

# INVENTION MACHINE

Patents for tools that would lead to patent-worthy ideas.

I want a cure for cancer, a transporter, and an end to aging. Maybe I could have all these things if I had an invention machine. Could a computer program solve the world's problems? Some people think so and have patented ways to invent.

An early example is No. 5,153,830, issued to Fisher et al. in 1992, for a computer program called "Idea Fisher" (get it?), which supposedly helps you create by "reminding the user of thoughts, feelings, experiences, facts, and

images stored so deeply in memory that they normally cannot be retrieved at will. When the user comes up with his own associations, the invention allows these associations to be stored along with those already in the system."

Patent No. 5,581,663 provides a good overview of TRIZ—a theory by Russian Genrich Altshuller popular in invention circles concerning inventive problem solving. The patent also notes several unsuccessful attempts to computerize TRIZ. Instead, the more modest goal of this patent is a computer-based method of identifying and structuring a problem so it is then easier to solve.

Another problem analysis program, offered by Invention Machine Corp. of Boston, is disclosed in patent No. 7,536,368 for a tool which "automatically reformulates a problem statement into a natural

language or Boolean query that is automatically submitted via a knowledge search tool to a database, and responses to this query from the database are automatically provided."

Patent No. 6,101,490 is more ambitious—a true computer program problem solver. The example problem given in the patent? A beaver strips bark off a tree and you want to save the tree. The computer's solution? Transplant bark to the damaged location on the tree.

As best as I can ascertain, patent No. 7,685,118 is for an invention machine based on ontology. Maybe one day it can solve the problem of explaining ontology.

Patent application No. 2002/0111817 is for the Invention on Demand method which identifies "white spaces" where patented inventions are needed.

Published application No. 2011/0202420 is for a brokered invention method. You have a problem which needs solving and you set a price for a solution. Your broker then seeks out people with potential solutions. Solutions submitted are rated and the winner then gets paid.

This sounds a little like InnoCentive Inc. ([www.innocentive.com](http://www.innocentive.com))—a Boston-based open innovation facilitator. A patent application describing InnoCentive's bounty-based invention method is No. 2010/0293040.

So, we don't yet have a fully realized invention machine. Why can't some of the inferior invention machines generate slightly better versions of themselves which then generate slightly better versions and so on? Maybe I should patent that idea. **ME**

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## WHAT IS TRIZ?



Genrich Altshuller, left, with a follower, Isak Bukhman, at a 1983 TRIZ workshop in Yaroslavl, Russia.

The Altshuller Institute for TRIZ Studies ([aitriz.org](http://aitriz.org)) defines TRIZ as "a systematic process that develops critical thinking skills and promotes creativity and innovation." It was originated by Genrich (or Genrikh) Altshuller, a Russian engineer who searched patents and identified patterns of problem-solving. The result is an algorithmic approach to analyzing and solving problems. TRIZ is an acronym for the Russian name of the process, which means "Theory of Inventive Problem Solving." TRIZ emerged in the 1940s and then was driven underground by the Soviets as "heretical." It re-emerged after the fall of the U.S.S.R.