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—MEG WHITMAN, CEO of Quibi, former CEO of eBay, and author of *The Power of Many*

HOW WE Make STUFF NOW

Turn Ideas into Products
That Build Successful Businesses

JULES PIERI

Cofounder and CEO

 THE GROMMET™

PRAISE FOR *HOW WE MAKE STUFF NOW*

If you're a Maker who wants to build a business, look no further than the priceless advice that Jules and hundreds of companies have shared here.

—MEG WHITMAN, CEO of Quibi, former CEO of eBay,
and author of *The Power of Many*

Generous, hard-won lessons and case studies for anyone who's hoping to launch a product that makes things better.

—SETH GODIN, author of *This Is Marketing*

My professional life has been devoted to what I call “the making of things.” Up until now, we Makers have been on our own—figuring it all out one day at a time, every day. Now, finally, we have our user's manual, our twenty-first-century handbook to leading a life driven by following the compulsion to do good work, to make cool things. Buy this, read this, underline key passages, turn down pages. Buy a second copy and give it away to someone who's always dreamed of creating.

—GEORGE GENDRON, editor-in-chief of *Inc.* magazine,
creator of the Inc. 500, and cofounder of The Solo Project

How We Make Stuff Now is pragmatic truth. A digestible read that will fan the flame of entrepreneurial passion while anchoring the Maker mind in down-to-earth counsel.

—JOHN VENHUIZEN, president and CEO of Ace Hardware

Maker: Here's your step-by-step guide to design, manufacturing, marketing, fundraising, and everything else you'll need to do to turn your dream into a business. *How We Make Stuff Now* is packed with practical advice and inspirational case studies.

—TOM EISENMANN, Howard H. Stevenson Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School

There is no one better than Jules Pieri, who has shepherded thousands of consumer products through the keyhole for mass adoption, to write a very practical guide for the dreamers among us, who have an idea for a product and the passion to see it through.

—ROBIN CHASE, founder of Zipcar and author of *Peers Inc*

This is the Maker Bible for starting your business. Read it. Reread it. Dog-ear it, take notes, mark it up.

—CHAD LAURANS, founder and CEO of SimpliSafe

Building hardware products is hard for every company—as evidenced by the countless delayed and failed product launches. With this book and her company, The Grommet, Jules has achieved an ambitious mission to help industry outsiders build both viable products and vibrant businesses.

—HARDI MEYBAUM, founder of GrabCAD, general partner at Matrix Partners, and author of *The Art of Product Design*

This book breaks down what a Maker needs to know into digestible, practical, bite-size gems. *How We Make Stuff Now* is a great how-to guide to support owners on their journey, whether they are just getting started or well on their way!

—TRYNKA SHINEMAN, CEO of Vistaprint

Jules's commitment and experience are an inspiration, and her book is a gift to founders. It's a complete playbook chock-full of tangible, experience-driven insights and advice. Armed with this wisdom and guidance, I predict a whole new class of successful Makers and founders will emerge.

—KIRSTEN GREEN, founder of Forerunner Ventures

Starting a Maker business is hard. The odds are against you. This book literally changes those odds by giving you a road map. I wish I had this when I started my business!

—GAIL GOODMAN, cofounder and former CEO of Constant Contact

As an investor in many of the products The Grommet has helped launched—including Fitbit, Molekule, littleBits, TrackR, and Sphero—I know firsthand the joys of building these exciting and challenging companies. *How We Make Stuff Now* reflects the deep insights Jules Pieri acquired through helping over 3,000 companies.

—BRAD FELD, founder of Foundry Group

As someone who's worked with small businesses for decades, I know how hard it can be not just to come up with a great product but to find, serve, and keep customers. A product isn't a business—no matter how great that product is. Few people know this as well as Jules Pieri. Jules is genuinely passionate about helping independent Makers succeed and is uniquely knowledgeable. In this book, she provides case studies, critical advice, and inspirational stories about Makers who've made it—all based on her years of expertise as cofounder of The Grommet. Jules shows you how to bring your innovative idea to market and create a sustainable business.

—RHONDA ABRAMS, small business columnist at *USA Today*
and author of *Successful Business Plan*

This fascinating book by the cofounder and CEO of the pioneering online platform for Makers, The Grommet, is packed with a rich range of invaluable how-to knowledge for the growing community of Maker-entrepreneurs to take their innovative ideas and products to market success. Pieri combines keen observations on Maker culture and its potential business opportunities and challenges. It is essential reading for entrepreneurs, product developers, designers, and business and design students.

—GUNALAN NADARAJAN, dean of Stamps School of
Art and Design at the University of Michigan

Stop, drop, and roll: Every kid knows this is what you do when you find yourself on fire. If you want to start a product business (a Maker business), *stop* what you are doing, *drop* into a chair, and *roll* through this book. Read it today, and it will save you months of pain and suffering.

—MARK HATCH, CEO of Maker Partners and
author of *The Maker Movement Manifesto*

A must-read for anyone who loves gadgets and the world of invention.

—STEVE GREENBERG, monthly contributor to the
Today Show and author of *Gadget Nation*

In writing a Grommet case study, I was struck by the many layers of value the company creates. This book is yet another worthy embodiment of its contributions to our economy.

—LYNDA APPEGATE, Sarofim-Rock Professor of Business
Administration Emerita at Harvard Business School

HOW WE *Make* STUFF NOW

Turn Ideas into Products
That Build Successful Businesses

JULES PIERI



New York Chicago San Francisco Athens London Madrid
Mexico City Milan New Delhi Singapore Sydney Toronto

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*To my cofounder, Joanne Domeniconi,
who has done more to level the playing field
for innovative products and Makers
than anyone I know*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd always wondered why people fawn over their editors at the end of books. Now I know. Thank you, Casey Ebro, for taking a risk on me.

I disappeared once a week for months while I wrote this book. Thank you, Grommet team, for not missing a beat in my absence. Thank you, Drew, for letting me regularly commandeer your home office, and obsessively stash all your clutter as part of my weekly procrastination ritual.

Bridget Samburg wrangled all the research for these Maker case studies. Imagine chasing down dozens of “one-armed paper-hangers” who are very busy building their businesses. That part was harder than the actual writing.

I'd always wanted to write a book. But I wasn't really doing anything about it until Charlie McEnerney got the ball rolling with a well-crafted proposal backed by his real-world experience in publishing.

My sons are three of the finest people I know and the best cheerleaders a mom could have. That is everything to me, and the thought of their support/judgment/pride fueled this book as much as coffee.

Working closely with over 3,000 Makers gave me a wholly unfair advantage in shaping this book. I hope it saves steps, preserves resources, reduces isolation, and aids success for future Makers who pursue their dreams.

INTRODUCTION

At noon on October 20, 2008, I pressed a button that has since shaped nearly every waking hour of my life. At that moment Daily Grommet's original website went live, and we launched our very first product from a fledgling Maine-based Maker, Bunnytail Blankets.

The night before the launch I looked across our shared IKEA desk at my hardworking cofounder Joanne Domeniconi and said a silent prayer to God, "Please forgive me for what I am about to do." Why? Because from the start, we committed to surfacing an innovative product and company *every single weekday*, supporting each with original research, vibrant video stories, and a nationwide marketing campaign. I knew this responsibility would set a life-altering demand for us both and that the pace in our not-yet-real company would be fast and exciting but also totally relentless.

We were clear about our unwavering mission to fight for the little guy. Over the course of our careers we had seen the odds stacked against innovative products. The United States had lost many of its specialty and local stores. These small retailers historically take bets on new products and develop the market for them, customer by customer. National retail chains were increasingly competing on price instead of sourcing distinctive products. Their buying processes became unwieldy and conservative. The risks of taking on an unknown supplier—no matter how promising the product—were increasingly considered higher than the likely benefits. Still today, that dysfunction in retail threatens to squash product innovation nearly at birth.

Joanne and I decided to build an informative, inspiring, trustworthy place where emerging Makers could "find their people."

We knew that these Makers would have many steep mountains to climb in building their businesses, and that gaining awareness and credibility would be by far the hardest one. New companies do not have built-in audiences or marketing budgets, and if retailers were no longer playing that critical connection role, we predicted there would be a whole lot of worthy products all dressed up with no place to go. We believed that losing those vibrant young companies before they had a fighting chance was an unacceptable cost to our economy and society. It made us spitting mad, and it galvanized us.

So we built a massive community of the very best kind—people from all walks of life who are curious, smart, and looking to support entrepreneurs and innovation. Over time, Daily Grommet became The Grommet, and today we are a powerful and unique market-maker for inspired young products. One of the reasons for our resonance and growth is that our community embraces the age-old human drive to create and invent. Our supporters and customers experience The Grommet as a place to see fascinating passions and talents realized, and to help the intrepid people birthing new companies. And some significant proportion of our many millions of followers cheers for these people because they hope to be one of those Makers someday.

Makers come from all walks of life. Our research across the 3,000 Makers we have partnered with reveals that they are also career changers. Only 10 percent of Grommet Makers have prior experience in the area where they build their business. ER nurses turn into tech device entrepreneurs. Lawyers invent water bottles. So if you secretly believe “I have no qualifications to launch a product,” you are in very good company.

It is easier to get into Harvard than to get a product sanctioned as a Grommet. Less than 3 percent of the 300 products that are submitted weekly are accepted. But despite the lack of relevant experience of most Grommet Makers, a guaranteed commonality is that their products are distinctive, innovative, and live up to their promises. Solving a problem in a fresh way or creating an

interesting business model does not require domain expertise. It requires tenacity, passion, and energy.

But what became plainly obvious over the years of working with Makers is that creating the product is just the start. The minute your baby gets into the market, your company has to be credible in 16 different other competencies, ranging from logistics to packaging to financial management. And we usually find that any given company is good at about 8 of those 16 competencies. Until we get to know them, we just don't know which 8 areas will be lacking. And we can't fix them all, no matter how much advice and how many lessons learned we share.

Sometimes one particular weakness can be debilitating. In consumer life, people don't really care whether a company is small or large when it comes to, say, delivery time frames and customer support expectations. Running out of inventory, having your shipping packages fail, or not answering the phone can wipe out hard-won sales territory and customer goodwill. The reality is that the under-resourced little guys have to throw their bodies at covering many of the business operations until they can scale enough to bring in a full team or professional expertise. That period between "start" and "sustainable business" can call on a founder's every last wit, resource, and shred of energy, so expert guidance from those who have cracked similar problems is invaluable.

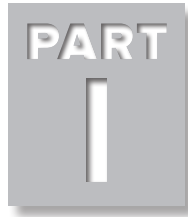
That is the point of this book. If you are an aspiring Maker, this book will help you evaluate a potential product and market opportunity. This endeavor will change your life in the same way pushing the button to take Grommet live changed mine. You will want to be sure that this idea is worth the potential assault to your current sanity and stability. And if you decide to take the plunge and pursue the business, the book will also help you stretch your precious time and resources wisely across all the necessary functions you will build. When you are as "busy as a one-armed paper-hanger" building your dream, you want to move efficiently and wisely.

INTRODUCTION

This book is organized in two sections. Part One provides a how-to for getting your business started (Chapters 1–5). Part Two is all about building the 16 necessary competencies (Chapters 6–21). You can read it in any order you like or need. The advice is drawn from our experience with our 3,000 Makers, who work across a couple dozen product categories. We’ve continuously advised them as they attack new territories, and much of our input is similar from one company to another because people are solving identical problems in isolation. We’ve also learned and passed along the lessons from Makers who have mastered the 16 necessary competencies. They are the ultimate experts, so I relay their experiences and lessons learned in the form of case studies in each chapter, to bring the lessons to life and to put a friendly name and face to their awesome products.

A whopping 135 million Americans already call themselves Makers. Some are describing the output from hobbies, and others have multimillion-dollar businesses with dozens or hundreds of employees. This will only grow. Thirty-seven percent of U.S. high school students say they want to start their own businesses, as do 25 percent of military veterans. Much of this creative energy is headed toward joining the ranks of existing Makers. Why? Because there is no other thrill or source of deep satisfaction in business quite like seeing a physical product you envisioned come to fruition.

It’s an honor to have a young business entrust us with its baby and its story. I hope that this book will help shape the next wave of successful Makers. These are the heroes creating jobs and shaping our economy. Perhaps one of them will be you. Maybe, just maybe, we’ll even meet in the happy event of a Grommet partnership and launch.



Starting Your Business

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSUMER PRODUCTS

Before the rise of corporations in the late 1800s, products were invented because people simply needed something for their work or life. They were the results of local ingenuity, put to use on the farm or in the workplace. Some might be shared locally, but there was no easy way for a product to reach people who lived elsewhere—unless the product was distributed by Sears, Roebuck and Company through its mail order catalogs, starting in the 1890s. Retail distribution, as we know it today, didn't exist, so when an innovative product was created, it would take years to catch on, if ever.

After corporations began developing research and development (R&D) departments, they started producing products. The twentieth century brought us an era of company-driven innovation from Ford, General Electric, Harley-Davidson, and RCA, as well as from visionaries like Thomas Edison and his Idea Factory in Menlo Park, New Jersey.

When I started my career as an industrial designer in the 1980s, consumer products were still mostly originated by large companies. For example, I worked at Unisys, Data General, Stride Rite, Keds, and Hasbro—all large corporations. By and large, designers like me had to work for large companies because these organizations had all the resources that enabled us to do our job. Because of that, our expertise tended to exist in a walled garden. Even if I had struck out on my own, an independent entrepreneur would have had a hard time finding someone like me, much less affording my services. Add on top of that the likely need for mechanical, electrical, and/or manufacturing engineering expertise, and sourcing professional and expensive prototyping. Layer in the massive efforts of commissioning packaging, getting financing, finding manufacturing, and purchasing costly broadcast or print media to build awareness. No matter how committed you were, the vertical mountain in front of an aspiring entrepreneur would have discouraged the vast majority of individuals—until recently.

The only condition better for making a product 20 or more years ago was that retail was much richer, with a far broader variety of local and specialty stores that had not yet been sucker-punched by Amazon and big-box retailers. If an entrepreneur could run the gauntlet of challenges to create a product, there was a healthy network of stores and sales rep organizations that stood ready to welcome innovation from all corners. So other than the very last mile—retail distribution—consumer products were the purview of the powerful and large. The exceptional entrepreneurs who pushed through institutional and financial barriers to get a product to market were truly heroic.

Consumer products are physical items you can see and touch, so it's interesting to note that the main reason for the successful explosion of independent companies and brands over the last 20 years is something entirely invisible: the Internet. Technically, the World Wide Web was created by Tim Berners-Lee (a former neighbor of mine) in 1989. It became conveniently accessible to ordinary

people in the mid-1990s with Marc Andreessen's creation of the web browser Mosaic (later Netscape.) That's when I jumped on the bandwagon and joined a startup that scoured early bulletin boards and user groups to glean actionable consumer insights for consumer brands. (There was no Google or other easy way to search for those kinds of conversations and comments online.)

I also became a very early adopter of e-commerce for a great variety of household purposes—driven by both curiosity and the steamrolling time pressures of balancing a career and the needs of three young sons. At the time, my otherwise modern friends were asking me, “Do you really trust getting food and furniture online? Why do you use e-mail? It seems like a pain in the neck.” But by 1999 these conversations were largely in the rearview mirror with the dot-com boom roaring and broad participation across personal and professional landscapes spreading.

That's the superficial consumer side of Internet and broadband penetration. Here's why the underground game started changing for product Makers, too: the Internet represents access to the keys to the castle—knowledge previously hidden behind college degrees, large companies, professional subscriptions, societies, and artifacts like industrial component directories. All the know-how and easy access to resources of the Internet became long-overdue fuel to the fire of creative people. A proxy for this expansion in access to creating innovation is patent applications. Since 2002 global applications have grown exponentially, and 2016 set a record with over 3 million applications submitted.¹ China represents the lion's share of applications, with the United States a distant second, but the European Patent Office also reflects a massive 40 percent growth—the biggest increase since 1982.

It is hard to overstate the impact of an aspiring entrepreneur being able to Google “U.S. toothpaste use” or “pet product sales trends,” rather than going to the library to scour microfiche of government market data. Compare tapping YouTube to figure out how to use Arduino (easily programmable electronic components)

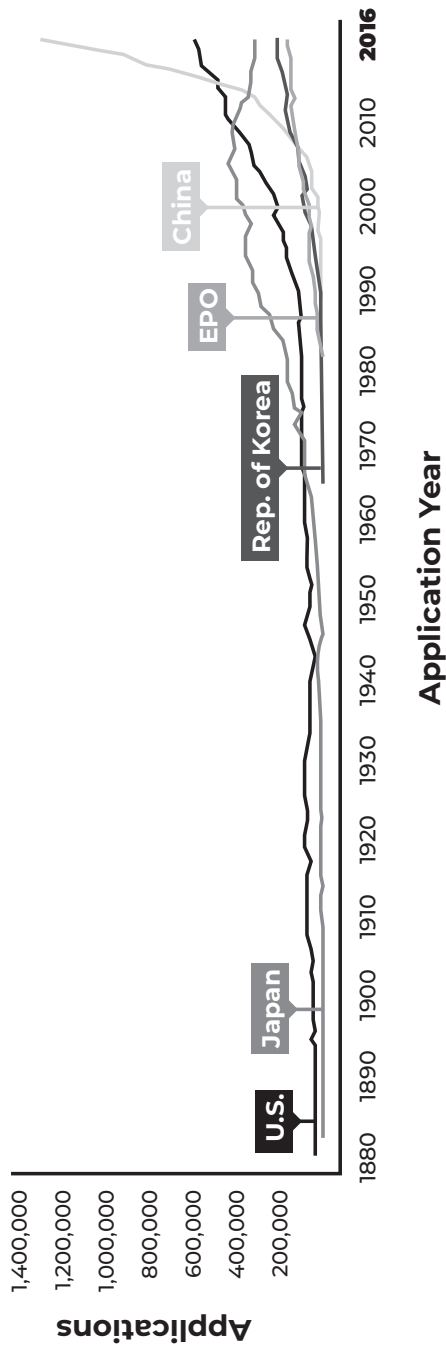


Figure 1.1 Trend in Patent Applications for the Top Five Offices

Note: The IP office of the Soviet Union, not represented in this figure, was the leading office of the world in terms of filings from 1964 to 1969. Like Japan and the U.S., the office of the Soviet Union saw stable application numbers until the early 1960s, after which it recorded rapid growth in applications filed.

Source: World Intellectual Property Indicators 2017 Patents, http://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo_pub_941_2017-chapter2.pdf

instead of going through your Rolodex to find an electrical engineer to help you. Imagine using the Yellow Pages to find a packaging vendor—where you would be restricted to the businesses in your local community—versus using a search engine. For every single business function of a startup there are massive and often superb resources just a few clicks away. The Internet enabled a panoply of new businesses to form around the Maker Movement, too—much like the gold rush birthed the sellers of blue jeans and picks for gold prospectors. And these businesses, along with free information sources, replace what used to be thousands of road miles, work hours, and investment dollars required just to have a first attempt at a new competency or supplier.

The best statistics for illustrating the flood of independent products reaching the market are coming out of the CPG (consumer packaged goods) arena because grocery and drug store brands have always had historically better market share tracking than fashion, tech, or most other product categories. Ryan Caldbeck, the founder of the CPG investment fund CircleUp, succinctly summarized the salient trends in a 2018 tweetstorm:

In almost every category large brands [are] losing market share to small brands because 1) consumers are demanding products that meet their unique needs, 2) marketing costs [are] switching from fixed to variable, 3) direct distribution [is] becoming more important. Net = higher demand and lower barriers.

Caldbeck continued, “At the same time, large brands are spending almost nothing on R&D. They don’t have a pipeline of innovation. They have 50–100 years of R&D-less cultures. Big CPG spends too much on marketing. So you have stale incumbents pumping [millions] into marketing the same products they’ve sold for 50 years. BTW—kudos to @KITKAT for evolving their tagline from ‘Have a break’ (1960s) to ‘Gimme a Break’ (now). Impressive.”

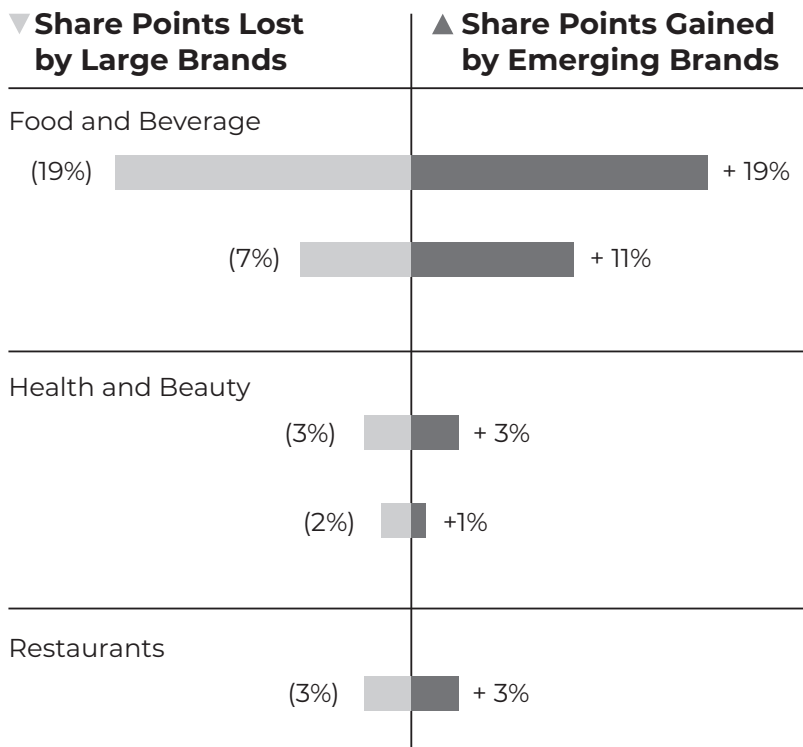
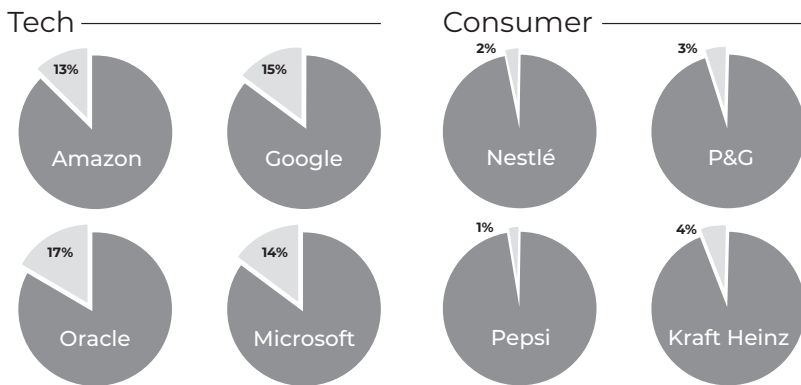


Figure 1.2 Seismic Shift in Market Share

Source: CircleUp, Ryan Caldbeck

Caldbeck concludes by illustrating both the market size for consumer products and the rising opportunities for smaller enterprises to be great investments because they have a growing opportunity to be bought by the moribund incumbents seeking a competitive edge and faster speed to market. “Big CPG outsources innovation because they aren’t nimble enough to do it themselves. They buy the innovation. Last year the M&A market was >\$310 billion. That’s with a B. And did I mention this market is absolutely massive? >\$15 trillion. That’s with a T. Zoom out: So you have one of the largest industries in the world (CPG), with stale incumbents that are losing market share and can’t innovate.”



Why does this matter? Big consumer companies are slow to adapt to changing consumer tastes because they spend so little on researching what those tastes are. More investment in R&D could actually save Big CPG a lot of money in the long run because it could keep them from having to pay hundreds of millions to acquire upstart consumer brands.

Figure 1.3 Research and Development Spending as a Percentage of Annual Net Revenue

Source: CircleUp, Data from 2017 10K forms

In today's connected world, entrepreneurs in any field have unprecedented access to market information that can set them up for seizing this kind of opportunity so starkly illustrated in the consumer packaged goods arena. Simply tracking digital news, setting alerts, and participating in streamed events and meetups makes gaining expertise a credible activity.

In parallel to the product development malaise of too many big brands, many powerful technical advances appeared, such as CAD (computer aided design), digital manufacturing tools and online assembly, and additive manufacturing (3D printing.) The first large crowdfunding site, Indiegogo, was founded in 2008, and it and Kickstarter started really gathering steam by 2011. Marketplaces like Etsy (2005) and The Grommet (2008) provided new options for reaching a valuable audience. At every step in the product creation journey, resources have been getting both cheaper and more

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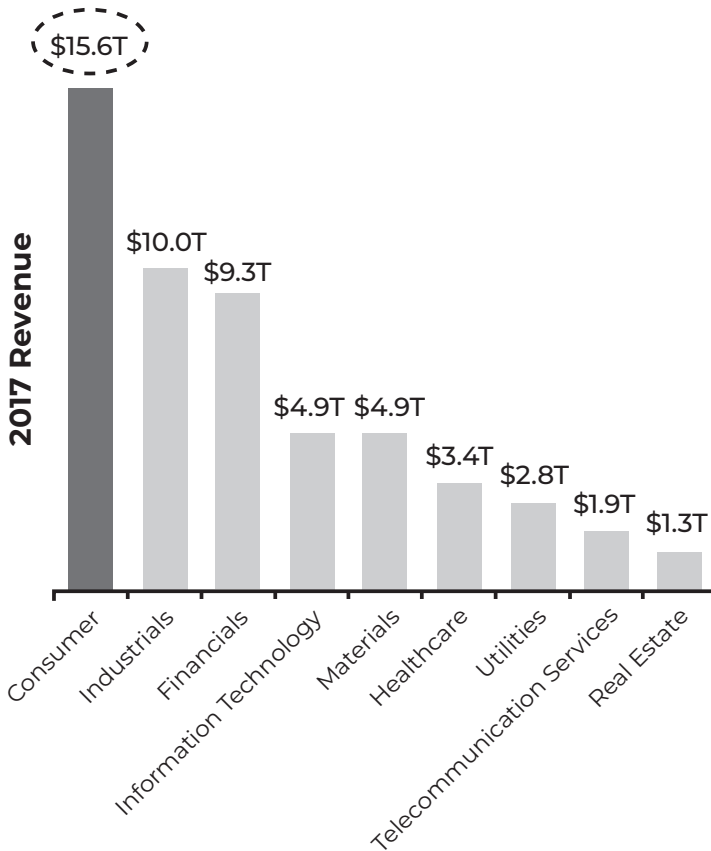


Figure 1.4 Sample U.S. Sector Revenue

Source: CircleUp, Ryan Caldbeck

accessible. These technology trends, along with a massive parallel interest in entrepreneurship, have created the Maker Movement.

Former *Wired* magazine editor Chris Anderson sums it up well:

I would argue that there have been two major industrial revolutions, with the third one emerging now. The first industrial evolution was about mechanisation; replacing muscle power with machine power and amplifying human productivity by letting machines do the

work. The second industrial revolution was arguably the computer revolution. But it wasn't the invention of computers. It was their democratisation; putting them in the hands of everybody with the PC and the Internet that unleashed a huge amount of talent, energy and creativity which was transformative. The third industrial revolution is just a combination of the first two: it's the Web revolution meets manufacturing.

The reason that this is even more transformative than the Web is simply that the world of physical stuff is bigger than the world of digital stuff. The manufacturing economy is much bigger than the information economy. And if those same social forces that transformed the world through the Web can be applied to physical goods, you would see tremendous social impact.²

I am writing this chapter from the porch of the gracious Magnolia Hall at the Savannah College of Art and Design. Beyond being impossibly atmospheric, it's an inspired place to write because John Berendt wrote *In the Midnight Garden of Good and Evil* here. But the location has an even greater significance for me. This is my second visit, my first being in 2009 when SCAD was the place where I first saw 3D printers in a design school setting. It is where I spied the tireless machines—available at \$15 per hour to happily chug out student concepts—and knew I was seeing the future. I was only one year into the development of The Grommet. It was an exhilarating but sobering time. The financial crisis was in full bloom, and I had bet my family's security and my career on two predictions: (1) that enough thoughtful and curious people would care about supporting innovative products from independent companies and (2) that there would be an explosion of great products from entrepreneurs. I saw those machines and I knew my instincts were right about this Maker Movement transformation that did not even have a name yet.

In taking my giant leap I was also betting on the simple enduring life force of human creativity. People have an age-old drive to solve problems, to invent, and to create. Because of my professional background I had a sense of the concurring sea change of opportunity for Makers and the expected obstacles. The range of resources for Makers advances every year by leaps and bounds. But this paradox of choice, in business as in life, can be paralyzing. This book will help you navigate those new opportunities and technologies, because even with great resources, you need to have a plan, to know the questions to ask, and to have real-life examples to illustrate the way. Welcome to your future—the one you can now create.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jules Pieri is cofounder and CEO of The Grommet, a site that has launched more than 2,000 consumer products since 2008. The company's Citizen Commerce™ movement is reshaping how products are discovered, shared, and bought.

Jules started her career as an industrial designer for technology companies and was an executive at Keds, Stride Rite, and Playskool. The Grommet is her third startup, following roles as VP at Design Continuum and President of Ziggs.com.

She was named one of Fortune's Most Powerful Women Entrepreneurs in 2013 and one of Goldman Sachs' 100 Most Interesting Entrepreneurs in 2014. She is currently an Entrepreneur in Residence at Harvard Business School.

Jules is frequently asked to speak on consumer trends and technologies, design, and entrepreneurship. She has presented at HBS, SCAD, MIT, and at conferences, including SXSW, PwC Women's Conference, Internet Retailer, and the Conference on World Affairs. She's been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and many other media outlets.

Visit thegrommet.com.

