



5 ways to get products to market faster

It pays to have good ideas for new products—especially if your company can turn its good ideas into exciting new products faster than the competition. Automotive tier and after-market suppliers that consistently get new and innovative products to market first enjoy the strongest and most profitable relationships with original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and other customers in the automotive supply chain.

Here are five steps you can take to get first-to-market advantage

1

Build the map

Automotive suppliers must take a disciplined approach to every step of the new product development lifecycle. This includes creating a high-level roadmap for what you plan to develop and how. Consider applying value stream mapping and a lean manufacturing methodology to this stage of your product development. With this approach, all the key participants in your new product initiative work together to identify each step in the process, including the required inputs and outputs. Each step is then analyzed to determine if it really adds value. If it doesn't, you can bypass it.

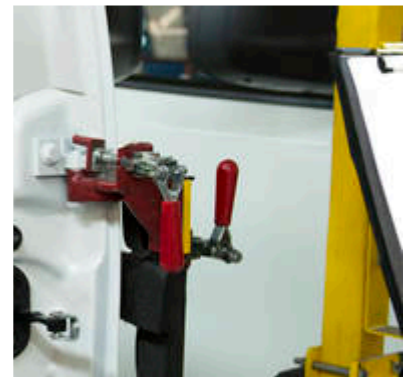
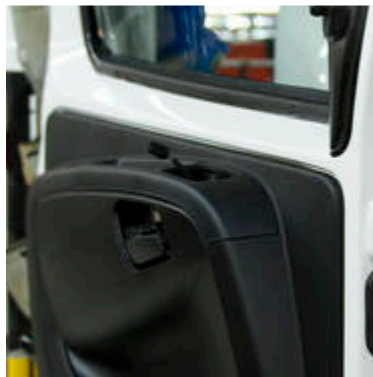
If the step is valid, you then determine if there is a better approach. You'll then get a graphical roadmap that defines the essential processes for creating the product in the most efficient way.

Industry Week magazine has published a detailed description of value stream mapping that concludes. "Use it properly and completely and it will provide a direct path to process optimization and an operation that is assured long-term survival."

2

Build the workflows

With your roadmap in hand, the next step is to define the specific tasks required to complete each distinct process. At this point, it's helpful to analyze the interrelationships between tasks to identify ways to complete multiple steps at the same time. There will be product development phases that require a serial approach, where nothing happens on one phase until a previous phase is complete. But with careful analysis, you can identify steps in your new product initiative that can be done in parallel to help you shorten your time to market.



3

Enable workflows with communication and collaboration

With the best possible workflow in place, it's critical to create an effective communications infrastructure—especially when it fosters collaboration across all the teams participating in the new product development. This infrastructure builds on the tasks defined in your workflow to define the individuals and teams required to complete each task. Using product lifecycle management software to formalize processes makes it clear who does what (and when), and helps avoid numerous missteps that increase time and costs. The right communications infrastructure can help you manage version control, check-out and check-in procedures, and messaging. Engineering release software won't preclude the need for face-to-face meetings, but it can help to make those meetings more efficient.

4

Categorize parts to the point of uniqueness

Just as you avoid development efforts that repeat what's already been done, you can and should guard against specifying multiple parts that do essentially the same thing. Implement "Group Technology," a systematic approach to describing and categorizing parts by material, shape, size, electrical properties, and other physical and performance characteristics. Group Technology uses a "tree" structure to refine the categorization of parts to the point of uniqueness.

After doing this, most companies find a surprising number of equivalent parts—either exactly the same or close—that are specified in bills of materials for several different products. When development engineers find and use an existing part instead of specifying something new, you can avoid the time and cost of locating, sourcing, and acquiring a part you really don't need. More effective management of parts reduces design time, manufacturing set up time, and manufacturing through put time. It can also help reduce costs for raw materials and in process inventory.

Learn from the past

Use past product development experiences to refine and improve all your new product initiatives. Consider implementing an engineering release system, so you can retain a detailed history of how each project progressed, where there were delays or late completions, and other lessons that can guide you in streamlining processes and preventing delays and other problems on future projects.



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