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Mom inventors get their other babies to market

For many mothers, having a creation picked up by a national chain validates the hard work and sacrifices they make to juggle child-raising with creating a product.

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For many mom inventors, having a creation picked up by a national chain validates the hard work and sacrifices they make to juggle child-raising with creating a product.

Excitedly snapping pictures of herself and her daughter next to a rack in the Babies R Us store in Temecula, Stephanie Veve ignored the raised eyebrows of passing customers.

She was celebrating: On display were her Pop Pals, an invention she thought up one summer day in 2006 to hold the dripping ice-pop frozen treats her three kids loved.

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The Pop Pals journey from Veve's kitchen table to big-box retailer was challenging and expensive for the 39-year-old former massage therapist. It was also the realization of a dream shared by other mom entrepreneurs who aspire to have their inventions carried by a major merchant.

"To actually walk into a store and buy your product made it all very real and exciting," she said. Not every new product is a fit for major retailers. But for many mom inventors, having an

invention picked up by a national chain validates the hard work and sacrifices they make to juggle child-raising with creating a product.

It's never been easy for inventors to get the attention of retail buyers, but the economic downturn has made it even harder as chains have reduced the number of vendors they do business with. But they all

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want the next new top seller.

"Products are coming into our stores right now that are brand new and started on somebody's craft table," said Carrie Doll, senior vice president of merchandising and marketing at Anna's Linens. The 264-store chain based in Costa Mesa recently launched a program to carry more mom-invented items.

Just last month, Target unveiled a new line of brilliantly colored, organic baby clothes designed and sold by the moms who own the Little Seed, a boutique in Los Angeles.

[Soleil Moon Frye](#), 33, and Paige Goldberg Tolmach, 43, credit "a mutual friend" as the door opener that started the process.

Getting a foot in the door at a large retailer is a major hurdle for inventors. Entrepreneurs can try to contact buyers on their own or find a distributor or manufacturers' representative who will do it for them. Trade shows such as the [ABC Kids Expo](#) held in Las Vegas each fall are good places to make contacts.

Whatever the route, being prepared is key, experts said. A product should be past the prototype stage with manufacturing lined up and packaging in place. Safety tests and liability insurance are often required.

"You have to think it through and prepare your product," said Karen Waksman, a former manufacturer's rep who now works as a consultant. She has written an e-book titled "Product for Profit."

Nerves of steel also help. Just ask Alison McKinstry, 40, of Ladera Ranch and her business partner and sister, Jill Franks, 37, of Long Beach.

The women said they thought they had gotten through the hard part when supermarket chains [Safeway](#) and Albertsons agreed to carry their Mommy's Messages lunchbox notes. Then, product samples arrived from their Chinese manufacturer with the messages in the wrong order.

When that got fixed, another problem emerged. The individual packages of messages arrived at a distribution warehouse in Tennessee with an extra number at the end of the UPC code, and the distributor was furious. McKinstry said she received an e-mail telling her "We need to talk to you about your product immediately."

The women pleaded for time, and with the help from a mother-in-law and some high school students, 10,000 packages were opened, a new UPC sticker was applied, and the packets were reboxed and shipped off again. The product is due in stores any day now.

Product development requires "incredible stamina," said consultant Tamara Monosoff of Mom Inventors Inc. "It just takes a lot of hard work and determination." Monosoff's website and books are among the many resources devoted to helping mom inventors.

Many moms are already on to their next ideas when their first products hit the shelves. "It opened up so many doors for us," Tolmach said. "The point is, it could go anywhere from here."

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