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# Creating Opportunity through Innovation in West Michigan

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## Definition of Innovation

**Innovation** is defined as a new way of doing something. It may suggest an incremental, radical, or revolutionary change in thinking about products, processes, or organizations.

One example of innovation is invention as in macro inventions, as in radical change, or micro inventions, as an incremental change. Micro inventions represent much of what is done in industry when looking at product and process inventions. Working on an idea and developing a concept and then a prototype is the way that many micro inventions occur (Smith). Change like Meijer brought to retailing, as extended by Walmart, is macro in nature.

## Life is full of little inconvenient opportunities!

As a reader, you may be able to contribute to the West Michigan innovation base. Ideas tend to come from inconveniences you experience. Some people tolerate inconveniences while others try to think of solutions. Thinking of a solution is only an idea. If you want to take it to the next level, you have to make the idea work that could lead you to an invention. Many inventions, including those that are patented, web sites put on-line, and even services performed never really reach the market and, therefore, are not innovations. For your product to be an innovation, it must be accepted in the marketplace.

Katie Racey, a GVSU student who lives with an insulin pump, really felt inconvenienced by having to wear the pump on her waist all the time. If she wanted to dress professionally or for a night out, she did not wish to advertise her pump to the world. Her idea was to move the pump's location, and she figured out how to do that. That was the invention. Now she is working to bring her product to market for the benefit of hundreds of thousands of other pump wearers throughout the United States. In the future, she may form a Michigan company.

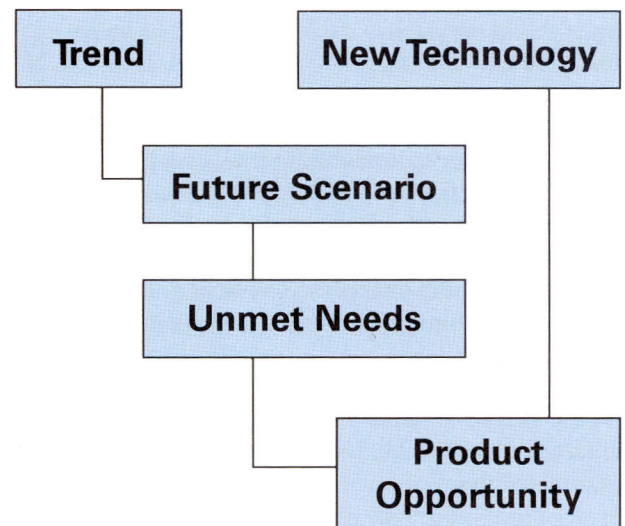
Brian Rider, a former GVSU student, saw the inconvenience of trying to plan a dorm room and created Digital Wingman. Brian and his team provide college and university students the opportunity to look at their dorm rooms while still in high school, and to change the rooms by adding and moving furniture. His ideas allow prospective roommates to organize and refine their dorm rooms on-line in advance of occupancy.

Will you help Michigan grow by turning your inconvenience into a product for tomorrow?

You may think of Amway as a huge sales and distribution organization, but it is also a power house of ideas and invention. Amway has developed 600 patents over the last fifty years and has 400 patents pending, according to its web site. Through its sales channels, Amway is able to take invention to innovation by bringing invention to market. Further, through Amway's leadership, vision, and passion for new ideas, it has turned ideas into successful ventures that affect many including the Seidman College of Business and Grand Valley State University. It helped build a university and with others, helped shape a world-class medical and research center in Grand Rapids. With vision and generous gifts, the leaders helped rethink economic development in downtown Grand Rapids and, most recently, how to engage people in the arts. All of these activities stemmed from recognizing a need or an opportunity and working to make something happen. It may help to have been successful, but each of these ideas involved seeing a need and finding a solution. **Can you be the champion of your ideas?**

## Trend Analysis

Many companies analyze trends to develop new products. Herman Miller is one such company. Looking at the trend of sustainability and the needs of a diverse workforce including aging boomers, they developed the desk top climate control, the C2 (Money CNN). This an example of adding new technology to an older product to meet perceived needs of the future. Herman Miller has long been known as a leader in design, but what many do not know is the company's focus on the future and the trends that may impact the office and manufacturing environments.



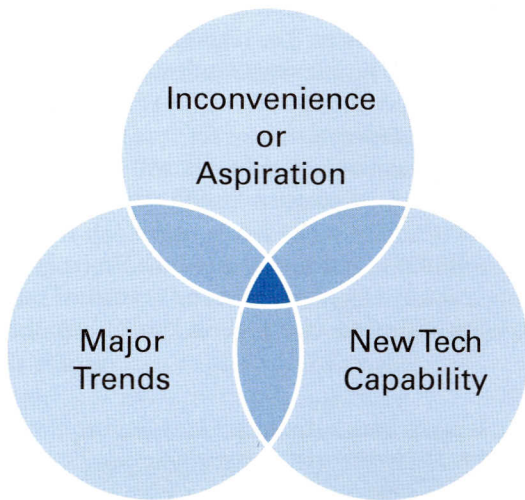
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**Sweet Spot**

When it became evident that common objects like shoes, box cutters, and shaving cream were being used to threaten the safety of airliners, local entrepreneurs brought an innovation to market that rendered the box cutter harmless. Jeff Kempker, Orville Crain, and Matt Jacobs, owner of Grand Haven-based Advanced Molding Solutions, invented Klever Kutter—a box opener that cannot cut the user, anyone else, or damage the contents of the box. In 2006 they sold about 100,000 Klever Cutters. Last year they sold 900,000 and this year's sales are expected to be well over a million.

Klever Cutters, like other successful innovations, combined an inconvenience or aspiration—the need to open boxes in industry—with a major trend. When inconvenience, trends, and technology have clear intersection, you have the sweet spot, as shown in the darkest area in the Venn diagram. Clearly the unit sales indicate that the Klever Kutter hit the mark. Can you use the tool to help you think of new ideas?

Will you contribute to the future growth of West Michigan through innovation? There are many resources to help you including Seidman's Small Business & Technology Development Center. [www.gvsu.edu/misbt/dc/region7](http://www.gvsu.edu/misbt/dc/region7) ■



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Area of Innovation	Organization or Individual
Retailing	Meijer
Furniture Design	Herman Miller, Izzy
Manufacturing Space Design	Herman Miller
Wall Systems, LIM (Led light)	Haworth
Recumbent Bikes for Boomers	Terra Trike
Gas from Trash	Ottawa County Farms Landfill
Electronic Mirrors	Gentex
Retailing On-line	Wolverine World Wide
Dimming Windows	Gentex
Distribution, Air Filters	Amway
Education/Charter Schools	Heritage Academies
Restaurants/The Bob	Gilmore Collection
Art/Internet	ArtPrize
Mfg Engineering	Cascade
Mfg Engineering	Auto Cam
Lodging/Environmental	City Flats Hotel
Klever Kutter	Klever Innovations
Environmentally Safe Asphalt	Advanced Seasonal Innovations LLC
Interactive Learning	Rapid Growth Media
Theatre	Spectrum
Science	Van Andel Institute
Personal Hygiene for Disabled	Freedom Wand
Brain and Spinal Injuries	Mary Free Bed
Gutter Protection	AAA Flow
Agricultural Products	Agretek
Medical Products	Stryker

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