

# Where New Products Come From

by Nancy Knowlton

Do you ever wonder where new products come from? Who gets the ideas, and then how do new products make their way into common use? It really is quite a process to get new products into users' hands. Many people have roles to play along the way.



## A New Idea

There's no telling where an idea will come from. It could be random or it could be purposeful. It could be fortuitous or the result of hard work. Sometimes it is serendipitous, and sometimes it is right there in front of you.

The SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard was my husband's (David Martin's) idea. We had been given the opportunity to purchase an LCD research and development facility in Tempe, Arizona, that had been created back in 1986. While thinking about what we could do with LCDs, Dave conceived of the entire system needed for a SMART Board interactive whiteboard.

In Dave's case, the idea really came from the reading that he does. Although I would hesitate to describe him as a computer scientist, he certainly knows where technology is headed and is therefore able to expect and anticipate certain things.

Dave takes his knowledge about new technologies and puts them together with what he observes people do in the course of their daily interactions. All the time, he considers how technology can solve their problems. He believes this part of creating and inventing is easy.

## Getting to Market

Many great products have died because there was no way to get them to market. Technology by itself means nothing. It only has meaning and value when people want to use it.

A particular type of company brings new products to market, and while it would never say to potential users, "Hey, we diffuse innovative products," that's exactly that it does.

Introducing new products takes time and energy. It involves not just demonstrations but also making sense of new products to people who may be indifferent or unaware that a solution to a particular problem now exists.

If you observe people who diffuse new technology products, they engage in activities quite different from a company that sells established products. They attend trade shows so people can try the product, host seminars, hold training events for customers and bring new products directly to the people who may use them. They also tell people how the products are used in other countries and organizations.

Our resellers are exactly like that. Not only have they introduced interactive whiteboards to educators, but they ensured educators had all the information they needed to use the product successfully. In short, it has put a great deal of effort into educating the market.

## Passionate Early Adopters

New products don't go anywhere without a passionate group of early adopters. This group loves new technology, even if it means the technology isn't quite perfect yet. Early adopters feed a company – sometimes literally – as it struggles to come into existence or get its product off the ground.

Early adopters also teach a company a lot about its product and what users want. They're a relatively small group, but their enthusiasm can go a long way toward exciting and influencing a more mainstream group.

The passionate early users for SMART Board interactive whiteboards were elementary and secondary school teachers, military people and corporate users who wanted to collaborate with colleagues at a distance.

## The Storytellers

A new product cannot succeed without someone to write about it. Media spread the word about new products, because their job is to report on new developments in all walks of life. For us, it is a symbiotic relationship, one that has worked well for years.

Hundreds of stories appear in the press each week about SMART Board interactive whiteboards and the impact they have on everyday life. Their very existence has to be credited to many people.

**Nancy Knowlton** is the CEO of SMART Technologies Inc., the world's leading supplier of interactive whiteboards. Nancy's husband and co-founder of SMART, David Martin, is the inventor of the interactive whiteboard category. Together they have built a company focused on delivering easy-to-use, feature-rich collaboration tools, including the SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard. Nancy can be reached at [NancyK@smarttech.com](mailto:NancyK@smarttech.com).