

Foreword

By David Mann

Question: “How do you get from here to there?”

Response: “Well, if I was going **there** I wouldn’t leave from **here**.”

– Irish proverb

If you’ve picked up this book, chances are good that you’re a lot like me. I’m very curious about many things and a natural inventor (I built my first radio at the age of 10), I love the process of creating something new, and I’m passionate about science. I believe strongly in the importance of making space to shelter and nurture scientists while they invent and create. I am equally passionate about commercializing great ideas, and to do this I know it is of paramount importance to be able to articulate the value proposition that represents that great idea in a convincing yet simple manner.

I’m also a businessperson and investor. All 42 years of my career have been spent in technology environments, including in management and senior executive roles at a number of global telecommunications providers and vendors. Wearing the “business hat,” I recognize the practical limitations to the amount of sheltering of science and invention that can be supported from business and financial perspectives.

Frequently today, I am in the position of having to make decisions about what new inventions, creations and ideas will be funded – and which won’t. I use the *So what? who cares? why you?*TM methodology to help make those decisions, and I’m going to let you in on a little secret: ALL investors and business backers intuitively use a process like *So what? who cares? why you?*TM to make decisions about ideas, technologies and products just like yours.

Here is another secret: investors are invariably very savvy people who ask tough questions. When venture capitalists interview teams, they are, in different ways, asking the questions, “So what?” and, “who cares?” and, “why you?” They ask these questions many times and in different ways. They are assessing both the idea and the people behind it, and the biggest problem that investors see is the inability of people to explain the value of their ideas. In other words, the majority of people who approach investors for support cannot articulate a compelling value proposition around their idea – one that makes the idea stand out as an overwhelmingly appealing opportunity amongst the hundreds of other good ideas for which inventors seek angel or seed funding in any given year.

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The power of the *So what? who cares? why you?*TM approach – and of this book – is that it turns the process of assessing the value and validity of a technology idea inside out so that you as an inventor or technology entrepreneur can leverage it for your own optimum success. That’s a powerful concept. It means you can take ownership and control of the difficult, often lonely process of seeking support and funding for your idea.

Foreword *(continued)*

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I have used ***So what? who cares? why you?™*** to help startup companies clarify their pitch at every stage of investment. In large companies, I have used it to ensure that we were making investments in the right products.

Let me give one example of how I've used ***So what? who cares? why you?™*** as a tool to make decisions about new ideas. At one point in my career, I took over management of a division at a large global technology company – the division constituted a large incubator within the company, distributed globally and devoted solely to fostering and developing new ideas for commercialization. The company invested significantly in fostering new ideas, and wanted a higher success rate in these early-stage investments than it was traditionally seeing.

One of my first initiatives when taking over this division was to shift its focus away from thinking just about technology ideas and toward thinking about emerging business ideas. My goal was to ensure we understood that what we did in that division had to add value to the larger company's existing businesses.

I have observed that, in any large dispersed organization there are many wells that an inventor can visit for funding. Traditionally, these organizations would invest a large sum of money in new ideas, but I wanted us to have a repeatable process – a standard practice and language – that we could use to leverage our existing technical acumen to take a leadership role in market spaces where we had what I called, “permission to be.” We rolled out ***So what?***

who cares? why you?™ in a series of seminars and consultations to hundreds of members of my team across three countries and two continents. It became a powerful tool that we used for assessing what new ideas the company would – or would not – put its money behind. It helped us stop trying to tackle markets that we had no permission to be in; it helped us focus on and develop the highest value ideas into products that became market leaders.

On a more individual level, I witnessed ***So what? who cares? why you?™*** help both science (the discipline) and inventors (the people) become more valued by the outside world. I discovered that if you assimilate the ***So what? who cares? why you?™*** process as part of your standard operating procedure then you can witness the transition of researchers and scientists into people who can effectively communicate the value of what they are developing.

It is a powerful testament to ***So what? who cares? why you?™*** that it helped our scientists and engineers to begin to feel valued. In fact, I learned that you can't be valued unless you are producing valuable things. In my personal opinion, ***So what? who cares? why you?™*** can help any such group be perceived as valuable people doing valuable work – not simply as blue-sky scientists whom no one can understand.

Everywhere that I have introduced this process, it has taught us to take our existing technical and business acumen and turn it into clearly articulated value propositions to our customers. With a number of teams, I have used the process to help marketing and sales people show customers a future picture that made sense to them; to build a vision and roadmap for the work being done in a way that customers valued. Without ***So what? who cares? why you?™***,

I would have pursued many good ideas without really knowing why – more importantly, my teams would not have been as effective at getting people interested in commercializing those ideas.

I have also used *So what? who cares? why you?*TM to connect with partners and to find lead customers. It helped me to do so by pitching advanced concepts in contemporary language, taking highly innovative concepts and portraying them in a way that people could understand in their current terms.

As you begin to seek support and investment for your idea, invention or product, you'll encounter many challenges and frustrations, as well as moments of pure euphoria. The most difficult challenge you will face will not be a technical challenge. Instead, it will be the challenge of getting other, non-technical people that you rely on to look at your idea as a good opportunity and a worthy investment.

Initial meetings with angel investment groups and other business backers will be short – in an hour or less, people will have made a decision about investment in your idea. That's 20 minutes to present your idea – if you're lucky – and 10 minutes to answer questions. That will be the ONE SHOT you get with that investor. They will focus on more than your idea and your people, and that will probably frustrate you. They will focus almost exclusively on the problem you are solving, the pain associated with that problem, and what it will cost the customer to have that pain removed. They will ask if the customer has money to buy the solution. They will ask if the customer will think it is worth spending the money to solve the problem. They will ask how you will make money, how much, how big the market is, and how long it will last. Most individuals pitching their ideas are weak in these areas. But from experience, I know that *So what? who cares? why you?*TM can give you the tools you need to outshine the other ideas competing for attention and funding.

Happy inventing!

— David Mann

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This is a sample chapter from the book, *So what? who cares? why you?*TM: *The Inventor's Commercialization Toolkit*. To read all 10 chapters of the workbook, and to gain access to the online ToolShed that's chock-full of additional examples, tools, tips and advice from Wendy Kennedy, visit www.wendykennedy.com.