

Proto Labs

The Opportunity

Proto Labs is a leading online and technology-enabled quick-turn manufacturer of custom parts for prototyping and short-run production, with an arsenal of services that include computer numerical control (CNC) machining, injection molding and additive manufacturing. The proprietary software technology that powers Proto Labs enables parts — no matter the process — to be produced and shipped in as fast as one business day.

The Cool Idea! Award seeks to award those with promising new product ideas with these services, free of charge. Since the inception of the award program in April 2011, more than \$600,000 worth of Proto Labs services have been granted to recipients throughout the United States and the European Union. Again in 2014, the company is poised to grant an aggregate of up to \$250,000 in their services to award recipients. Winning entries receive high scores in originality, feasibility, potential benefit to end users, marketability, problem-solving ability and innate “coolness.” These factors are determined by six influential industry judges, based on the written answers to the application questions and 3D CAD part files that correspond to the idea.

The Collaboration

Proto Labs used the PitchBurner platform to monitor the new product ideas as they came in. The platform also lent itself to the tracking of submission activity such as where an applicant discontinued the submission process, what vertical they came to the submission process from (email, website, organic search, etc.), applicant location and a full view of all submissions.

With a monthly review process, those who read through the submitted ideas were able to easily provide feedback to the submitters, including:

- Areas of improvement
- Encouragement
- Suggestions for expansion

Proto Labs allowed those who took the time to take the feedback into consideration and revise their idea to re-submit to the award program.

With this monthly review of both the applicants, as well as the submission process itself, Proto Labs was able to evaluate their marketing efforts and make changes accordingly. This resulted in a comprehensive and ever-improving award program.

“We’re able to experience innovation both internally, through the advancement of new manufacturing processes, and externally, through products that our applicants are developing. That creates a place where people are genuinely excited to come to work each day.”

Vicki Holt:
Proto Labs CEO
Cool Idea! Award