

Launching a new product

» **Anthony Carey**, the inventor of Core-Tex, and **Michol Dalcourt**, inventor of ViPR, talk about what it takes to launch a product successfully to the fitness market.

Anthony Carey, inventor of Core-Tex



The moment the concept came to me, I realised I had to see if it could work and if someone else had already had the idea and patented it. One of the first things I did with the idea was enlist the help of my very good friend (and now partner) Olden Carr to see if the concept could work.

Olden is an engineer and it is important to consult with someone with a mechanical mind to help put together a proof of concept prototype. With a working prototype, we were able to have something real to show some trusted friends and advisers. During this initial exposure of our idea, we received a critical piece of advice: anyone we present this to should sign a non-disclosure agreement.

During the process of building the first prototypes, we searched for any patents or trademarks that would prohibit us from moving forward. When we realised there were no other barriers to protecting our idea, we enlisted an intellectual property (IP) lawyer to patent the Core-Tex™ and protect our IP. The patenting process took 18 months from start to finish.

Initially, we approached several large equipment manufacturers with the hope

of licensing our product to them. We felt partnering with a large company with the resources to further design, manufacture and market the product was the fastest route to market. However, the pace at which many large equipment companies move is extremely slow. After many conversations and stops and starts with interested parties, years had passed. At this point, we felt we had to get this product to market, even without a big marketing budget behind us.

At this point, we went from inventors to manufacturers and some of the steps we had to consider were:

1. Mechanical drawings with very specific measurements, stress points, tolerances, etc.
2. Producing the necessary moulds and tools to manufacture the parts
3. The materials the product parts would be made from
4. Testing, inspecting and approving the first articles before mass production
5. Packaging of the product
6. Shipping and port delivery
7. Storage and fulfillment
8. Distribution

After these major financial and resource commitments, there was still the issue of marketing. Our first step into the market was with one of the best distributors in the US: Perform Better. We were extremely fortunate that Perform Better saw the potential for the product and gave us exceptional placement on the back cover on the very first catalogue we appeared in. How we were able to get started with Perform Better (and most of our distributors) probably had to do as much with my existing relationships and reputation in the fitness industry as the Core-Tex itself. Fortunately for us, people believed I would not get behind or bring to market something that was not valuable and commercially viable. Contacts were vital.

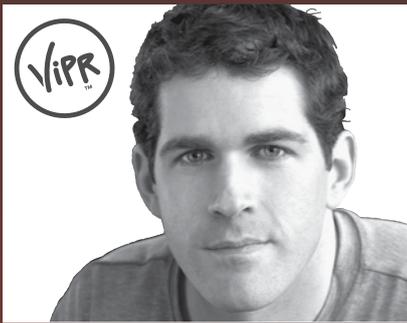
The product is also successful in the rehabilitation field, a field in which I did not have the same connections. Our ability to get distribution was a result of query letters, introductions from our existing network and being seen at industry trade shows. Being valid in the fitness industry helped us to introduce the rehabilitative benefits of the Core-Tex to that industry.

The reality of distribution is that you are usually one of many products. Therefore,

sticking a product in a distributor's catalogue or website and sitting back waiting for sales will likely lead to disappointment. Marketing and education are the two drivers of the business once manufacturing has been established.

One of the most valuable aspects of the entire experience has been having a successful mentor who has been with us from the prototype days. To say that we were fortunate to have one of the most successful fitness product inventors in history behind Core-Tex would be a massive understatement. Tom Campanaro of Total Gym/Gravity Systems has been instrumental in advising us along the way and his experience continues to play a critical role in the growth of the product.

Michol Dalcourt, inventor of ViPR



The idea for ViPR™ originated in my university days and the preconception I had of the human body. If anyone's view is that we are a series of different muscles that do different things, then you're going to train those muscles independently. That's how we trained but, with the hockey players we coached, we saw there was a difference between the effectiveness of someone who lived in a rural area and an urban area regarding their movement.

What made them effective was they were able to work their entire body at one time, so for them shovelling dirt and lifting bales of hay was a body-gain and body-training modality. It wasn't just specific to the arms. All the science we were looking at was also pointing to the body being one unified thing so, with that broad concept in mind, we looked at how we trained and the equipment we were using.

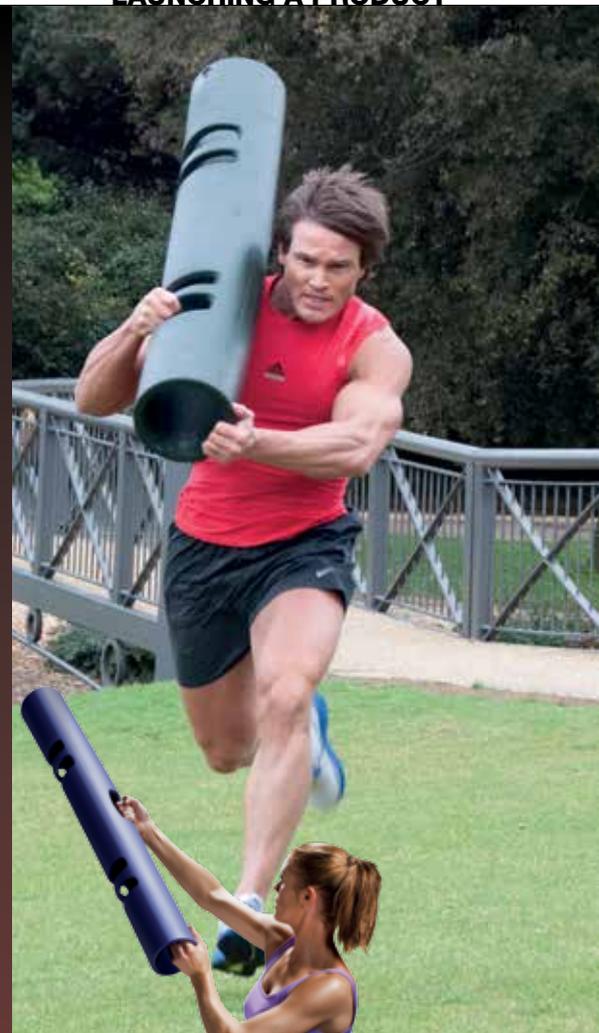
The next step was to produce a tool that was heavy enough to challenge the appropriate tissues in certain ways. We started to flip this rubber mat that we

rolled up and I thought that, if we put handles on it, then we could pick it up and it would have enough mass that we could weight it and un-weight it accordingly to elicit certain goals. So that's exactly what I did. I had these prototypes made and we started to test them with elite professional hockey players. They came back and said "the game slowed down for us". Their ability to move had increased, as they had been training their whole body.

It took us five years from our first prototype to getting it to market. Part of that process is putting together your patents and IP protection and the business structure, which all needs to be in place before distribution. The next part is getting the manufacturing to such a level where you can scale it: where you can make more of them but keep the same quality. Then you need to look at the education and application of it: what you can do with it. And then you have to trial the whole process.

We found that the fitness industry was open to the product; there were many educators and opinion leaders that blazed a trail for us and spoke about movement and functional training and they created a space for ViPR to live in and thrive. When we hit the market, the timing was perfect for us as there was a very receptive audience. Had it been that we came out as soon as we created ViPR, five years previously, it probably would have been more of a push to try and educate individuals but we took a lot of the good research and ideas and applied them right away.

The advice I would give to anyone thinking about launching a product is to be patient as this is a process. Don't think you have to do it so quickly before someone else does it before you – this is a fear I often hear but have rarely seen realised. People want to get their product out first but this normally means they don't do their homework and research properly and either their education fails, their product can't be delivered at scale or they haven't created a space for the product. The next thing I would suggest is getting a working prototype and protecting that with IP, trademark and patent. After that you will have to monetise it somehow – either through a partnership, venture capital money or from friends and family. **fpb**



Michol Dalcourt is an educator, author, trainer, inventor, and an industry leader in the areas of human movement and performance training. Michol is the inventor of ViPR, a functional fitness tool being used in top clubs and with professional athletic teams. www.viprfit.com

Anthony Carey holds a master's degree in biomechanics and athletic training, and is a certified strength and conditioning specialist and clinical exercise specialist. He is the inventor of Core-Tex. www.coretexfitness.com