

Don't try to predict the future, engineer it with Directed Evolution

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(Friday, May 19th, 2006)

How valuable would it be if you could know the future? Billions of dollars are spent annually on market research and product design/test all trying to determine what the customer is most likely to buy tomorrow. But what if there is a different way to go about this? This article describes [Ideation International's](#) tool called [Directed Evolution](#) and discusses how using it alleviates you from having to guess and try to hit that moving target, but instead, allows you to proactively *engineer* the future.

In general, every product goes through a well-known lifecycle known as the S-curve. Early on, when product technology is new and a consumer base is still forming, growth is sluggish forming the bottom of the classical S-curve. As the product catches on, the curve turns upward and the product enjoys a vigorous growth period. As technology matures, the market becomes saturated, and competitors arise, growth begins to flatten out, forming the top of the S-curve. Here, the product is at a critical point. Unless things change, growth will eventually turn into decline and the product will die out inevitably to be replaced by something else. Whether a competitor's product, suddenly gaining traction, or an entirely new product has emerged, the new winner is near the bottom of its own S-curve and about to flex into the growth period. And so, the world continues.

The challenge for the manufacturer is to be able to foresee the market forces that drive this cycle and stay ahead of it. If you are smart enough to make improvements to your product during the accelerated growth period, your product can avoid the eventual downturn and remain dominant. However, making changes too early in the lifecycle could kill the product. Also, you always run the risk of changing the product in a way counter to what the market wants. So what do you do at the critical point? How do you know in which direction to go?

In analyzing millions of patents and tens of thousands of case studies, [Altshuller](#) and his colleagues now comprising Ideation International recognized that systems do not evolve randomly. Rather, evolution tends along demonstrable principles called "[patterns of evolution](#)." These principles are general in nature and apply to virtually any system or product.

The Directed Evolution tool helps you systematically explore the application of the pattern of evolution to your product. Any evolution that comes out of the process has behind it the power and truth of history. If thousands of other products have followed a certain evolutionary path, yours is likely to do the same. This way, you avoid the pitfall of changing your product into something the market doesn't want. By applying the Directed Evolution methodology, you identify the approximate point on the S-curve where your product currently is. This prevents you from making changes too early.

However, there is one very important difference in Directed Evolution. Once you have identified what the next version of your product should be, the Direction Evolution tool

allows you to identify how your competitors will be able to compete with you. Constructing a patent fence, by essentially inventing their future too, blocks them from entering the market with a competing product. Therefore, you have essentially picked a point in the future to evolve to and have engineered a competitor-free pathway toward that future. Selecting a future using Directed Evolution is fundamentally different from attempting to predict what the future will be as is done traditionally. Rather, you are selecting the future you want to bring about and are actively structuring yourself and the market to maximize your success.