

1 Look at these products that were revolutionary when first introduced. How have these products been developed over time? What new features and designs have improved their quality?



2 How creative are you? Answer the following questions and check your score on page 137.

- | | Never | Sometimes | Always |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 I look for solutions to difficult problems. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 I see things that other people don't notice. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 I like to find ways to connect different things together. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 I note down interesting ideas as they come to me. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 I don't always respect decisions made by those in authority. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 I like to keep myself informed about new developments. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 I like taking risks. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 I am perseverant. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9 I will take unpopular positions if I think I am right. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 I like to discuss things with other people. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Points 0 1 2



Reading Mastering design

1 Look at the sample designs produced by the Alessi factory in Italy. What do you think of them?

2 Now read the article on the opposite page. Are the following statements about Alberto Alessi true or false? Correct the statements.

- 1 He is the only member of his family to work for the company.
- 2 The company has always been owned by the Alessi family.
- 3 He wants his firm to design only household objects.
- 4 He designed the famous Bird Kettle.
- 5 All his designers are company employees.
- 6 He doesn't mind talking about products that have failed.
- 7 He supervises the planning of new projects.
- 8 More than half of his new products fail.

Alberto Alessi transformed his family's housewares business into a trendsetting design giant. His secret: walking the borderline between genius and failure.

Has your latest project bombed? There's only one thing to do, says Alberto Alessi, godfather of Italian product design: Revel in your glorious failures. Dance on the borderline between success and disaster. Because that's where your next big breakthrough will come from.

Alessi, 54, has followed that very advice ever since he took the reins of the family business in 1970. His partnerships with some of the world's best designers have transformed this 80-year-old company from housewares supplier to design leader. You might not know them as Alessi offerings, but most people can recognise Philippe Starck's Juicy Salif lemon squeezer and Michael Graves's Bird Kettle.

But Alessi is just as proud of his flops. It's the duds that enjoy centre stage in the company's private museum, where Alessi's designers meet weekly to discuss new projects. He has even published a book of prototypes that never made it to production. In a market that's crowded with the mundane and generic, Alessi says, the lemons reassure him that he is not veering toward safety.

Fortunately, most of the products created by Alessi's impressive stable of 200 free-agent designers are winners. The Alessi 'dream factory' of 500 workers, which Alberto runs with brothers Michele and Alessio, has over the past decade raised sales by around 15 per cent a year, to \$100 million today.

Now, having conquered our kitchens, Alessi is looking at our cell phones, watches and maybe even our cars. How will he do it? By walking along the border between the 'possible and the not possible.' In an interview at the Alessi factory he explained how to fail in style.

Where is this borderline?

The area of the 'possible' is the area in which we develop products that the customer will love and buy. The area of the 'not possible' is represented by the new projects that people are not yet ready to understand or accept. At Alessi, we work as close as we can to the borderline. Because when we succeed, we give birth to a new product that surprises people and because it is completely unknown, it doesn't have any competition — which means we can enjoy big margins.

How do you explain your success?

Our industrial organisation is very flexible. We have a few best-sellers that sell more than 100,000 pieces a year, while others sell in much smaller numbers. In any case, Alessi is not a mass-production company. It's a research lab for the applied arts. And that means we have to experiment a lot. But doing experiments doesn't just mean doing the research and making a prototype. It means putting a finished product into the marketplace.

What is your favourite fiasco?

Our most beautiful fiasco was the Philippe Starck Hot Bertaa kettle. I didn't realise that we had gone too far. Inside the kettle was some complicated but very intelligent engineering. On the prototypes, it worked well, but when we produced thousands and thousands, it didn't work so well.

How do you view your customers?

Our customers seem happy to take risks with us. Customers are much more progressive than marketing people or retailers think. Society is much more exciting than just a target market. A target market is a cage where people try to put society. It bears no relation to what people feel and want.



Failure is glorious

