

TAKING THE NANOPULSE

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Recession ends. Nano-convergence begins. **What happens now? The five new rules of nanotechnology.**

BY SCOTT E. RICKERT

The recession has bottomed out – so says the Fed's Ben Bernanke and a host of other market watchers. Include me in that group, too. While signs of weakness still dot the landscape, there's room again for optimism – and opportunity. And nanotechnology can be your ticket to ride the growth curve.

Want proof? Check out some recent good-news headlines. The makers of nano-enabled batteries have completed a company IPO, a reflection of their significant product and market success. Several entrepreneurs tied up in patent scraps have rescued their high-value IP, some moving on and some selling their technology to healthier entities. And even the government has recognized the economic engine of high-tech growth as seen in their launch of the Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

So we're back to business as usual, right? Not yet. Probably not ever. The rules have changed, and the nanotechnology winners will embrace a new paradigm: nano-convergence. The definition? Nano-convergence is the assimilation of nanotechnology with smart business models. The effect? For nanotechnology companies that means coming down from the ivory towers of research and thinking harder about infusing technology benefits into the real world. For mainstream companies it means a lot of idea generators looking to provide near-term innovations for products big and small.

That leaves us with the eternal business question: how can you pick a winning partner for Nanotechnology, the Sequel? Simple – see how they get down to business. They understand that success is about labs and products. It's about innovation and manufacturability. It's about solutions and cost-effectiveness. It's about breakthroughs and flexibility. It's about science and business.

Here are my five new rules to judge the sea-worthiness of a nano-company in this brave new world.

- Check the homework. If they don't understand basic market realities, there can be a lot of time and money lost in education.
- Skip the Mr. Wizard demonstrations. Real players will bring you defined solutions, not just science projects. You want science with a near-term benefit.
- Do they theorize or commercialize? If a prospect doesn't understand the commercialization process, it can be a long, costly journey from the lab to factory to store shelf.

- Invent your own win-win situation. Smart companies will be open to all the possibilities of working together, including partnerships, joint development, tech sharing, market sharing, licensing or even sales and distribution agreements.
- Avoid the one-trick ponies. Is the company investing in the future – theirs and yours? You want a partner who’s continuously working on new technologies and expansion of current platforms.

Is it simple? No. Is it worth the effort? You bet. Now’s the time to get a head start on innovation and put some distance between you and your competition. There are nanotechnology companies in the market doing amazing things in every sector – from breakthroughs in electric vehicles to better aluminum foil, from smaller computers to high-coverage paints, from bacteria-fighting washing machines to better air filters for our cars. The recession is over – it’s time to start building success again.

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