


# Great business ideas

**A**

Dr Kate Pitts is a researcher at the e-Research Centre, University of Oxford. She was asked the question: *In your opinion, what were the best business ideas of the last 15 years?* Predict what she will say. Think of products and services.

**B**

 CD1.39 Listen to the first part of the interview. What products and services does Kate mention? Why does she think they were excellent ideas?

**C**

 CD1.40 Listen to the second part and answer these questions.

- 1 What types of company spend a lot of time and money on research and development?
- 2 Which company spends nearly 25% of the cost of sale on research and development?

**CD1 TRACK 39 (I = INTERVIEWER, KP = KATE PITTS)**

**I:** In your opinion, what were the best business ideas of the last 15 years?

**KP:** I've thought about this for quite a long time and, in my opinion, it's a service and two products. The first is eBay, and this works for me because it provides individuals and small businesses with a channel to market that didn't exist before. It started in the dot-com boom and has been extremely successful, with a turnover in 2009 of \$2.4 billion. It's not a new idea though – running an auction is almost as old as society. It's based on a model of traditional auctions. It's just transferred the model and the thinking to a different environment.

My second is the product, and it's a USB stick for computers, or plug-and-play devices. This enabled data and pictures to be easily transportable and satisfied a demand for easy portability from computer to computer. The amount of data that can be transported now is enormous; and it had the huge benefit of meaning that you didn't have to take your portable computer with you everywhere. So it satisfied a basic customer need. The technology itself also enabled a lot of other devices.

The final one is the digital camera. I'm not sure it's – if it's strictly an invention of the last 15 years, or if it's just become a mass-market item, but it's revolutionised photography and it's now incorporated into many other devices as a free gift, like mobile phones or PCs. And again, it satisfied a customer demand to share pictures and images quickly and easily.




**CD1 TRACK 40 (I = INTERVIEWER, KP = KATE PITTS)**

**I:** Do companies spend enough time on research and development?

**KP:** I think this depends very much on the industry. There are some product-based companies, like pharmaceuticals and high-tech companies, that spend an enormous amount of time and money on research and development. Nearly 25 per cent of the cost of sale, for example, at Ericsson, the Finnish mobile-phone company, are on research and development.

I strongly believe that most companies can benefit from using information and relationships within their own company to actually develop new products and services. My definition of innovation is to look at what everybody else sees, and see something different. So that might mean looking at what you already do, and looking at where you can do it slightly differently to increase your product range, or extending your products into new markets. This can save time and money.



 CD1.40 Listen to the second part again and complete the gaps in the audio script.

I strongly believe that most companies can benefit from using .....<sup>1</sup> and .....<sup>2</sup> within their own company to actually develop new .....<sup>3</sup> and services. My definition of .....<sup>4</sup> is to look at what everybody else sees, and see something .....<sup>5</sup>.

So that might mean looking at what you already do, and looking at where you can do it slightly differently to .....<sup>6</sup> your product range, or .....<sup>7</sup> your products into new markets. This can save .....<sup>8</sup> and money.



**E** **Discuss these questions.**

- 1 What will be the best business idea in the next 15 years?
- 2 What would you like someone to invent?

## Three great ideas

- A** What makes a business idea a really *great* idea? Brainstorm as many points as you can.

**EXAMPLE:** *It results in an increase in sales and profit.*

# WHO NEEDS TRANSLATORS?

Google is developing software for the first phone capable of translating foreign languages almost instantly. By building on existing technologies in voice recognition and automatic translation, Google hopes to have a basic system ready within a couple of years. If it works, it could eventually transform communication among speakers of the world's 6,000-plus languages.

The company has already created an automatic system for translating text on computers, which is being honed by scanning millions of multilingual websites and documents. So far, it covers 52 languages. Google also has a voice-recognition system that enables phone users to conduct web searches by speaking commands into their phones rather than typing them in.

Now it is working on combining the two technologies to produce software capable of understanding a caller's voice and translating it into a synthetic equivalent in a foreign language. Like a professional human interpreter, the phone would analyse "packages" of speech, listening to the speaker until it understands the full meaning of words and phrases, before attempting translation.



# SAFER CYCLING

Swedish designers have created a cycling “collar” that is worn around the neck with an airbag hidden inside. When sensors in the device determine a crash has happened, an airbag instantly inflates around the cyclist’s head to form a helmet.

The invention was presented today in Stockholm. It will go on sale in Sweden early next year for about £50. The designers have spent six years developing it. Terese Alstin, one of the inventors, said, “The protection should include keeping the sense of freedom and not ruining your hairstyle.”

The device has been improved by recreating hundreds of accidents using crash-test dummies and real riders. “We have developed a unique, patented, mathematical method to distinguish these movement patterns,” say the inventors. A small helium-gas cylinder inflates the airbag in 0.1 seconds and is designed to let cyclists see at all times.

The airbag stays inflated for several seconds. It is powered by a rechargeable battery. Co-inventor Anna Haupt said, “The shell of the collar is removable and available in many different styles and fabrics, and will be launched in new fashion collections.”





# Going for gold

Apart from being gold-plated – and the fact that they are bulletproof – they seem much like any other vending machine. But instead of chocolate bars, a network of “gold-to-go” machines dispenses 24-carat bullion in a smart presentation box.

Originally designed as a marketing device for an online gold-trading business, the machines have become such a success that their inventor plans to build a global network, installing them everywhere from fitness centres to cruise ships.

Thomas Geissler, the German businessman behind the machines, said their unexpected success was the result of a recent interest in gold. “Our customers are those who are catching on to the idea that gold is a safe investment at a time of financial instability,” he said.

Since the first machine was installed in May, in the lobby of Abu Dhabi’s Emirates Palace hotel, 20 gold-to-go machines have appeared across Europe. Germany already has eight. Next month, the first machines will open in the United States – in Las Vegas and Florida.

The company claims its gold is cheaper than that available from the banks, largely because its overheads are lower, and that unlike at a bank, the machine gold is available immediately.



<b>Questions</b>	<i>Who needs translators?</i>	<i>Safer cycling</i>	<i>Going for gold</i>
1 What is the great/unusual idea?			
2 What problem does this idea solve?			
3 Which markets are mentioned in relation to this idea?			
4 In terms of time, at what stage of development is the idea?			


**D****Discuss these questions in pairs.**

- 1 Which of the ideas do you find the most interesting? Why?
- 2 Which idea do you think will be the most profitable?
- 3 Which idea will reach the most markets?
- 4 Can you think of any problems any of the ideas might have?

# **HOMework**

**Match a verb from box A with a noun from box B to complete the sentences below. Use a suitable form of the verb–noun combination.**

A	B
to develop to extend to make to meet to protect to take to win	the environment advantage of (something) a (product) range a business idea a breakthrough a need an award



- 1 Brainstorming is an effective way of ..... *developing a business idea* .....
- 2 A couple of years ago, scientists ..... in the treatment of cancer.
- 3 'Eco-consumers' choose companies which do not produce a lot of toxic waste and have a clear policy of .....
- 4 Sometimes an idea may simply be when a company .....  
..... an opportunity to offer more choice to its customers.
- 5 If one of your products ..... for innovation, prospective customers may see you as a dynamic, high-quality company and decide to choose you over your competitors.
- 6 Our company would like to attract a wider variety of customers, that's why we are planning to ..... of cosmetics and toiletries.
- 7 A good business idea is one that generates profits and at the same time

**ИСПОЛЬЗУЙ СЛОВА ИЗ ПРЕДЫДУЩЕГО  
ЗАДАНИЯ**

**These phrases are often used when replying to an order. Complete them with words from the box.**

deliver   doing   hesitate   ~~placing~~   receipt

- Thank you for .....*placing*.....<sup>1</sup> an order with (name of the company).
- Thank you for your order of (date).
- We confirm .....<sup>2</sup> of your order dated (date).
- Shipping normally takes two to three days / a week / etc.
- We can .....<sup>3</sup> within a week / a month / etc.
- Do not .....<sup>4</sup> to contact us if you need further information / details.
- If you have any queries, please contact us.
- We look forward to receiving further orders from you.
- Looking forward to .....<sup>5</sup> business with you again.

Basically, the rules for writing business e-mails and letters are the same: be clear, be so polite and do not write more than you have to. Over the past ten years, business correspondence has generally become a simpler and more informal, and this tendency is even more visible in e-mails. But some things they have not changed. Clarity of layout is still important so you should to use paragraphs and space them out. Grammar and spelling too need to be accurate and if you want to make a good impression on your business partners. Even the best spellchecker cannot find all the mistakes you make so always to check your e-mails carefully.

**ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ПО НАПИСАНИЮ ЭЛЕКТРОННЫХ  
БИЗНЕС ПИСЕМ. НУЖНО ПРОСТО ПРОЧИТАТЬ**