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# Ten cost-effective ways to test your product

ALEXEY SALTYSKOV AND DMITRY MITYAGIN

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As a small business owner, there are hundreds of tasks to deal with, but at the end of the day, it all boils down to the two most important things: your customers and your product. So how can you build a product that will be embraced by customers? Here are ten cost effective ways to test and improve a product.

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**1. Ask your friends.** This is a simple way to demo your product. You probably won't get the most critical perspective, but speaking with friends will allow you to identify the most glaring points that need improvement. Some friends aren't afraid of being honest, especially when it can help your business. The best part? You can always go back and ask if the new changes are an improvement.

**2. Your first customer is in a coffee shop.** It might sound strange, but grabbing a random person in a coffee shop can become a first unbiased product user with fresh eyes. Latte sippers are not in a hurry, so asking someone to quickly try the product shouldn't be a burden. Many people love to be asked! Best of all, you can choose testers from almost any customer segment: from a techie teen to a 50-something office worker.

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**3. Do a 65+ test.** The best products are easy to use. Ask seniors to try the product and watch how they engage with your creation. They might pay attention

to completely different aspects than you expect. Taking their input into account may open a door to a totally new customer segment.

**4. You don't speak my language? Test my product!** To ensure that a user interface speaks for itself, find someone who isn't fluent in your language. Is your product simple enough that it doesn't need to rely on heavy text explanations? Sometimes knowing the language is required to use the product, but in many cases you will be able to either make the interface more intuitive or simplify the language. Mother-tongue speakers will also be grateful.

**5. Test with industry experts.** Nobody knows more about your product than you. And nobody knows more about the industry than industry experts. They can offer professional insights about your product and help you think about additional elements that will allow you to develop an even better product. To connect with experts, try participating in an innovation competition. You're sure to get valuable input.

**6. Leverage your employees.** It may sound banal, but ask everyone in your team what they think about the product. Comments from accounting or marketing will be different from those coming from the developer or designer. Your team will feel more involved and motivated when they're contributing to the product's overall success.

**7. Call on subscribers.** Most small businesses have a web presence and also an option to subscribe to a newsletter. Many offer a blog to share news and updates with their users or customers. Remember that the majority of those who subscribe to your newsletter or RSS feed are people who are sincerely interested in your business, and they'll be happy to provide feedback. You can be sure that there will also be numerous industry experts among them. If you offer a small volunteer incentive, such as a prize or draw, it can't hurt.

**8. Shake up cocktail conversation.** At this year's seasonal party circuit, why not combine business with pleasure? When people ask what business you're in, use this opportunity to gauge interest in your field. A short survey of the crowd with, "Can I get your honest opinion on three designs so that we can create an amazing product?" will surely engage many party-goers. You may discover new fans of your product or industry experts. Just remember to keep it short and simple – it's still a party and not an office.

**9. Use social networks.** Most of us use social networks; some more, some less. They allow us to stay linked to others, get updates and share our lives. But social networks are also a powerful, low-cost business tool for [product development](#). Just ask people what they think – many social networks offer feedback tools, such as the Facebook survey. Not everyone will get back to you, but you'll surely get a lot of insightful feedback.

**10. Debut with journalists and bloggers.** If the product or service is ready for the greater public, try it first with specific journalists and bloggers. These are busy people, so if it captures their attention, you can be sure it will do the same with many other consumers. Once you've identified the right target audience, put together a catchy title, a short and crisp introduction and a link to your product. That's all it takes.

**One final word:** After you launch your product or service, the biggest test begins. Be sure to collect, review and implement customer input to constantly refine and improve your product. Consider every piece of negative feedback as a gift, since these nuggets help you evolve.

*Alexey Saltykov and Dmitry Mityagin are the co-founders of [InsurEye](#), which provides independent online tools to help consumers save money through an improved understanding and management of their insurance.*

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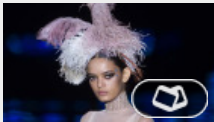


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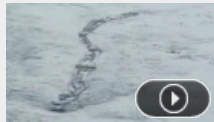
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