

LOCKING IN SUCCESS

**QUAD LOCK CO-
FOUNDER ROB
WARD ON HOW TO
GROW A PRODUCT
LINE AND ENSURE
YOUR BUSINESS
THRIVES FOR
YEARS TO COME.**

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:
ROB WARD IS
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QUAD LOCK HAS ACHIEVED A LEVEL OF STABILITY AND FINANCIAL SECURITY THAT IS THE STUFF OF ENTREPRENEURIAL DREAMS.

The company—which sells vehicle mounts and other accessories for smartphones—got its start in 2012, still relatively early days in the iPhone revolution that would change all of our lives. But founders Rob Ward and Chris Peters spotted a booming market, carved out a solid foothold with a quality product, and adapted their offerings as that market evolved.

As a result, Quad Lock is one of the most successful companies of its kind, in what is now a quite crowded market. It's selling more than 30 products that cater to drivers, runners, cyclists, and more, and as a result is bringing in \$9 million in annual revenue. Every day, thousands of units ship out to customers whose addresses span over 100 countries.

A big part of Quad Lock's success is its versatility, but combined with a laser focus that has allowed it to build up a formidable presence in a specific-but-massive

marketplace. Its core product consists of a phone case with a universal locking mechanism, which securely attaches the phone to any of its various mounts. Once a customer has the case on their phone, it can be used in a variety of contexts, including bikes, scooters, motorcycles, even jogging armbands.

When a startup achieves the kind of steady, solid growth that Quad Lock boasts, it's understandable to wonder if these particular founders have identified some secret sauce. What did they do that you can do, too? How do you know where to start, and then grow with the market? Eight years into Quad Lock's impressive reign, co-founder Rob Ward shared his thoughts with Foundr on that very idea.



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Knowing When to Say When

How do you know whether the idea you're pursuing right now is the one that is worthy of your attention? Is your current endeavor the one that's going to lead you to the promised land? Or is it time to start over?

Fans of Quad Lock products may know that it was not the first launch for Ward and Peters. While they had the idea for Quad Lock early on, they did not initially pursue it. Instead, they created a bottle opener and phone case combo called Opena.

They raised \$20,000 in a Kickstarter campaign to create the product, which also validated the existence of a market that would purchase such a device. Ultimately, though, a competitor came along with a less expensive version of a similar product, and the product fell victim to a lack of patent protection or sufficient brand loyalty.

So the business partners tested out other products and ideas, including 3D printers, laser printing, and optimizing websites. "We used all those businesses to work out where we wanted to be," Ward says.

Through that process, Ward and Peters identified a number of individual markets, barriers to entering them, and more. They kept going until they weeded through the approaches they did not want to take, and found the things that interested them most—things that they could see themselves doing day in and day out, happily.

To be clear, a lot of money was intentionally left on the table, and a lot of hard discussions happened during those days. Ward and his business partner, though, were committed to hitting on something that truly captured and held their interests and desires.

So how does Ward determine which areas deserve their attention and consideration?

"The opportunities and things that aren't being talked about at mass scale," he says. "You want to be shooting for where the market is going to be."

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Building Out Your Idea

OK, so once you feel you've hit upon the business that's going to excite you and thrive in a growing marketplace, how do you build that product or suite of products?

For one, Ward urges entrepreneurs to keep the customer in mind when selecting how to get a product to the market, even during the development process. Look around and you will find many entrepreneurs relying on third-party platforms and vendors to sell their products. This might not be the way to go, as it could undermine your connection with your customer.

“The relationship with the customer is where the value's at,” Rob says. “I think people who farm that out are gonna wish they hadn't in the next couple of years.”

It's also important to let your own entrepreneurial process and experience inform your decision-making when it comes to determining next steps for your business. Ward has words of caution for entrepreneurs who are just adding on new products or features for the sake of adding on.

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“It's easy to think you'll get more by doing more, but more of what? More widgets? Or to do a better job with the widget you already have? To start with, I'd always choose that. Once you nail it and you feel confident and you know you're building on this base, and then whatever you do next builds on top of that base—that's a great time.”

Finally, be realistic. Most entrepreneurs have limited time and limited budgets. “Pick the easy battle,” Ward says. Don't become an entrepreneur who is running fast, but going nowhere.

Branding Is Your Business

While Ward and Peters spotted a lucrative opening in the smartphone accessory space, the product category is now filled with competitors. So how has Quad Lock held onto its position as a leader in this space?

While they are working to increase product penetration in the marketplace, Ward says Quad Lock has one powerful thing going for it that has helped the company consistently beat back rapidly arising clone competitors—brand notoriety.

“You can manufacture product quickly, but you cannot quickly manufacture a brand that is synonymous with the problem that you’re solving.”

He points out that message boards and customer reviews of other products in their category space contain comments from customers calling those products out for being a “Quad Lock knockoff.”

Quad Lock has been in the space—consistently listening to its market and

solving that market’s problem with high-quality solutions—for long enough to become a stable, dominant brand. The brand is also super-focused, which helps solidify its positioning. Quad Lock offers over 30 products now, but all of them are centered around meeting their customer’s needs in the same category, just in a variety of ways. A lot of those products also interact and complement each other, expanding on their core solution.

“The more you sell to the same group, the more you get to know how they think, how they click. You see the same requests for similar products come through,” he says. If you gave them an excellent product that met their need once, then they will trust you to do it again. And again. And again.

“An initial sale is worth much more than that initial sale,” he points out. It’s the start of a relationship and a reputation. Identify your market’s problem and then solve it, repeatedly and well. Then, when a competitor comes along with a cheap, one-time knock off, your customer will recognize the difference.

And remember—your product must be excellent. “We’d rather put out one good thing than four average things,” Ward says. The Quad Lock brand goes beyond being a consistent solution—it’s also the high-quality, dependable solution.



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ROB WARD'S TOP TIP: FORGET ABOUT THE TIPS

As most interviews with successful business leaders do, our time with Rob Ward turned toward words of wisdom he might offer to other aspiring entrepreneurs. Tips? Tricks? The aforementioned secret sauce?

If you were grabbing a pen, you can stop now.

“Don’t worry about the 10 steps to success,” Ward says. “Worry about looking at people who are doing things that you wish you were doing. Don’t compare yourself to them, but learn from them. Look at what they’re doing and why they’re doing it. ... Then try and read between the lines. That’s where the gold is. It’s in the lessons and learnings, not the actual tips, because exactly what worked for them won’t work for you.”

His thinking is that if you can see the why behind a successful entrepreneur’s choices and actions, you’ll be better equipped to know when and how to apply their experience to your own situation.

“Any time you get an opportunity to get insight like that, really take it. And don’t take it by sitting down with a notepad, about to copy down exactly what they say. Take it in, let it really wash over you, and try to really look for the learnings within it.”

Author: *Rebeca Seitz is a best-selling writer and producer, and the founding CEO of 1C Productions, Inc. She recently raised over \$3M for a single business venture and helped create, distribute, and promote products with sales over \$34M. Her books are published by HarperCollins and B&H Group and her last screenplay was produced with Out of Order Studios and written with Disney veteran Bob Burriss. She has appeared on NPR, CNN, Huffington Post Live, and more regarding responsible use of mass media. Connect with Rebeca on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn.*

