have a passion for ideas.

And we hope that through our daily interviews, we can provide information, inspiration and connections to help people all across the world get one step closer to bringing their ideas to life.

**Ship. Ship it  
out the door.  
Do things that  
frighten you  
and put them  
out there. Fail  
often. That's  
what I do.**

**Seth Godin**

**I just do it. (I credit Nike for this.)  
Too many wannabe entrepreneurs  
will talk about their idea, blog about  
it, post it to Facebook/Twitter,  
write a business plan, etc., but not  
enough of them actually take the  
first step and just do it. Start  
making something, and create  
something that wasn't there  
before. There are no special tools  
you need, you just need to take  
that leap. Just do it.**

**Derek Johnson**

Start small. Whether it's in marketing or engineering, one of the best things the "agile" development methodology teaches us is the power of iteration. Don't spend all your time mapping out elaborate plans in your head. Jump in with some sort of concrete implementation, however simple, to start getting feedback and momentum. It's through this act of creation that ideas become real — and take on a life of their own.

**Scott Brinker**

**Honestly, my ideas are born out of solutions that I need myself! As the parent of two young sons, new challenges crop up every day. Our philosophy is to make new and useful products for parents — simple ideas that simply work.**

**Sari Crevin**

I start with the vision: Why not go to all 50 states? Why not bring 400 people to Portland next summer? Then I work backwards and figure out what needs to happen to bring the idea to life. An important step is publicly stating the goal. Three years ago I told everyone I was going to visit every country in the world, so there is a lot of self-applied pressure to live up to the promise.

**Chris Guillebeau**

I bring ideas to life using multiple mediums, like my iPhone application, two blogs, a book, a magazine, my speeches and columns. By having the message and ideas in multiple mediums, you can help all audiences and be where people are searching on a daily basis. The big ideas that I'm bringing to life over the next several years is that perception can make or break your career, and that the Internet is the global talent pool filled with personal brands.

**Dan Schawbel**

Lie  
down  
and  
think.

**Craig Newmark**

**I write, draw,  
brainstorm with  
my daughters  
and dog.**

**Julie Aigner**

In “Do More Faster,” Matt Mullenweg said, “If you’re not embarrassed when you ship your first version, you waited too long.” There are no secrets to bringing ideas to life. Just get out of your head and take action in the tangible world. Commit to a single action that moves an idea forward in a material, measurable way every day. **Jonathan Fields**

**You execute!  
That's the key to  
bring ideas to life.  
If you can't  
execute, then your  
ideas won't be  
worth anything.**

**Neil Patel**

**I start with a wild idea,  
throw it out to my  
community, and then  
find people crazy  
enough to work with  
me on those types of  
ideas.**

**Chris Brogan**

I build them instead of debating them. I've spent enough time in corporate environments to know that asking people to imagine things is not merely inefficient, it's a recipe for conflict. People will fight endlessly over a product that doesn't exist — because no one is talking about the same thing. I'd rather spend 3 hours building something tangible that we can criticize, than those same 3 hours describing it.

**Matt Sherman**

**By sharing them with  
my team and inner  
circle, by seeking  
feedback and  
refinement, and by  
working late.**

**Scott Belsky**

**Brainstorm , exchange ideas back and forth, draw up wireframes, write lots of code, release a beta version, get feedback, make changes, launch the product. A painting, a song, and a website are never truly finished. It's best to launch at 80% and test the market. Otherwise you'll spend a year trying to get it to 100% and you run the risk of getting beat to market.**

**Jon Cook**

I am most fulfilled when an idea grows from a thought to something tangible. It gets me more excited than anything. While I'm very organized, I used to write my ideas down on sticky notes. They would blanket everything, and often times I would find some of my best concepts nestled inside the pockets of last season's purse. A friend of mine introduced me to Moleskine journals. I like the smaller ones that come in shades of lime green and pink. I can throw two to four of them in my purse. I have one for work and another for my personal life. Now, whenever I get an idea I write it down and check it off once it becomes reality. Not only is it personally rewarding to see all I've accomplished listed out, but after time it starts to reveal to me the thought patterns of how I think and develop ideas, which has benefited me even more.

That said, the biggest part of bringing an idea to life (after you learn how to not lose it ... ) is to just sit down and make it happen. Buy a domain name. Go buy a book on the subject. Use Google to your advantage and find out everything you can on the topic. Take small steps to make it happen, use technology to help you promote it and be tireless and relentless in the pursuit of your passion. If it's something that consumes you from when you're brushing your teeth to meeting friends for drinks, it's worth doing. If you have a passion and an idea, you already have everything you need to realize your dream as a reality. Technology has leveled the playing field in a way nothing else has. Take advantage of it, and make your dream come true.

**Brianne Burrowes**

**Start with just a kernel of an idea. Let it marinate. Add some meat over a couple of months. Talk about it with lots of people and get their takes. Never ask them to sign an NDA. Ideas are nothing. Execution is everything. Getting real feedback from real or potential customers is beyond everything. Once you're convinced, run as fast as you can, get the right people on the bus and iterate like mad, all along asking customers to tell you how your product sucks.**

**Doug Aley**

**Most importantly, I think you need to do something you really love. You need to have an original angle and always treat people really well. Then I like to take a slow and methodical approach to building a business. It's not a flashy approach nor does success come over night, but it works for me.**

**Richard Thalheimer**

**I struggle with time management. In addition to having too many irons in the fire and demands on my time, I find that in order to make progress in any one domain, I have to be totally immersed. So, the long and short is: I don't know that I have any productivity insights except to focus, focus, focus and say "no" to maintain quality and focus in the endeavors one undertakes.**

**Jakki Mohr**

The way my mind works, I think of new ideas every day. I have a concrete process to evaluate and bring ideas to life. I write down each idea as I have them, and once per week I then sit down and write out each step that I would need to take to research and/or make that idea happen. By the end of that planning time, I will know who to talk to, where to go and what to do to take each step to make the idea possible. Often in this process, I encounter reasons (whether financial or other reasons) that the idea may not work, which causes me to go back to tweak my plans and process until I find one that works. Ultimately, I never throw an idea out, I just backtrack plans until I find a workable solution. One of the best methodologies I have found is David Allen's Getting Things Done. I also make sure that I never multitask. I am much more efficient when I work on one task at a time.

**Brandon Hensinger**

**I wait for ideas to become unstoppable passions before delving into execution. First comes the idea, then comes the hunger, then comes the execution. Don't forget the hunger.**

**Daniella Jaeger**

**My ideas come from anywhere when I least expect it; I'm constantly diving out of the shower to the keyboard getting ideas out before they fade away.**

**I've never been a noodler; I write full scripts for everything before I draw a single line.**

**Dan Goldman**

I'm all about simplifying as much as possible. If I have a big idea, I try to divide it into things I can do in a week or two. I build the first part, launch it, and then see how it goes. Then I go to the next part.

Sometimes it's an ugly process. It's hard to not keep tweaking something until it's perfect. But the idea that never gets out there has no chance for success, and I've seen countless teams and people plan and perfect themselves to death.

**Ian Lurie**

I still do it the old-fashioned way. I write and write and write and write and edit and edit and edit and edit, and then try stuff out on my wife, friends and relatives. I was taught a long time ago that there is nearly always more than one way to effectively execute against a strategy, so I try to come up with as many ideas as I can, and then focus on in on the one or two ideas that are most involving.

**Bruce Silverman**

I walk. I walk back and forth to work. I try to walk everywhere. When I travel I choose different neighborhoods to explore. On the weekends I walk through forests and deserts and river beds. Every day I try to walk a minimum of five miles while I explore the latest additions to my iPhone. It's like a Disney ride with great music but you get exercise. While I walk I look for inspiration in music, podcasts, and the life and architecture of the neighborhoods, countryside, and other locales I walk through. I invest in real estate, so I will sometimes drive to an area and walk it over a period of months or years to look for changes. And often the walk inspires an idea, so I am frequently talking to myself or muttering into the "record app" on my iPhone while I walk. People assume I am a crazy but well-dressed homeless man as I mutter ideas into my hand.

**Tim O'Leary**

**Give ideas away to those who are passionate enough to manifest them. Then move on to the next one or help others fast-track manifest their ideas.**

**Hal Josephson**

**I grind. The notion that you can wake up in the middle of the night with some divine inspiration or that an idea will come to you while you're in the shower is a myth. If you want to produce something great, you have to put in the hours thinking, writing and rewriting. At least I do.**

**Court Crandall**

**As quickly as possible.  
I hate open items, and  
every time I pour over  
an idea I end up  
making it worse. Ideas  
live and die very  
quickly. Get them in the  
right hands right away.**

**Justin Gray**

**Short answer: Brute force. Long answer: It's taken a few years to assemble one of the world's best search engine & social media marketing teams at Anvil, which makes bringing ideas to life much easier. Outside of Anvil, my network has been instrumental in growing other business idea.**

**Kent Lewis**

Bringing ideas to life is the most difficult thing for an idea-person. You have this constant flow of ideas, and you are almost paralyzed with indecision. How can you choose just one? How do you determine if this is an idea that you want to spend months or years of your life on? It can be impossible, and it prevents many intelligent people from taking the leap.

I am a firm believer in manifestation and the law of attraction. I don't force anything, and I just put my ideas out there and let them exist. I try not to pressure myself to pick one or to make something happen, because I find that patience will bring you the resources you need. For example, my current venture was not something I had really expected to do. It presented itself and the timing was right. I was able to gather the resources to make it happen. It was mostly unplanned, but once it had the momentum, I committed 110%.

Some say that ideas pick you. I just say that you have to be in tune with what is going on in the world around you. If you are paying attention to the signs, you will find the tools you need to bring your idea into reality.

**Nick Vivion**

**By understanding a truth in life or in people and connecting it with whatever it is you're trying to communicate. Years ago I listened to a panel discussion at SXSW with Public Enemy about how to write a protest song (Fight the Power) and even artists understand that you need to find something to motivate people. They started with James Brown and went from there.**

**Evan Ferrari**

I am someone who can't let a good idea just sit around. If I hear a good idea, my mind takes it to the nth degree in every possible direction. I do the same with my own ideas. I share the ideas with others over coffee, skype, email, etc. until they land with people who can and will run with them.

**Thubten Comerford**

I get lots of ideas (for businesses and other things), but I have what may actually be a disease in that when an idea gets in my head in a certain way and I can't get it out I just plunge into it full steam ahead. I probably don't do enough planning in advance, it's human nature to massively underestimate the time it will take to do something. I had the luxury of quick success with my first business, and so as soon as I had saved some capital, I dumped a big pile of it into my second business, and have done that ever since, though the businesses have gotten a lot more scaleable.

This enables me to move fast, but it certainly doesn't ease the stress level, ha. Almost every time I start a business, I find myself 6 months in, when I'm working 80-90 hour weeks, going "why didn't I really plan out the details through some more before going all-in". Whenever I commit to an idea I want to get it out as fast as possible to beat any potential competition etc. But once you have a staff and overhead you have a lot of other things on your plate that can suck the time away from planning, so you end up working nights and weekends so you can really hone ideas without all the distractions. So far it has always worked out in the end, but it certainly makes the process quite a ride.

**Clark Benson**

**I carry a sketchbook almost everywhere. If I have an idea that I like, I write it down or sketch it out. No matter how silly or trivial the idea seems, I enjoy putting it on paper. I go for quantity over quality.**

**If I have an idea that is terrible, I share it for laughs. If I have an idea that is funny, I share that, too. If I have an idea that I think is good, I share that to see if anyone else likes it. If everyone likes it, even my most cynical friends, then I may move forward with it. But most of my ideas are happy to be left in the sketchbook.**

**Tom Nardone**

I ask for help and I ask all types of people. Whether volunteers, other nonprofit leaders or friends and family, I find there is always someone who can help. No matter how smart, strong or wealthy you are you can never do it all by yourself.

**Meaghan Edelstein**

**By collaborating with like-minded folk. First, having someone to bounce ideas off of and to help motivate one other is essential; a partner in crime if you will. Second, and perhaps most importantly, is knowing (and accepting) what you stink at doing and then finding and empowering the people who absolutely geek out on doing just that. It's much easier to bring something to fruition if you have folks who are the master of their trade doing what they do best.**

**Ryan Cruse**

We're actually finessing that process at the moment. It always starts with being able to articulate the idea clearly, so that someone else can understand it easily. Invariably there are colored pens and mind-maps involved as we move from concept to finished product, but it all boils down to just getting something out there, no matter how rough and ready, and then use an iterative approach to fine-tune and produce something that's functioning at 100%. It's always good to have a group of testers, or people who can give you rapid feedback. That's why we've assembled SuperGroups, comprising friends, mentors and potential collaborators, who buy into the initial idea, but can then challenge us, ask the hard questions, and to whom we can feel accountable.

**Peter Mandeno & Lizzie Shupak**

Depends on the idea. The basics are:

Explore the why.

Create a hook. What's the "Twitter pitch." The big idea in 140 characters or less.

Find the networks and channels that can provide the most momentum in the least amount of time.

Give a crap about your customers/readers/adopters/followers/users.

For Man Vs. Debt, this was a long process for me, but each time I do it — I become faster.

**Adam Baker**

**This one is easy — by starting. Great ideas aren't hard to come by, but what takes work is implementation. Starting is by no means all it takes. After that come the long hours, the late nights and a lot of trial and error. Talking, however, gets you nowhere. Step one is rolling up your sleeves and digging in.**

**Aaron Presley**

I come from the tech culture where ideas are explored and invested in even though they may mutate into something else or even fail. I bring ideas to life by casting a wide net (nurturing a large network), encouraging risk taking and having a willingness to see a few ideas fail in exchange for larger break-out ideas to yield meaningful impact. **Jim Moriarty**

**I spend  
most of  
my day  
saying,  
“What if?”**

**David Girgenti**

I've read enough books to know that time doesn't wait for you. One of my favorite quotes is, "The best time to get to work on it was yesterday. Failing that, today will do." The most important thing that I've realized in being able to generate my ideas and flush them out is to hang on to the fact that galactically, I don't matter. Once I realized that fact, it liberated me to do things that terrified me, be it traveling to a far off land, starting a company or getting an MBA in my free time.

I've learned that every minute counts. Chris Guillebeau helped me focus on the idea that time should not be wasted. You should always be cognizant of what you are doing with your time. If you want to veg out for an entire day, that's fine if that is what you decided to do. But don't let minutes and hours go by without you having decided that that was indeed what you wanted to be doing.

"Making Ideas Happen" by Scott Branson was a book that helped me organize my life a little better. He and Tim Ferriss taught me about the value of short-term goals. Without short-term goals, nothing gets done. I've written a feature length screenplay, but when I started I would freak out about how I was going to write 120 pages of something. I couldn't get one page down.

Well, I learned that a few lines was a success and that it was farther along than if I hadn't started at all. Everything takes hard work. If you're not willing to put in the work, then don't bother.

"Drive" by Daniel Pink taught me that doing something because it intrinsically makes me happy might be the most important thing to do. I write not because I get paid for it, but because it makes me happy, and in turn, that makes me a better person.

I also choose very wisely who I spend my time with. Unfortunately, you can't hang out with every friend of yours all the time. It's your life. How are you going to fill your days?

**Bassam Tarazi**

**My philosophy of business has always been to surround yourself with good people who can execute. I'm an idea and concept guy; whether it's with Brandon, the VP at Wine Library, with AJ and our team for VaynerMedia, or elsewhere, I have someone to follow through.**

**Gary Vaynerchuk**

**I test ideas on my  
blog and on Twitter. If  
the idea generates  
excitement with many  
people commenting  
or tweeting, then I  
know I have  
something interesting  
to share in future  
speeches or books.**

**David Meerman Scott**

I start with some pretty low-tech processes, like a pen and a notepad. I write down observations when traveling or notes from the different things I read (and I read two to three hours per day at minimum). Watching and observing the world around me and taking note of it is the beginning of all of my ideas.

Next, I find a quiet place, like my lake cabin or even my car, to think deeply about how things work, how to make markets or products more efficient and whether any of the ideas I've written down could be brought to market to make the world better, more efficient, life changing, etc.

If I think some of the ideas hold water, I'll explore them further by researching others that might have information pertaining to an idea or market, or other companies that may be solving similar problems.

If I find someone doing exactly what I was thinking (well, for a fair price and with good service), I will stop exploring the idea, and if not, I'll explore it further. Then I get feedback from what I call the smart people; industry experts, academics and other successful business professionals (generally operators).

Finally, after all of that, if I feel the idea has legs, I will consider writing a business plan and forming a company.

The ratio of turning ideas into started companies is probably a hundred to one. Every idea has a natural beginning and end. Some are quickly dismissed, and some go all the way to business plan and company status. It's very similar to other creative processes, whether it be writing or acting.

**Brian Gramer**

I know it sounds trite, but there's really only one way to bring ideas to life, and that's through a personal commitment to hard work and perseverance. If you substitute the word "success" for "genius," I firmly believe in Thomas Edison's observation that "genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration!" There inevitably comes a point, however, when you cannot do everything yourself, and you have to start relying on others. So, I'd say that another way to improve your odds of successfully bringing ideas to life is through self-awareness and trust, i.e. recognizing your own limitations and having the self-confidence to actively seek people who are much better at what they do than you are. I think good ideas get to be great ideas that way!

**Bill Staby**

**First, throw ideas out all the time, even if you think they are silly. Second, disassociate yourself with the idea. You'll have a much easier time tossing ideas out in the future if you remove any personal anguish that might be caused by others cutting it down. Third, talk about your ideas a lot. Repetition can give it substance or just the opposite. You'll see that it doesn't make much sense, and that's alright. If an idea catches on ... give it time, give it TLC. Tell your idea to 5 to 10 appropriate people outside your inner circle, and ask them their thoughts and feedback.**

**Josh Zabar**

By starting. I don't really think about ideas too much in my head. Ninety percent of the ideas I have flutter for a while and disappear. They were probably not worth working at anyways. But a few of them stick around after weeks or months, and then I know they may have some value. From then, I just start working on whatever is most productive toward reaching a goal of launching that idea. That could be jumping straight into code and developing a proof-of-concept, designing it out in Photoshop so it makes better sense than it did in my head, or pitching the idea and trying to raise capital right away (in order of frequency).

**Sahil Lavignia**

**Although our ideas technically come to life in front of a computer screen, they are NEVER born there. All my good (or is that hubris?) – all my better-than-average ideas, come when I'm in the shower, on a run, on the London underground. In fact I often think I should just get on the Circle line with a pen and paper and start scribbling. There's something very fertile and creative about the tube for some reason! When we're developing our ideas we use post-it notes, big sheets of paper, and lots of tea.**

**Rob Symington**

**It depends on the  
idea. Most of my  
ideas come from my  
surroundings,  
reading, thinking  
and paying attention  
to my fantastic  
audience.**

**Karol Gajda**

My blog is the best tool I have for distributing my ideas, however the real source of the ideas comes from just living. My blog has always been about reporting the "journey" and continues to be so for me today. I still write content that is relevant to me in that moment, based on what I am striving for and thus experiencing as a result.

The great thing about this is that I can simply think of something in response to a conversation, or watching a movie, or reading a book, or any form of stimulus in my life, which can then become content for the blog, which I share using my own interpretation and ideas. Because I have a following, I have a platform to share these ideas and impact people in a positive way, so while I help myself I help others too, which is immensely gratifying on many levels.

**Yaro Starak**

**Have a  
strategic  
vision for  
where you  
want to go,  
and be willing  
to put in the  
work to get  
there.**

**Gary Arndt**

**By including other people.  
Rohit and I talk a lot on MSN,  
on the phone, by text or in  
person. Finding a partner that  
you can spark with is key.  
Historically, it's very rare that a  
great idea comes fully formed  
from one person's head. When  
it's all kicking off, some of the  
discussions can be a bit like  
Jazz or blues jamming.  
Getting it out the door is when  
the hard work really starts.**

**Lee Marshall**

**Start now.  
Launch early.  
Build momentum.  
Get feedback.  
Improve constantly.  
Run as fast as you can.**

**Mario Schulzke**

More often than not, you can't bring an idea to life completely on your own. You need the help of other people. So you need to enroll those people in the power of your idea. They have to understand it, believe in it, and be moved by it. In other words, you have to sell it. I have found that the best way to make the sale simple is to make the idea — and the sharing thereof — simple. Start by stripping away any superfluous information and boil your idea down to its strategic core. WHAT is the idea? WHY is it a good idea? HOW will the idea be implemented? WHAT does success look like? You should be able to articulate the answers to these questions in a few minutes, if not seconds. After you make the idea simple, make it memorable. Sum up the idea in one simple sentence — or POV statement — then sum up this simple sentence with a defining visual. If engaging, people will remember the defining visual, recall the POV statement that it represents, and remember the idea that the POV statement summarizes. A simple idea, shared in a simple way, makes the sale simple.

**Todd Sebastian**

**Everyone has great ideas. The difference is that some people actually do something about it. If it's a good idea, I talk with my team about whether it's a risk worth taking. If it's something that, if we tried it, won't bring the rest of the company down with it, we usually give it a try, assign an owner, and some small funding.**

**Joe Pulizzi**

Just  
do  
‘em.

**Leif & Christian**

# credits

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**the  
end**