

Inventors

OCTOBER 2020 Volume 36 Issue 10

DIGEST

Soft and STRONG

AMBYR CHILDERS
JEWELRY SPARKLES
WITH PROUD HERITAGE

Cardboard King
HOW SY BERGER
INVENTED THE ICONIC
BASEBALL CARD

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TO BUILD YOUR
PROTOTYPING SKILLS



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Oh, the Humanity! USPTO Winners



End of year is typically awards season, and at *Inventors Digest* it's no different. But in this year of extraordinary health challenges throughout the world, some awards announcements salute innovation with particularly powerful and lasting impact.

This year's Patent for Humanity winners come to mind. The United States Patent and Trademark Office program promotes life-changing innovations that address and sometimes solve long-standing development challenges.

Worried about our planet's future? Here are a half-dozen reasons to calm down:

Global Vision 2020 is one of three Maryland winners on this year's list. The Easton-based nonprofit, founded by retired U.S. Marine J. Kevin White, developed the USee Vision Kit that provides prescription eyeglasses cost effectively to hundreds of people. These include those in parts of the world who normally do not have access to vision care.

Sisu Global in Baltimore, which designs and commercializes medical devices with and for emerging markets, created the Hemafuse. It's a highly effective, mechanical alternative to transfusing donor blood. With a push and pull of a handle, the Hemafuse can salvage, filter and recycle blood from an internal bleeding in trauma without using electricity.

Sanaria, a Rockville-based biotech company, developed a whole parasite vaccine for malaria. Developing vaccines to fight malaria has long been the company's mission; as the company said, "This award recognizes the importance of Sanaria's intellectual property, covering the innovations that have developed a unique family of vaccines designed to prevent and eventually eliminate malaria."

Flexcrevator is a pit latrine emptying device that enables fast, safe and hygienic fecal sludge removal as opposed to manual emptying. A team from North Carolina State University made the first version of Flexcrevator in 2011 with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

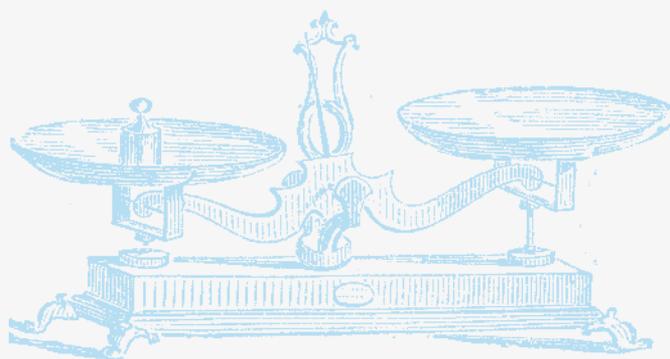
NEWgenerator was developed by University of South Florida engineers. It utilizes state-of-the-art membrane bioreactor technology to create a machine capable of simultaneously recovering nutrients, energy and water from wastewater.

Nonspec of Lowell, Massachusetts, provides affordable and highly adjustable prosthetic limb systems to amputees. The devices can be taken off the shelf and adjusted in less than an hour.

Not surprisingly, Patents for Humanity is a global competition. Want to know more? See the Patents for Humanity page on the USPTO website.

—Reid
(reid.creager@inventorsdigest.com)

American innovation needs to hit the gym



Weakened patent protections have reduced the value of American inventions. To strengthen American innovation, support the STRONGER Patents Act—legislation designed to restore strong Constitutional patent rights, limit unfair patent challenges, and end the diversion of USPTO fees.

Make your voice heard now at
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AMERICAN
INVENTOR**



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TV and movie actress
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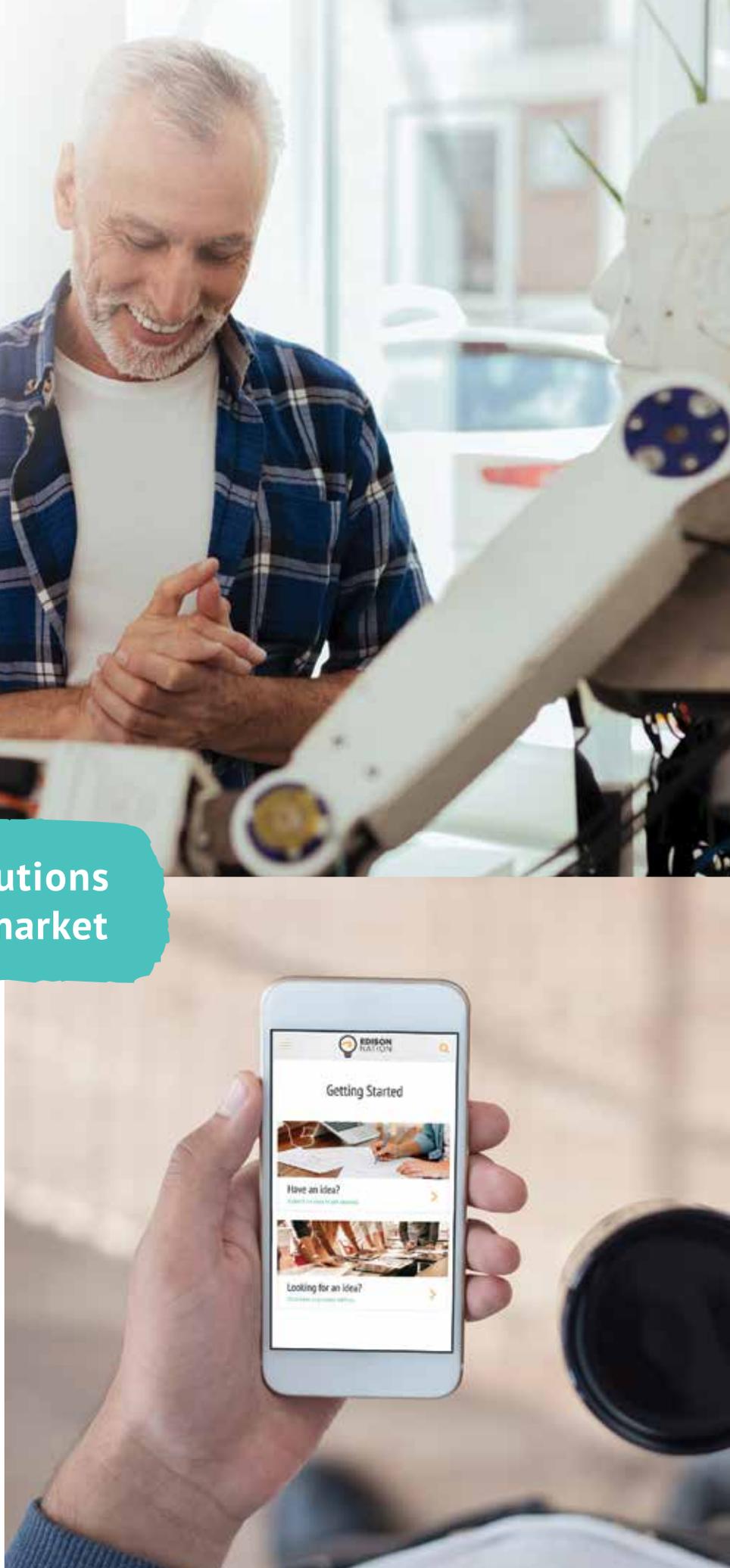


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CORRESPONDENCE

Letters and emails in reaction to new and older **Inventors Digest** stories you read in print or online (responses may be edited for clarity and brevity):

“10,000,000 (Patents) Served” (June 2018):

A book is to a publisher as an invention is to a _?

Why are inventions not treated as books, where inventors are maybe provided advance payments and treated as writers are treated? What is the equivalent of a publisher of books, to a _ of inventions?

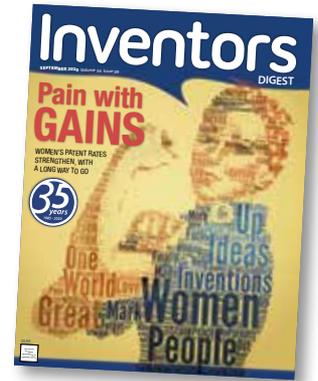
Are patents not an equivalent protection to the copyright of a book? —M. ROSS

Editor's note: Based on the escalating pace of U.S. patents during the past century, the 11 millionth patent could be approved as early as the first half of 2021.

“Baby Steps” (September 2020):

Thank you for featuring and analyzing the latest report on women and patents. Let's make sure women stay in the inventing game and become even more of a force! They have been mostly on the sidelines for far too long.

Kudos to *Inventors Digest* and the patent office for fighting the good fight. —RENÁ MCBROOM



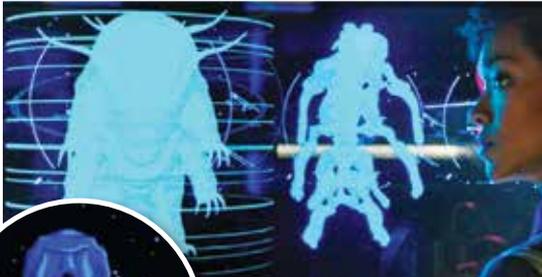
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In this space in the June *Inventors Digest*, we discussed a lawsuit involving “Star Trek” and Dr. Seuss Enterprises. Little did we know that the number of “Star Trek”-related lawsuits is stacked higher than the Cat In The Hat’s striped chapeau—yet another reminder of the importance of intellectual property in the inventing world.

One of the more recent court verdicts came in late August. A panel of three appeals judges led by Judge Denny Chin of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York agreed that CBS and Netflix did not commit copyright infringement in a lawsuit filed in 2018 by video game developer Anas Abdin.

Abdin claimed that the “Star Trek: Discovery” series infringed the develop-

ment materials for his Tardigrades game concept, published on YouTube and game development websites between May 2014 and September 2017.

The plaintiff noted that both the TV series and video game featured tardigrades—hardy, microscopic organisms that can survive in space. But the appeals court noted that information about tardigrades is available publicly in several scientific studies, and that facts and ideas are not protected by copyright.

In acknowledging the plethora of “Star Trek”-linked court cases since the TV series debuted in September 1966, Judge Chin’s written statement slipped into a hackneyed attempt at humor: “Today, in the latest round of ‘Star Trek’-related litigation, we are asked to boldly go where no court has gone before.”

Far from it.

In fact, during the 50th anniversary of the original TV series in 2016, the excellent trademarkandcopyrightlawblog.com compiled a list of 50 Trek-related lawsuits in chronological order.

A GALAXY OF ‘STAR TREK’ LAWSUITS

The first lawsuit chronicled was in 1974. An Ohio TV station tried to get the Federal Communications Commission to waive its Prime Time Access Rule and let the station air “Star Trek” reruns from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. on weekdays, in order to generate more ad money than it would receive by running local programming. The FCC said no.

“Star Trek” disputes abound even when they don’t result in court proceedings.

After President Donald Trump unveiled the new insignia for the United States Space Force in January, the internet was in an uproar that the design closely resembles the Starfleet logo from “Star Trek.”

It certainly does. But as we often remind you in this magazine, the internet doesn’t always give us an accurate or complete story unless you look a little harder.

In fact, that original “Star Trek” logo was arguably inspired by the NASA astronaut pin. And if you look even further, you’ll see that the U.S. Space Force logo is a clear hybrid of the old Air Force Space Command’s logo and the NASA logo.

When you have never-ending controversies like these, who needs marketing?

BRIGHT IDEAS

KittySpring

WHISKER-FRIENDLY WATER FOUNTAIN

kittyspring.com

This non-electric, quiet fountain holds enough water to last for two days and is designed to stay upright, using gravity. The shallow bowl minimizes irritation from the cat's whiskers getting wet.

Cats often have a low thirst drive, making them susceptible to dehydration and kidney issues. KittySpring is designed to ensure there's the right amount of water in the bowl. A built-in stainless steel filter, which typically lasts for years, means the water always stays fresh and clean.

The version with the glass dish will retail for \$70, the regular dish for \$60. Shipping is set for January.



"Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right." —HENRY FORD



Ninebot Gokart PRO

ELECTRIC GO-KART

segway.com

This update of its predecessor, the Ninebot Gokart, has an improved design, solid build and more features.

With a top speed of 23 mph, PRO's maximum acceleration of 1.02G is almost 1.5 times higher than the original. PRO's outer part is a plastic layer designed to reduce collision impact force. The primary steel beam of the inner layer provides high-strength protection.

A laser green LED headlight is convenient for night driving. A mechanical handbrake is an alternative to the electric braking system. There's also a temperature protection function, battery overcurrent protection function and motor stall protection function.

The PRO will retail for \$1,999; shipping is in December.

The Slite

MODULAR, COLLAPSIBLE
ELECTRIC GUITAR

reveho.com

The Slite is a full-scale guitar that can be reduced to five parts and fit in a 4-by-11-by-18-inch travel case.

The guitar allows you to customize your sound directly on it. Each of the three main sections plays a special role in this.

Its unique standardized pickup size can house almost any guitar pickup type or size, unlocking various possibilities with the same hardware. The pickups are mounted on a magnetic base to allow for fast pickup change.

The base package will retail for about \$2,850, the amp package (with base package) for about \$3,360. Shipping is planned for March if the project meets its crowdfunding goal.



POSSIBLE DELAYS

Coronavirus-related factors may result in changing timetables and later shipping dates than companies originally provided.

Whipr

COMPACT PADDLE, SKI AND ROWING MACHINE

whipr.com

Whipr is a 3-in-1 standup paddle, cross-country ski and rowing machine that can fit in a suitcase. It measures 6-by-6-by-6 inches and weighs about 6 lbs., and is allowed on airplanes.

The unit is a platform for many cardio and repetition-based exercises. Each modality uses the same base unit with accessories. Whipr accepts any handles, straps or bars commonly used on a regular gym cable machine.

Using two base units, you can use the planned swim and surf accessory for dry land practice and training.

The base unit will retail for \$349; the total package (paddle, ski, row) will retail for \$716. Shipping is planned for February.



Cardboard KING

SY BERGER, INVENTOR OF THE MODERN BASEBALL CARD, MADE POP CULTURE HISTORY

BY REID CREAGER



LET'S NOT ARGUE whether Lucy Van Pelt was right. But for many kids, the cranky “Peanuts” character’s observation to unresponsive love interest Schroeder struck the right key.

“Beethoven wasn’t so great,” she told him in the historic 1965 “A Charlie Brown Christmas” TV special. “How can you say someone is great who’s never had his picture on bubble gum cards?”

Somewhere in New York, Sy Berger was laughing all the way to the bank. The baseball card hobby had stuck as a pop culture phenomenon.

1952 changed everything

There is evidence that baseball cards date to before the Civil War. But Berger is known as the inventor of the modern baseball card.

These cardboard slices of Americana have generally remained the same in size (2 ½ inches by 3 ½ inches) since 1957, five years after Berger and Woody Gelman designed the groundbreaking 1952 Topps set at Berger’s kitchen table in Brooklyn in fall 1951.

The ’52 cards, slightly larger than the dimensions noted above, came in packs of six with a thin, hard slice of pink gum. The price was 5 cents. The impact was priceless.

I had the enormous pleasure of interviewing Berger on many occasions; he even sent me autographed cards with his likeness as thanks. He was not the typical inventor in that he had no patents, but the product of his tireless innovative energy is forever linked to baseball, youth and innocence.

When Berger began working for The Topps Chewing Gum Co., the rival Philadelphia-based Bowman Gum Co. was selling baseball cards in its packs as enticement for kids to buy the gum. Berger’s assignment was to produce a design that would make the Topps cards more popular. (Topps had unsuccessfully experimented in the baseball card market in 1951, when it produced smaller red-backed and blue-backed cards with player likenesses. These were meant to be played as a baseball-themed card game.)

Berger and Gelman introduced a slew of innovations that became baseball card fixtures. Among them were facsimile autographs on the front—taken from Topps contracts that paid players \$400 a year for the right to use their likeness on a card—and the player’s height, weight, statistics with a short biography on the back.

“I had a list of things I wanted,” Berger told me for a cover story I wrote for *Beckett Baseball Card*

Monthly's December 2000 issue, commemorating the 50th anniversary of Topps baseball cards.

"I told Woody (Gelman) I wanted a team logo on the front and a place for a copy of a signature to go with the picture. He made sketches as we experimented with where to place these things on the card.

"I also knew that we needed to do more than just a blurb on the back (as Bowman was doing). So I came up with the idea to also include last year's statistics and the player's career totals"—for all 407 players in the set, hand calculated by Berger.

Sometimes, Berger's marketing mettle was tested when writing those back-of-card bios.

In an oft-reported quote, he said, "It was murder. You don't know the agony of trying to say something nice about some guy who hit .176 and made 25 errors.

"What can you say? 'This guy stinks?'"

You couldn't make this up

The '52 set was a hit. Topps cut into Bowman's market share with superior offerings throughout the early 1950s.

Before long, the goal wasn't selling gum. The goal was selling baseball cards. Topps bought out Bowman in January 1956 and became the undisputed king of the market.

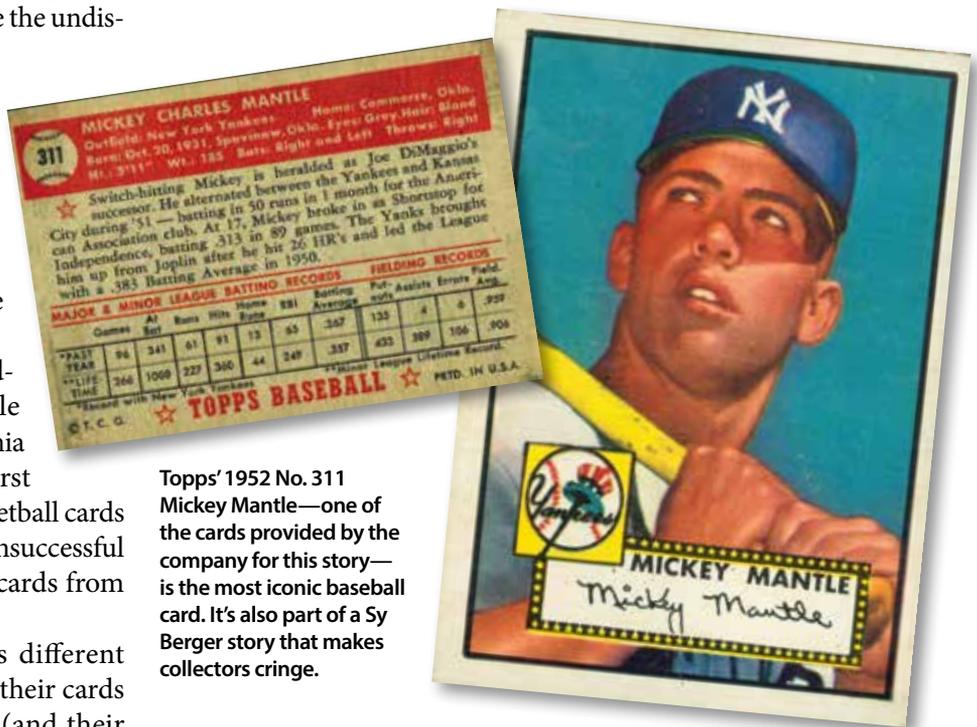
By this time, Berger was far more than a card designer. Now charged with securing Topps licensing contracts for players in baseball and other major-league sports—as well as in the entertainment industry—he was a persistent force in major-league dugouts and hotels.

Topps began producing black-and-white Beatles cards with facsimile signatures in 1964, the year Beatlemania came to America. It produced its first football set in 1955 and debuted basketball cards in 1957, although the latter was so unsuccessful that the company did not produce cards from that sport for another 12 years.

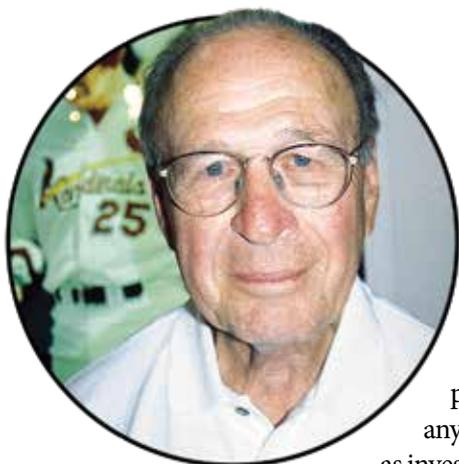
The mentality of collecting was different then. Few kids cared about keeping their cards in mint condition; many children (and their

TOPPS IP

- As of this writing, Justia Trademarks listed 204 canceled or current trademarks owned by Topps. Many of them are associated with Bazooka Gum, which was first marketed by Topps in the United States shortly after World War II.
- Seventeen patents were listed as assigned to the company—among the hundreds that Topps has undoubtedly owned in its 82-year history.
- Our favorite listed patent (now Status: Abandoned) is "Collectible card with cavity for containing inner item." The description: "A collectible trading card that contains a cavity within which is located a second trading card in which the identity of the second trading card is unknown and the second trading card is inaccessible without altering the collectible trading card." Got it.



Topps' 1952 No. 311 Mickey Mantle—one of the cards provided by the company for this story—is the most iconic baseball card. It's also part of a Sy Berger story that makes collectors cringe.



“I was proud to contribute to Americana, and Topps baseball cards are Americana.” —SY BERGER

parents) eventually threw away their cards without a second thought.

In fact, one of the early problems for Topps—before anyone thought of baseball cards as investments—was what to do with leftover stock from previous years.

Eventually Topps’ warehouse space was shrinking, with thousands and thousands of now-historic 1952 Topps baseball cards in particular excess. A lot of them were from the high-number second series issued in late summer each year, when kids would typically lose interest in collecting.

One player featured in that series was No. 311, Mickey Mantle—generally considered his rookie card. It is now the most iconic baseball card of all time; one mint copy sold for \$2.88 million in a 2018 auction.

The stratospheric price for that card can be attributed to more than Mantle’s status as an American idol. Berger unwittingly had a hand in the card becoming scarcer than it should have been.

Brace yourself for the reason.

“It was sometime in the late ’50s or early ’60s,” Berger told me. “We just couldn’t give away all those ’52s.

“So we rented a few garbage trucks, piled the cards on a garbage scow and dumped them all into the Atlantic Ocean. I was on the garbage detail.”

Rival game changers

Topps had exclusive rights in the bubble gum baseball card market through the 1970s, despite a legal challenge by Fleer Corp.

In the early 1980s, Fleer and Donruss Corp. emerged as competitors after a court ruled they



Left to right: 1869 Peck & Snyder’s Cincinnati Red Stockings card; Goodwin & Company tobacco card of the St. Louis Browns’ Bob Caruthers; Goudey Gum Co. brought gum and color portraits to cards in 1933.

BASEBALL CARD ORIGINS

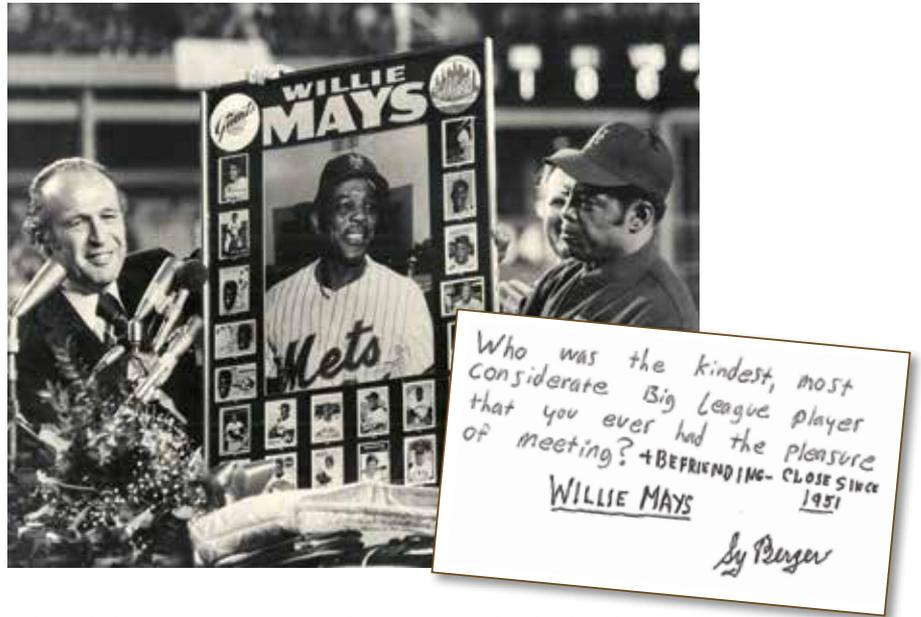
Peck & Snyder, a sporting goods company, created what is often considered the first true baseball cards from 1868 to 1870.

The card fronts featured a photo of a team, with a cartoon image advertising the Peck & Snyder store in New York. The 1869 set featured cards of the first professional baseball team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings. The card, issued as an advertising trade

piece and produced in two different sizes, is often considered the first true baseball card.

In the late 1800s, tobacco cards (usually about 2 5/8 inches by 1 1/2 inches) were often distributed inside of cigarette packs. In 1886, Goodwin Tobacco created what is considered the first official baseball card set—the N167 set.

In 1933, the Goudey Gum Co. became the first U.S. company to issue baseball cards with gum.



could produce baseball cards so long as they did not include bubble gum or candy in the packs. Up to then, those two companies had produced non-sport cards that included the Three Stooges and Monkees, respectively.

Interest in baseball cards skyrocketed. But Fleer and Donruss led a decade of overproduction that riddled the industry as kids' parents mistakenly perceived baseball cards as can't-miss investments.

In 1989, the Upper Deck Co. splashed onto the scene to revolutionize baseball cards with its exclusive trademark hologram on card backs, elegantly minimalist design, and thicker card stock. Upper Deck sold out its initial offering by the middle of the year. It pre-sold its entire 1990 baseball stock before that year began.

Following Upper Deck's lead, baseball card companies launched a premium quality war.

Soon, certified autograph cards, scarce parallel sets, holograms, refractors, and even swatches of player uniforms and equipment were all part of this escalating competition. The day of a kid picking up a simple five-cent pack of cards at the drugstore had been blasted away; some packs were now selling for \$100.

Even with flashy competitors chipping away at its profits, Topps savored some triumphs. Its 1991 Stadium Club set—featuring borderless photos, dramatic photography and an elegant foil logo on the card fronts—remains one of the most striking baseball card offerings ever produced.

Berger never bemoaned the lack of innocence in today's shiny, glitzy cards, calling them “works of art.” His death in 2014 at 91, after more than a half century as the face of Topps, was national news.

“I was proud to contribute to Americana,” he told me, “and Topps baseball cards are Americana.”

Topps remains active as the granddaddy of sports card companies, staying current with market trends and often establishing some of its own. The company announced in September that it will create women's professional softball cards for the first time in its 82-year existence.

This may not be as impactful as making American history at the kitchen table, but Sy Berger would approve. ☺

Above left: Once the only game in town, Topps' 2020 cards show the dramatic photographic, print and design improvements of what is now a highly competitive industry.

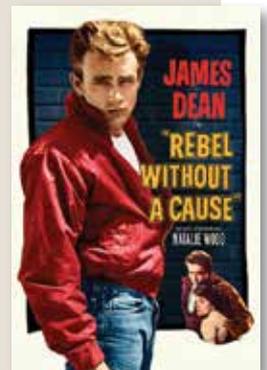
Above: Sy Berger presents Willie Mays with a special framed edition of all his regular-issue Topps cards during Willie Mays Night at Shea Stadium in 1973.

INVENTOR ARCHIVES: OCTOBER

October 29, 1955: Warner Bros. copyright registered the movie “Rebel Without a Cause,” starring James Dean.

The studio went through several writers before settling on what it deemed a suitable screenplay. The first draft was written in June 1946 by Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss.

Dean died in an automobile accident on September 30, 1955, nearly a month before the film's release. Paul Newman was reportedly considered for Dean's iconic role as Jim Stark.



The Awe of Creativity

WE CAN USE THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY TO MEET ABOUT THE HISTORY OF INVENTING **BY JACK LANDER**

INVENTING IS a subset of creating. So, bear with me if I emphasize creating here. I'm trying for a macro perspective rather than my usual nuts-and-bolts approach.

Civilization was never imagined by the early Homo sapiens. Nor was civilization's predecessor, farming. Both were gradual innovations born of the quest for a safer lifestyle and more dependable sources of food.

Imagine spending long days hunting and gathering. You had no time for leisure—and you were the prey as well as the predator.

You had a spear as your means of killing an antelope or a gazelle. It was also your weapon for defense. You may have gone for a few weeks before killing another large animal. And when you finally scored, you had no way to preserve any excess meat until you lived in the colder climates of Europe or Asia.

Then, one day about 75,000 years ago, you invented the bow as a means of projecting a small but deadly spear, the arrow. Your kill rate improved, and it made sense to share the yield with fellow tribespersons. They, in turn, shared theirs with you.

Thereafter, life was easier. You even had time to invent beads with which to decorate yourself.

You also had time to invent the atlatl, a spear-throwing shaft that approximately doubled the thrown distance of the simple spear. The atlatl further increased the kill rate for large animals and increased the shared meat source for tribal living.

With meat as a more dependable source of calories, it was then possible to raise food rather than constantly gathering it for a single day's sustenance.

In order to farm food, a person, family or tribe had to settle in one location. Little by little, your skill as a farmer increased, and you needed a secure place in which to store your

surplus grain. The local trade routes, long established for trading skins used for clothing and flint with which to make arrow and spear points, now bustled with baskets of grain.

The commodities market began. This led to the need for foresters, carpenters, traders, accountants, bankers, lawyers, etc. Primitive civilization had begun.

Tipping points

An invention such as the bow and arrow triggered a major tipping point that led to where we are today: towns and cities populated with the hundreds of professions and trades that could not have been imagined at the eureka moment of invention.

Our thoughts back then may have been limited to the increase in meat that our little tribe of 150 or so would enjoy. A city of hundreds of thousands would have been inconceivable.

We can name only a few tipping points that are as consequential as the invention of the bow and arrow—for example, the smelting and casting of metals.

Imagine being able to cast an arrowhead or spear point from bronze, rather than knapping away a chunk of flint perhaps for hours. Imagine having an axe made of steel rather than stone.

Presently, computers, cell phones, robots and 3D printers offer substantial improvement in the functions that preceded them. We can argue whether these recent inventions initiate a true tipping point, or whether they are merely welcome advancements in methods.

But certainly Nikola Tesla's 1888 invention of the alternating current motor, patent number 382,279, (and several more) represent a dramatic improvement in power sources—arguably a tipping point.



Start a Zoom or Facetime group. Not all participants need to be “hardware” inventors. Draw on people who paint, write, restore old furniture, etc.

The AC motor was small, reliable and operable almost anywhere electricity was available. These attributes enabled manufacturers to eventually spring up anywhere there was a need, as against the former and limited manufacturing locations by a downward sloping stream that powered a waterwheel. The AC motor was crucial in the rapid growth of America as a world power.

Start a virtual group

Now here’s what I’m getting at: COVID-19 has caused the isolation of many of us, especially people who live alone.

I belong to a group with many depressed persons. One can only watch so much television before the soap operas all seem alike. Seeing the ads that tell me my car will break down and put a giant hole in my bank account make me want to throw a frying pan at the TV screen.

What we need is social contact—not just email or other forms of written communication. What we need is, well, propinquity. That’s the proper term, if I may use a word I recall from my high school Latin class.

Yes, we need to be near each other, but the risk is said to be high at this time. Thankfully, there is Zoom for computers, and Facetime if you have an Apple device. These are second best

to in-person contact, but they are effective barriers against viruses.

Those of us who belong to an inventor group may already enjoy periodic video meetings. But most inventors don’t belong to an organized group.

So, I suggest starting a Zoom or Facetime group. Not all participants need to be “hardware” inventors. Draw on people who paint, write, restore old furniture, etc.

The theme is creativity; the object created is less important than the means by which it manifests. (Oops, another one of those great Latin derivatives.)

Once you have a couple participants drawn from your acquaintances and friends, hold a video meeting so that you can claim yourselves as a creative group. Then, write a news article about your first meeting for your local paper. (This is how I started the inventor group in Danbury, Connecticut, in 1996.)

Remember, papers want news, not thinly disguised advertisements. You can add a legitimate statement that provides contact details.

Don’t neglect posting similar information at your library, in the windows of retail stores, etc. And of course, use social media to spread the word. When it is safe to meet in person again, you may have the nucleus of an inventors club.



Is Van Gogh's "Starry Night" an invention? Neil deGrasse Tyson calls it an "emotional interpretation of reality," that "If Van Gogh does not paint 'Starry Night,' then nobody is going to paint 'Starry Night.'"

Celebrate, debate creativity

At this point, you may be wondering: What is the connection between the bow and arrow, the alternating current motor and a Zoom meeting on creativity?

Creativity is an exciting subject. Sometimes it's even life saving. There's reason to believe that the bow and arrow and atlatl enabled the survival of the Homo sapiens species—us—whereas all the dozen or so other Homo species have not survived.

Perhaps that borders on philosophy rather than the practical matters of inventing. But that's the point.

We don't have to limit a Zoom meeting to the trials associated with our invention or other creation. The background, the history, the biographies, the competition, the dirty dealings, the failures, the wonderful creations that have made our lives more comfortable—these are the subjects that will compel, hold and increase the number of your recruits.

Think of the fascination of the first motor developed by Michael Faraday.

Imagine the thrill he must have felt when he saw its sustained motion. It was crude and offered no useful power, but it was the first time that anyone had ever observed rotation that was caused by electricity and magnetism.

That was 200 years ago. Key in "michael faraday's motor" on an internet search engine, and you will see several intriguing illustrations of this amazing device. Could Tesla have invented his motor without having Faraday's creation as a foundation?

Consider the tales of deceit and infringement among inventors of the past. Did Elisha Gray, Antonio Meucci or Alexander Graham Bell invent

the telephone? There is evidence of foul play involved. You decide, but involving others may provide material for two or three Zoom meetings.

Did Eli Whitney patent the cotton gin that was invented by Catherine Greene? I'm sure the women will have much to say in this discussion.

Is Van Gogh's "Starry Night" an invention? Neil deGrasse Tyson calls it an "emotional interpretation of reality," that "If Van Gogh does not paint 'Starry Night,' then nobody is going to paint 'Starry Night.'"

In other words, the difference between an invention and a painting is this: if Michael Faraday had not invented the electric motor, someone else likely would eventually have invented it—whereas there is only one original "Starry Night."

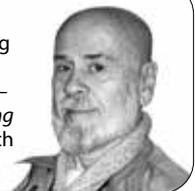
Think about the implications of that idea for inventors. Our originality is only ours if we claim it first. Even then, it's only officially ours if we patent it.

Creation is a very broad subject. And we inventors can gain a perspective that increases our imagination for our own specialty.

But we aren't just lone inventors; we are social creatures. We need each other as well as we need pencil and paper. Zoom, Facetime, etc. are our present, and hopefully temporary, media for interpersonal inspiration.

Let me know when you have your second meeting. I'll join you if you wish. ☺

Jack Lander, a near legend in the inventing community, has been writing for *Inventors Digest* for 24 years. His latest book is *Marketing Your Invention—A Complete Guide to Licensing, Producing and Selling Your Invention*. You can reach him at jack@inventor-mentor.com.



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Campaign Strategies

WINNING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IS MUCH LIKE A SUCCESSFUL POLITICIAN'S PLAN **BY ELIZABETH BREEDLOVE**

THE 2020 ELECTION season is both ramping up and drawing to a close. Politicians and their staff members have been working for months—even years—to craft a political campaign strategy that will have them winning at the polls in November.

Just like a good social media strategy, a good political campaign strategy requires much thought and hard work over an extended period. These tenets of successful political campaigns can also bring success in a social media campaign for your invention:

Stick to your guns. If you're a politician who wants to win an election, it's smart to stick to your beliefs. This instills trust in your voters or constituents. It helps them feel confident that you'll fulfill your promises. Keep your beliefs and your actions consistent while campaigning and in office.

Similarly, brands must maintain consistency. Make sure your social media marketing reflects your other branding and marketing, and vice versa. Keep your voice consistent across all platforms.

Your goal should be to create a clear, consistent, easy-to-recognize brand that followers and fans will immediately recognize and trust. If they feel good about your consistency on social media, they're more likely to trust that you'll be consistent elsewhere—such as in quality and customer service.

Bottom line: Follow the course you've set.

Rally your fans. If you're a politician hoping to win an election, you'll need voters. However, perhaps even more than that, you'll need people who will not only vote for you but encourage others to do the same.

A consumer product brand needs much more than customers; it also needs brand loyalists



A consumer product brand needs much more than customers; it also needs brand loyalists who will spread the word about your product.

who will spread the word about your product or invention and encourage others to purchase it as well.

Social media marketing is a great way to find followers and cultivate them into brand ambassadors. By posting regularly to social media, encouraging comments, interacting with followers and asking them to share your accounts—and of course, your product—with others, you'll gather a group of people who love your brand or product and want others to love it just as much.

Bottom line: Use social media to engage with followers and build relationships with those most loyal to your invention.

Have a plan for handling negative feedback. Whether you're a politician or an inventor of a consumer product, most likely you'll have at least a handful of haters. If you react negatively or defensively, you may make things worse and make yourself look bad.

Negativity spreads, so make sure you deal with it appropriately. Generally speaking, addressing negative comments on social media is a good idea as long as it is handled kindly with a positive attitude and doesn't turn into an argument.

If someone posts about a poor experience with your invention, it's appropriate to apologize for the issue, provide some kind feedback and offer to make it right.

It's OK to ignore rude comments. If they are offensive, you can delete them from your page. Just don't delete every negative comment.

Bottom line: Have a plan for handling negative feedback before you encounter it, and always stay kind and calm in your responses.

Serve your people well. Seek to build a relationship with your customers. Good customer service is especially key here.

If someone has a question or comment about your invention, respond quickly and helpfully. If someone purchases your product and there is a quality issue or it breaks, offer to make the situation right.

If you can, reward your most loyal customers; for example, give them a referral code that offers a

percentage off for both your customer and friend or family member who buys your product.

Social media makes you highly accessible, so this is a great place to offer exceptional customer service and a great customer experience. Make yourself available to answer questions, respond to issues and get to know your audience.

Bottom line: Prioritize your customers (as a politician would his or her voters). You're sure to experience greater growth.

Experience helps, but providing value is key.

It's no secret that during an election, incumbents typically have an advantage. Their constituents know who they are and are usually familiar with their policies. Although they may not agree with all of them, there is something about the familiarity that many voters find appealing.

However, a new arrival on the scene can win an election if he or she has beliefs similar to the majority of voters and is able to effectively communicate that.

Marketing a consumer product is similar. A product similar to your invention that has been on the market longer will of course have a greater market share initially. But if you provide value, you can come out on top over time.

Of course, your invention must provide value if you want people to purchase and use it, but it's also important to provide value on your social media accounts.

Post about your invention, of course, but also provide helpful information related to your industry that your customers would enjoy knowing. Offer a place for conversation and discourse that provides value, with the goal of having engaged followers who encourage others to engage with your brand as well.

Bottom line: A brand's (or politician's) experience matters, but providing something of value is much more important. ☺

Elizabeth Breedlove is a freelance marketing consultant and copywriter. She has helped start-ups and small businesses launch new products and inventions via social media, blogging, email marketing and more.



Solving Little Problems

FORMER ATTORNEY THRIVES WITH LINE OF INNOVATIVE BABY PRODUCTS **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

BY THE TIME you read this interview, I should be a grandma for the first time! My daughter and son-in-law were expecting a baby boy, due at the end of September.

After my many years of manufacturing safe baby products in China, I now have a personal interest in inventions for little ones. Recently while surfing on social media for such items, I came across an ad for grabease by elli&nooli, and its line of innovative baby products. I can't wait to try them on my grandson!

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): How did the grabease story begin?

Maya Shalev (MS): My background is in law and business management, but I was always fascinated by the art of product development. I always loved problem solving (possibly due to my previous life as a lawyer and trained mediator), as well as observing my babies' and other babies' development.

I first came up with a stroller blanket that wrapped around the baby in a way that couldn't fall off the stroller. In 2011—together with my father, who was an engineer—I invented the looping recorder to go into a plush animal and play Mommy's (or any loved one's) voice in a loop until the baby could fall asleep. To this day I personally think it's a brilliant idea, but marketing it and educating the market was difficult.

In 2014 my father passed away, and I felt that I needed a break from the entrepreneur adventure. I was pregnant at the time with my third one and had to focus on being healthy for him. But the inventor's bug didn't just go away and in 2017 the grabease utensils came to life (as with my other products) by observing my little one at the stage of self-feeding. I noticed that baby utensils aren't really designed with babies' needs and capabilities in mind.

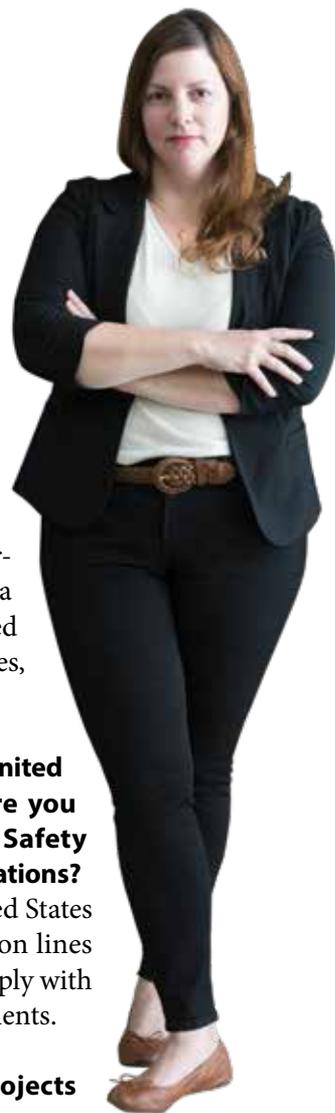
I started by breaking the spoons in my kitchen and designing a proper handle with play dough. Given its small size, I felt it needed a choke shield. So, that was added, and our first 3D fork and spoon were printed. I had consulted with occupational therapists and feeding specialists and made some changes to make sure the utensils are ergonomically designed for baby's natural hand grasp.



Maya Shalev came up with the idea for the grabease Allover (waterproof) Bib during a visit to the hair salon with her little one. The Ergonomic Utensils set was one of her first innovations.



“Apparently once a product has been patented anywhere outside of China for more than six months, you can no longer apply for a design patent in China. The solution is to invest in a patent in China ahead of time.” —MAYA SHALEV



After the plastic utensil launched, I noticed more and more young babies chewing on the rounded handle, so we made a silicone version of the ergonomic spoon to serve younger babies.

The toothbrush was my daughter's invention. She noticed we were struggling to brush her little brother's teeth and suggested we come up with a toothbrush that he could use on his own and become more comfortable with independent brushing. So, together with our pediatric dentist, the double-sided toothbrush was designed! It was patented under her name after she and I did some market research and learned about product pricing.

Then the bib came to life after conducting a survey that showed parents' second biggest struggle (after putting baby to sleep) was the mess during mealtime. There are so many bibs and floor mats on the market that I wasn't sure what else we could make. One day, I was at the hair salon with my little one when the bib apron/chair cover came to mind.

EGT: Have you a favorite among these?

MS: I love the toothbrush because my daughter came up with that idea and we patented it together. I'm mostly attached to the ergonomic utensils. They were the first ones in the Grabease line and are like my fourth child.

EGT: Have you tried crowdfunding?

MS: No. I figured if I need to spend time and money on promoting the crowdfunding, I may as well put that money into sales of the product directly. Of course, this strategy is possible when the initial fund for a small production is available.

EGT: I first noticed the Allover Bib ad on social media. Have the ads helped sales?

MS: Yes, ads help if you have a knowledgeable person running them. We had an interesting case with the Allover Bibs, where at first people did not understand the products and we were getting a lot of negative response. Once we changed a few things in our messaging and images, it was a game changer.

EGT: Are you manufacturing in the United States, or overseas? If overseas, are you following the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act testing and certifications?

MS: We manufacture both in the United States and overseas, and with both production lines we run third-party lab testing. We comply with U.S., EU and other countries' requirements.

EGT: I understand you have many projects of giving back.

MS: I always wanted my company to be tied to doing good. (TOMS was the inspiration.) We started small by cooperating with homeless pregnant women to do our packaging, we donated utensils to Feed the Children and Baby2Baby, and donated on a monthly basis to Operation Smile until we were able to commit to donate a meal to the Children's Hunger Fund for every item we sold.

EGT: What is your patent situation?

MS: Some items are utility patented, some are design, and some aren't at all. Some of the products are patented and trademarked internationally as well.

EGT: Where are your products sold?

MS: Grabease.com, Amazon, Nordstrom, buybuyBABY and in boutiques throughout the world.



Maya Shalev's favorite product is the Double-sided Toothbrush because her daughter came up with that idea and they patented it together.

EGT: Have you encountered any problems during product development?

MS: Of course! I can write a semester-long course about it. One example has to do with China's patent system. Apparently once a product has been patented anywhere outside of China for more than six months, you can no longer apply for a design patent in China. The solution is to invest in a patent in China ahead of time.

Another example has to do with sourcing materials. As the designer of the RecordablePal plush recorder, I wanted to use all kinds of fabrics to create the most appealing owl plush toy. From a business perspective, that wasn't a good idea. Each component and fabric of the finished product had to go through chemical and safety tests. With all the different kinds of materials I initially had it made with, the testing cost became very high.

When designing a product, you need to take into consideration the effect your design will have on the product's cost. I ended up cutting down on the variety of the materials to lower the testing costs.

EGT: Do you have any advice for our readers?

MS: I wish I knew the patent system in China better at the time. I was thinking small and didn't want to "waste" my money at such an early stage. Good products get picked up (by international distributors) pretty quickly, so you have to keep that in mind with everything you develop. ☺

Details: grabease.com

Books by **Edie Tolchin** (egt@edietolchin.com) include "Fanny on Fire" (fannyonfire.com) and "Secrets of Successful Inventing." She has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000. Edie has owned EGT Global Trading since 1997, assisting inventors with product safety issues and China manufacturing.



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Motivation is **All Relative**

BROTHERS' POWERFUL KITCHEN SCRUBBER RESULTED FROM AUNT AND UNCLE'S DIFFICULTIES **BY JEREMY LOSAW**

WHILE VISITING his aunt and uncle in New Jersey from his native India several years ago, Hannan Hakim noticed they struggled to clean the dishes after meals. So he rolled up his sleeves and got busy—on an invention.

His older relatives lacked the hand strength to effectively clean tough stains in the kitchen. Hakim assumed there was a motorized cleaner on the market that could help, but after thorough research he found nothing.

An industrial designer by trade, Hakim—with his brother Juzer Saleem—created the Skadu, a motorized cleaning tool that scrubs grimy surfaces in the kitchen and bathroom.

Skadu is a powerful handheld device with a high-torque motor and bespoke planetary drivetrain that spins a variety of rotary

heads to power through tough stains on dishes, pans, grills, ovens—even cars and bicycles. The primary head is a three-disc scrubber; there is also a bottle brush and single-head copper scrubber as alternative options.

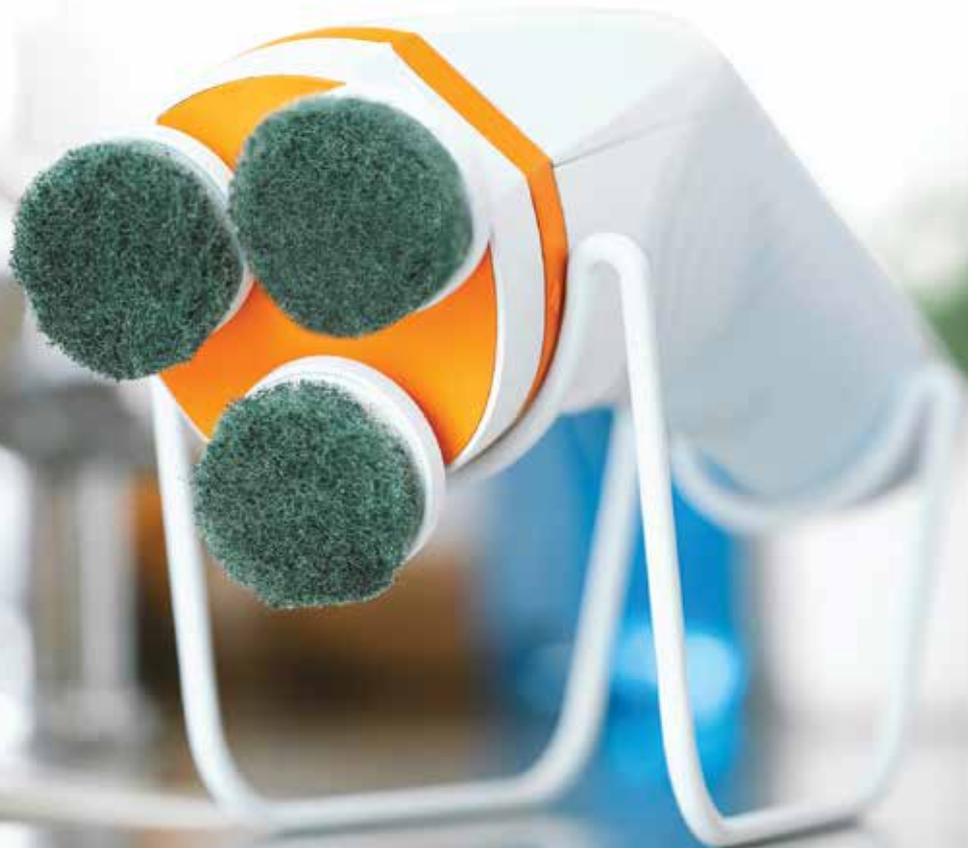
Skadu's onboard batteries are charged with a USB cable, and it has an app that monitors device diagnostics and provides a portal to order new heads.

Never-ending prototypes

The brothers began engineering Skadu in 2017. At the start of the development process, Hakim knew that ergonomics would be a key customer consideration. They tackled that first.

The two built prototypes—about 100 in all—of different styles out of foam, exploring the form and hand feel through these low-cost techniques.

Skadu's primary head is a three-disc scrubber. A bottle brush (below) and single-head copper scrubber (bottom) are alternative options.



“The target (market) that we had the idea to make the product for”—seniors—“would not be able to hold something so bulky.” —HANNAN HAKIM



They used FDM 3D printing to build prototypes when a good design seemed imminent.

“What we realized was that all of the other products that came out were too big and too bulky,” Hakim said. “The target (market) that we had the idea to make the product for”—seniors—“would not be able to hold something so bulky.”

Once the design and ergonomics were understood, the development turned toward the drive mechanism. Hakim started by purchasing similar types of motorized products and tearing them down to see how they worked. Devices such as motorized foot scrubbers provided key insights for how to possibly transmit the required torque to the heads.

“The first hack that I have learned in prototyping is to make something as close to your conceptual model as soon as possible to see if it can achieve what you are trying to do,” Hakim said.

Eventually, the brothers found a planetary gear head they liked. They worked with motor and gear manufacturers to provide the desired speed and torque, and customize it to fit the intended product design.

Crowdfunding turning point

Skadu, made by Hyper Lychee—the company the brothers co-founded in 2017—has an evolving suite of intellectual property to cover the innovation.

Hakim started by filing patents in India; he has since been using the Patent Cooperation Treaty to file intellectual property in other key markets.

Because Hyper Lychee (named for a hyper work ethic with a softer side, like a lychee fruit) is a startup, he admits that the expansion of the patent portfolio is a balance of available funds to file versus the potential for copycats. However, he feels that if a product is valuable and the company

is honest in delivering quality products, customers will stay loyal to his brand even if similar products hit the market.

Skadu was launched at this year’s Consumer Electronics Show. This provided strong feedback and media coverage for the product that resulted in a NICE Award for excellence in innovation.

The positive reinforcement led to a Kickstarter campaign for Skadu that was launched in August. Hakim chose to crowdfund the product because he felt it was the only viable way to get the project into the market without a huge budget or being backed by investors.

The product was fully funded in the first hour after launch and raised more than \$175,000.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Hakim has planned two manufacturing options.

His preferred option is to use the factories in China where he has established relationships, and where the tooling is already designed and ready to start manufacturing. However, should China cease to be an option, he has mapped out a strategy to manufacture in India even if that would result in an increased cost of goods.

The primary focus is to push to deliver Skadu to backers in the first quarter of next year. However, this has not stopped the creative juices.

Hakim plans for additional cleaning heads and a larger Skadu that will be better suited for large surfaces in bathrooms. 🛁

Details: hyperlychee.com

Jeremy Losaw is a freelance writer and engineering manager for Enventys. He was the 1994 Searles Middle School Geography Bee Champion. He blogs at blog.edissonnation.com/category/prototyping/.





Inspired ELEGANCE

ACTRESS AMBYR CHILDERS' JEWELRY LINE
BEGAN WITH GREAT-GRANDMOTHER'S STORIES
ABOUT HERITAGE, STRENGTH **BY REID CREAGER**

AMBYR CHILDERS says airplanes are her favorite invention. “They make the world so much smaller and allow us to connect with new people and cultures everywhere,” she says.

“To me, inventing is expanding the boundaries of human knowledge and experience,” she told *Inventors Digest*. “It’s an important part of the creative design process for my jewelry, and I feel so fortunate to be in a space where I am able to take my ideas and run with them.”

The versatile Hollywood actress—who appeared in “The Master,” directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, Showtime’s “Ray Donovan” and most recently starred in the Netflix series “YOU”—is proud that her Ambyr Childers Jewelry represents more than beauty. It tells a story with timeless themes such as empowerment and heritage.

That story begins with her great-grandmother.

Enduring impact

When she was a little girl, Ambyr liked to sit with her great-grandmother and her jewelry box. She listened to stories about each piece and their historic connection to the local native tribe.

Her great-grandfather helped build homes for the Yavapai people and even gave them food during the winter. They responded by gifting her great-grandparents with baskets—and turquoise jewelry.

She grew up with those jewelry pieces and the priceless stories of her heritage, which embody strength and dignity.

“My great-grandmother taught me that jewelry holds an invaluable truth and can be worn as a talisman to empower a woman’s strength in her femininity,” Childers says. “Learning the stories behind each treasured relic sparked the desire to embrace my heritage and the ancient symbols that surround it, and translate that into beautiful jewelry pieces!”

That embrace tightened once she became an actress. In her downtime, she found herself sketching jewelry designs and thinking about her great-grandmother. She felt comfort, strength and peace during adversity.

Around this time, her parents traced her father’s ancestry to the Dawes Rolls—lists of people who were accepted as eligible for tribal

TV and movie actress Ambyr Childers says “inventing is expanding the boundaries of human knowledge and experience.”

PHOTOS BY ROWAN DALY



membership in the “Five Civilized Tribes”: Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws and Seminoles. Childers’ sisters and father received their Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma tribal card.

She has passed along the importance of her heritage to her daughters London, 10, and Rylee, 6, who already participate in helping to design new pieces.

“Jewelry is forever. It is something that can be passed down and cherished from generation to generation. That was something that really felt

special and appealed to me, especially thinking about my daughters.”

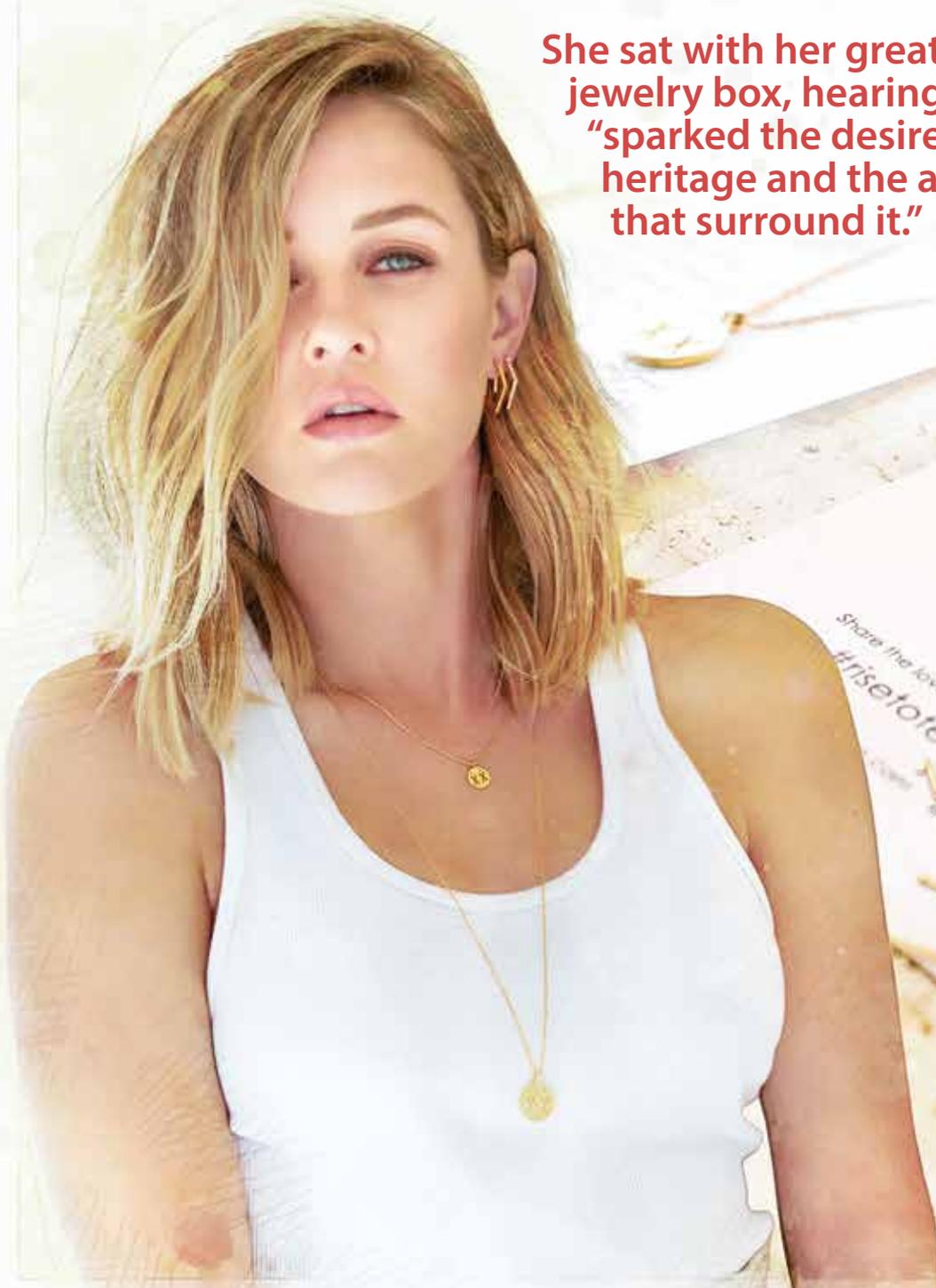
Rising above challenges

Childers’ Rise Totem Necklace, part of the Rise Totem Collection, is the heart of the brand for its creative design and the power it represents.

“The Rise symbol represents the bonds we form as women and the strength that comes from those bonds. I was first inspired when I became a mother to London and Rylee.

The Rise Totem Necklace represents the strong bonds formed by women.

She sat with her great-grandmother’s jewelry box, hearing stories that “sparked the desire to embrace my heritage and the ancient symbols that surround it.”



“The whole collection is filled with delicate jewelry containing the Rise Totem, and it is my hope that people will not only purchase the pieces for themselves but also share them with a parent, sister, lover, or friend with whom they have a special connection. We recently made the small and medium Rise Totem necklaces as part of a buy-one- get-one-free deal to help share the love.

“The mantra for it is: ‘Alone we hold strength; together we rise.’”

And even for a successful Hollywood actress, strength is of the essence as a single mother of two young girls while trying to run a business during a pandemic.

“I think there is always a challenge when starting a new brand with getting the word out,” Childers says. “I decided to use my name to help people recognize the jewelry, and I’m hoping that by sharing so much of my personal story in the form of my jewelry, it will help people relate to the pieces and the brand.

“I wear this jewelry every single day. It truly provides the comfort and strength I need in the madness that comes from being a mom, business owner, entrepreneur, partner, and now at-home-school teacher.

“If the jewelry can help other people find their strength, and look good doing it, then it has served its purpose.”

Surviving, planning

Asked how the line is selling, Childers says, “We are surviving! I completely understand that this has been a trying year for everyone, especially small businesses.”

She says the company is using this time to focus on designing new products and planning ways to give back to the community.

Its latest collection is The Malachite Eclipse, featuring a stunning Malachite stone. Childers also wants to begin partnering with some local, independently owned brands in the beauty sector.

She remains excited about the jewelry on a number of levels, especially her faithfulness to the innovative process: “My creative spirit is fierce. My jewelry is bold, colorful and full of meaning.

“Inventors are visionaries. They see the world in ways it has never been seen before, and that

is how we are able to propel society further and advance our communities.”

She urges innovators to be invigorated by that commitment—while always remaining true to themselves and their mission.

“Focus on the message you want your brand to convey, be authentic and genuine in your brand’s identity, and don’t be afraid to take a moment when you need it! Work hard, play hard.” ☘

Details: ambyrchilders.com



AMBYR CHILDERS

Born: Cottonwood, Arizona

Home: Los Angeles

Education: Vista Murrieta High School

TV/movie credits: “Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star,” 2003; “All My Children,” 2006-08; “The Master,” 2012; “Playback,” 2012; “We Are What We Are,” 2013; “Ray Donovan,” 2013-20; “Aquarius,” 2015; “Vice,” 2015; “You,” 2018-19.

Favorite movie: Any movie with Denzel Washington!

Favorite book: “The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F***”

Favorite quote: “Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind.”—Bernard M. Baruch





10 QUESTIONS WITH: SEAN MATSON

TROUW LITE



RETIRED NAVY SEALS WORK WITH U.S. MILITARY TO PROVIDE UNIQUE HIGH-TECH EQUIPMENT

LIGHTER, more practical technology isn't limited to cellphones, television sets and Alexa.

MATBOCK's stated mission is to "design lighter and more practical equipment for every environment"—with a heavy emphasis on safety for its U.S. military and law enforcement base of customers. Its equipment also serves hunters, campers, hikers and adventurers.

Cofounders Sean Matson and Zach Steinbock know the importance of this mission from experience. Matson served almost 10 years as a Navy SEAL; Steinbock is also a retired Navy SEAL and a combat veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan.

They work closely with the U.S. military and have been contracted to create unique products that use new technologies for making equipment more efficient. MATBOCK's top-selling products include: The Tarsier Eclipse (auto-focus for night vision goggles); dry bags; Cobra Sled (a mountain rescue litter); S-LIFT (poles and ladders for hunters), and the Reaper Hunting Vest. Its products even include medical equipment.

The company isn't just about its own mission. Steinbock and Matson encourage ideas from those who can benefit men and woman in combat.

Inventors Digest editor-in-chief Reid Creager interviewed Matson about MATBOCK (Steinbock provides his background in the first question).

Tell me about both of your backgrounds and MATBOCK's beginnings.

Sean Matson: I grew up in Richmond, Virginia, and graduated from Virginia Military Institute in 2005 with a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering. After VMI, I got my commission from Navy Officer Candidate School in Pensacola, Florida. In August 2005, I met Zach as we were both part of the same Basic Underwater Demolition School (BUD/s) class, 258. We started with 140 people in our class and Zach and I were two of the 19 original members of 258 who graduated.

Zach Steinbock: I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 2005 with a Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering. Immediately following graduation, I went with some of the other future SEAL officer candidates to Alaska to participate in NOLS (the National Outdoor Leadership School), a wilderness leadership and skills course.

In August 2005, I met Sean during BUD/s. After that we were off to start SEAL Qualification Training, which is four months of advance training before heading to the SEAL teams. During a flight to Alaska in 2006, our first product was

A soldier wears the MATBOCK Tarsier Eclipse, which provides auto-focus for night-vision goggles. MATBOCK's equipment also serves hunters, campers, hikers and adventurers.

born—a new cargo netting system for 463L Cargo Pallets. This product was also our first issued utility patent.

Sean, what portion of your customers are adventurers/outdoorsmen, as opposed to military/law enforcement?

We have multiple subsidiaries under MATBOCK Origins (our holding company) and all of them seek to support these customers. For MATBOCK specifically, military/law enforcement makes up over 90 percent of our customers.

While a lot of our products have crossover applicability to the hunting and outdoor space, the higher costs associated with our designs, materials and all U.S.-made raw materials and manufacturing prevents mainstream adoption. We have had other companies in the past where the majority of the customers were adventurers/outdoorsmen.

Who builds the prototypes? Tell me about how involved this process can be. What product was the most difficult for which to arrive at a final prototype?

Early on it was primarily Zach. I took the lead on marketing and other aspects.

Zach and Jim Foreman are the primary two that work to establish the beginning products, but then we have a team of prototype sewers, graphic designers and others to get the product to market. I assist from time to time, but mainly from a strategic level, the heavy lifting comes from Zach and Jim.

Our first one was definitely the most difficult—the cargo net. While it has been our hardest to get to market and hardest to sell, we learned so much during the process and we have been able to improve from there.

In 2016, we started developing a medical device with some other engineers that has plenty of its own challenges because of the FDA process. But using our knowledge from now having brought over 100 products to market, we are fully confident that once this product is cleared by the FDA it will be our greatest success to date—not just from the standpoint of revenue, but how it will greatly change the battlefield to save even more lives.

Any interesting notes about your prototyping challenges?

Military/law enforcement procurement is done largely through contracts. These contracts are typically multi-year, which is great when you're on a contract but difficult when you're trying to develop something new and innovative.

We have seen that the more a paradigm shift a product or technology is, the longer it takes for the customers to start buying at scale (on average about five years).

Where are your products manufactured?

All of our raw materials and products are proudly made here in the USA! All products start here in our facility in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and then will go to one of our contract manufacturers here in the U.S. for refinement and scale.

What is your most popular product for the military? For outdoors people?

The Tarsier Eclipse is probably our most popular product for both military and outdoorsmen.

It's such a simple product that offers such a huge advantage, it makes it a no-brainer. It allows an individual using night vision goggles to focus at all distances at the same time. Without it, the user would only have a limited focal range, similar to a camera.

MATBOCK cofounder Zach Steinbock wears the company's MR Dry Bag during over-the-beach operations.



PHOTO BY ????????

PHOTO BY PAUL WILDMAN



“We know our products are making significant changes on the battlefield, and we are saving lives by the products we are creating!” —SEAN MATSON

What intellectual property do you have? Patents? Trademarks? Copyrights?

We have over six utility patents and multiple trademarks. Our most popular patents are our LIFT System patent that reduces weight for the military person by nearly 60 lbs. while also making it cheaper for units to purchase. This system of products replaces a lot of “one-trick ponies.”

What are some of the challenges of working with the U.S. military?

The biggest challenge with working with the military is navigating their procurement cycle and all the different contract vehicles the government sets up.

But I’m sure you would rather focus on the rewards of working with the military. What are they?

The most rewarding part is that we know our products are making significant changes on the battlefield, and we are saving lives by the products we are creating!

One of the first stretchers we got onto the battlefield was sent back to us by the unit and after recovering four wounded personnel. It hangs in our production facility to this day as a constant reminder of how crucial the quality of our products is to our customers.

These are challenging times for law enforcement. Can you speak to its important role and your pride in providing products that help these officers?

There is not a tougher job on the planet than being in law enforcement. They are underpaid, underappreciated and risk their lives daily for the safety and security of our communities.

Unfortunately, the good cops are getting drowned out by the bad ones.

We feel very fortunate that our products are being used to rescue any and all people affected by the violence. ☺

Details: MATBOCK.com

Top: An injured soldier is placed on a MATBOCK R-LIFT.

Above: Sean Matson, MATBOCK cofounder, is excited about a medical device developed by the company and engineers that awaits FDA approval.



FOUR for More

WITH MORE FREE TIME, RAMP UP YOUR INNOVATION AND PROTOTYPING SKILLS IN THESE 4 AREAS **BY JEREMY LOSAW**

MORE THAN A HALF year into the COVID-19 pandemic, it does not look like life is going fully back to normal soon. It has been a difficult transition for many people, but the upside is that times of change are ripe for innovation.

With daily lives and work schedules upended, inventors have more flexibility than ever to work on their innovations and build great prototypes. Now that many of us work from home, we have taken back the often-significant time we used to spend on our commutes, and enjoyed the flexibility to not be trapped at our desks from 9 to 5.

So, instead of succumbing to the “Netflix and chill” culture, take some of your new free time to hone your innovation and prototyping skills in the following four areas.

Ideation

We have all heard the classic inventor fable that ideas strike like lightning bolts. Surely, ideas do strike at random moments—as in a dream or while in the shower.

However, ideas for products do not have to be magical moments that find you. You can take the initiative and search for the ideas yourself.

The process of coming up with concepts, often called ideation, is a skill that can be cultivated

and improved. One of my favorite techniques for exercising the “idea muscle” is to write down 10 ideas a day, a technique that I first heard about from podcaster and blogger James Altucher. It is a great way to get reps on coming up with ideas.

It is simple. Each day, log 10 (or more) ideas in a notebook. They do not all have to be product ideas. They could be books you want to read, or places you want to visit.

It may take 15-20 minutes to get your first set, but after a few weeks you will be amazed by how your mind shifts to looking for opportunities. You just might find that you extract a great new product idea this way.

Sketching

This skill is a crucial aspect of product design, yet few people are comfortable with it.

Even a rough sketch of a concept can clarify the details in ways that words often fail, and is so valuable for the development process. Sketching is also a very fast way to iterate through ideas, as the hand can draw concepts much faster than they can be rendered in CAD or prototyped.

The key to getting better at sketching is a mix of proper technique and repetition. Make sure you always have a pen or pencils and paper handy so you have the tools to sketch when the



Ideas for products do not have to be magical moments that find you. You can take the initiative and search for the ideas yourself.

moment strikes. Carve out 5-10 minutes a day to practice, or even do some sketching while on your work-at-home conference calls.

Tracing may seem like cheating, but it can be a great way to train your hand to sketch better. So, do not be afraid to print out images from patent drawings or of things you like and trace them.

I am spoiled to work with talented designers with great sketching skills I can learn from, but there are great lessons on YouTube that you can watch to learn some techniques. I recommend Anton Ruckman's channel (user/zutony007); he has videos on how to sketch that are specifically aimed at product designers—including a seven-video series for beginners.

Sewing

If the pandemic can be characterized by one product, it is the mask.

Once masks became *de rigueur* and even mandated in many states for those who are out in public, people did not settle for the standard surgical varieties. They began making their own with fabric patterns of super heroes or their favorite sports teams, which brought back to prominence the craft of sewing.

Sewing is also a great skill for prototypers. Many products have a soft goods element, so it is handy to know at least some sewing basics to be able to prototype them with any fidelity.

Hand stitching is a useful skill for small and simple projects; you can practice stitching with just a needle and thread. A handheld sewing machine is a good entree for using a powered sewing machine.

Handheld sewing machines are inexpensive but give you the power to sew long areas. They can be clumsy to use and set up but are very handy for sewing areas that would be too annoying by hand. These machines can be used to make great prototypes.

Once you have mastered the handheld, it is time to go pro with a proper sewing machine. Sewing machines allow much more flexibility to your sewing, and you have greater control with

the foot pedal. There are plenty of online tutorials that can get you started.

Painting

This is an often overlooked prototyping skill. In production, parts can be molded in the colors you want, or given a paint finish or other coating to provide the finished look to the product.

However, in prototyping, we often use 3D-printed parts that are a clear, white, or neutral shade with ugly build lines. So, for a prototype to look its best for photography or filming, it often needs a great paint job for it to look like a manufactured product. Great painting can be done at home, even if you do not have a garage or paint booth.

Painting starts with preparation, and that means sanding. If you are painting a 3D-printed part, you need to start with 100-150 grit sandpaper to remove the build lines and then move progressively through to finer grits, finishing around 400.

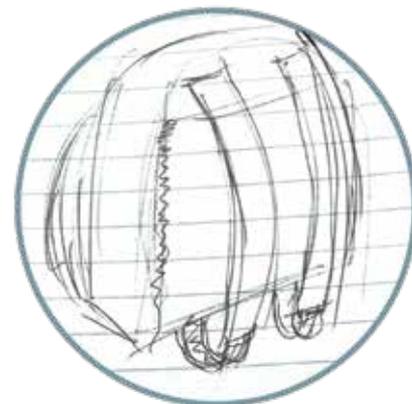
Next, you can lay down a coat of primer to seal the surface, fill small cracks and give the part a uniform neutral base color. Make sure you use protective gear such as face masks and rubber gloves when spraying, and always spray outside or in a ventilated area.

When the primer is dry, 400-600 grit sandpaper will smooth out the imperfections. If you break through the primer, recoat to get a smooth finish before moving on to the color coat.

Color can be applied very effectively with spray cans.

It is prudent to test the color on a scrap part or the back of a plastic spoon to make sure it is compatible with the primer and is the color you want.

Once the color is dry, you can add a clear coat to seal it and give it a protective layer. Be sure to use a clear coat that is the same brand and system of the color coat to ensure that the color layer does not react in a bad way and cause spider webbing. 🍷



This very crude early sketch of the writer's innovation, the Dadsak, formed the basis for the patent filing.



Press Release Basics

KNOW HOW AND WHEN TO PREPARE ONE, DON'T FORGET THE FIVE WS, AND REMEMBER YOUR AUDIENCE **BY ALYSON DUTCH**

A **PRESS RELEASE** is an announcement that should be meant to provide the media with factual information to report. It's ideally written in a specific format, which conceptually is in the shape of an inverted pyramid—i.e., where the most important content is provided at the top.

A press release is a tool used only when there is something truly newsworthy to announce to the press.

When a new product is developed, it is not newsworthy. But when it hits shelves and customers can buy it, the product becomes newsworthy.

Coming up with an idea for a service is not newsworthy, but finishing a study that shows a need for such a product is newsworthy. Get it?

Suggested format

If you are or were a journalism student, you know that a press release is dominated by a compelling, succinct headline. The first paragraph begins with the “five Ws”—who, what, where, when and why—followed by a couple paragraphs providing supporting information and then a “boilerplate” at the end.

The release ideally begins with a notation to the media about the timing for the news to be disseminated: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, or for release on a specific date. That is followed by contact information and the headline.

Your first paragraph must contain all the basic essentials—in other words, what would remain if your release was reduced to a one-paragraph story. It includes the five Ws.

The secondary paragraph should provide strong supporting information, followed by a third paragraph that includes a quote from an

inventor or significant supporter. This quote should not be flowery hyperbole but instead should focus on the factual benefits of the invention. The fourth paragraph can be the boilerplate.

Specifics on the most important components:

Headline. It's the most important part of the press release. It must be written so that it basically tells the entire story or purpose of your release.

When developing a press release, the exact angle, tone and story you want to tell is the first thing to put into words. The rest flows from there.

Once the headline is perfected, the rest of the release can expand on the story. Anticipate that the first five words of your headline will be the only thing that virtually all of your recipients will see. So it had better be poignant, full of information and newsworthy.

A few musts about headlines:

- Be extremely succinct. Forget superlatives. Tell the story.
- Leave out grammatical articles, connecting thoughts and preambles.
- Limit the headline to one line only (if possible).
- The words “reveal” and “secret” are some of the top attention-grabbing words for headlines.
- Use 100 percent fact. A good headline is not an opinion.

A subhead is not necessary, but sometimes it's a nice way to put important information up front. And it can expand on the headline. Example of a headline and subhead:

HORMONE THAT CAUSES BELLY FAT REVEALED

‘Skinny for Summer: How to Blast Belly Fat’ addresses major health issue



The headline must be written so that it basically tells the entire story or purpose of your release.

First paragraph. The five Ws format of the first paragraph must be present. Sadly, this is not always followed by publicists; writing skills are often not their most developed talents.

For now, however, you must write your own press releases in this format. Deviating from it can cost you press attention you should have had.

We live in a time when attention is a precious commodity. Life is so incredibly full of images, sounds, messages, advertising.

This is about learning to communicate in a very specific manner to an audience: journalists. So, take heed.

Many press outlets, such as weekly newspapers and in-flight magazines, have a tiny staff. Often your press releases are sent to an editor, who may like your story but doesn't have a reporter to assign to interview you or even someone to write the story in his or her own words.

So, guess what happens? The publication prints your press release, verbatim, cutting everything from the bottom up, using the first paragraph only. It had better be written well.

Second paragraph. This supports the first paragraph. It often lists places where a product can be purchased, billing people involved in a production, or information about how a product

has been received by an industry or audience.

Sometimes, you can turn the second paragraph into a quote.

Quote. You have seconds to capture the attention of a busy journalist. So, don't waste precious space in a press release saying something like, "We are so happy this product has finally hit the shelves."

When it comes to a quote, fill it full of meat. Take an industry statistic, for example, and make it into a quote.

A statistic will give a reporter a fuller picture of your industry and provide a context for your product's existence. Another piece of meat to put into your quote might be some interesting background that served as inspiration for the product to be developed.

Boilerplates. The boilerplate is a synopsis of your product and company using branding and advertising language, your URL, and even your address and/or phone number. It's your quick "elevator speech" about your product and company.

These are very succinct product and company descriptions that are dropped, verbatim, into every single press release. They don't change unless your company or products change.



Don't waste precious space in a press release saying something like, "We are so happy this product has finally hit the shelves."

Targeting your audience

A press release can be customized with a trade slant or a consumer angle.

For example, the announcement of a new personalized surfboard company's deals for boards made for major retailers as promotional tools is a headline that would be used for marketing trade magazines. The reason for writing it would be to find other companies wanting to order personalized surfboards they can use for their promotion as well.

The same company might write a press release about the personalized boards sent to surfers who might buy them. The headline for this will be more angled toward them and the fact they can have their own designs and ideas on their surfboard.

The kind of outlets that would report about this might be surf magazines, men's dotcom ezines, and sports news shows.

Cost considerations

Some companies write press releases every month just for the exposure. Although this isn't a bad idea to create repetition of message, it's expensive.

Every time you send a press release over PRNewswire, it can cost \$850 or more.

Using PRNewswire, by the way, is an art. Find a good rep there who can navigate you through the incredible amount of services offered. There are many options with different price tags that will reach different kinds of press throughout the world. 🌐

Alyson Dutch has been a leading consumer packaged goods launch specialist for 30 years. She operates Malibu-based Brown + Dutch Public Relations and Consumer Product Events, and is a widely published author.



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YOUR CHECKLIST, IN ORDER

- A chronological checklist of what to do with your press release once it's written:
- Formulate the "story."
- Write a pitch from the press release. This is usually culled from the first paragraph.
- Write a verbal pitch.
- Write an email version pitch.
- Determine what kind of press would be interested in reporting about your story. If your product is for dog owners, that list might include regional magazines: new products editors; national newspapers, city editors; women's magazines, new products and features editors; pet aficionado magazines and e-zines, editors; business magazines; entrepreneurial and small business editors.
- Pull your lists. The site prhandbookentrepreneurs.com gives customized lists by the piece.
- Develop a pithy mini headline (smaller than 10 words!) and use for an email "Subject."
- Cut and paste email addresses into the BCC line of your email. Do not let others see who else you are sending to.
- Cut and paste your press release into the body of the email (do not send as an attachment).
- Email it. Wait 1-2 days.
- Email the pitch to the same lists with same subject line.
- Begin phone follow-up, contact by contact.
- Call each one at least times; the goal is to get someone on the phone. Make sure it's the right contact by asking, "Are you the right person who reports about xxxx?" If not, get the right person and change your list.
- Once you get the right person on the phone, say your verbal pitch.
- Ask "Does this interest you to report?" If yes, offer an interview or photographs of your product.
- Find out when the story will run, and ask for copies.

Don't forget to post the press release on your website; add it to your press kit; send it to colleagues and friends, and give it to your sales staff to use in their presentations.



Overcoming Others' Failure

5 STEPS FOR PROVING THAT A PREVIOUSLY FAILED INVENTION TYPE CAN SUCCEED IN THE MARKET **BY DON DEBELAK**

USUALLY, you aren't the first one to see a problem and try to fix it.

Sometimes, you find patents for inventions that try to solve the same problem as yours, or people within your industry may have seen products similar to yours that fail to make it to market.

When industry people have seen a certain type of product fail a number of times, they are highly skeptical that a similar one can succeed. What do you do when you have a great new product that works for a great price, but other inventors' failures have left potential buyers or partners reluctant to accept your innovation?

Example: Air ducts, even after cleaning, frequently expel dust when the heater or air conditioner comes on. I did a quick check on Google Patents and found over 10 patents and patent applications. I did a search for commercial air duct cleaning equipment and found numerous other patents.

The question is how many products have tried to solve the same problem as yours. They don't have to be just like yours.

Check product directories available from trade magazines or trade associations. In this case, I searched for air duct cleaning equipment trade magazines, found the National Air Duct Cleaning Association, and that it had a product directory.

Consider this checklist for eliminating skeptics:

1. Determine why other products failed. You don't need to ask too many buyers about this; one or two recurring problems is enough.
2. Show why or how your product avoids those problems.
3. Show that your product is easy to use. Offer potential buyers major encouragement to try your product. They may have wasted a lot

of time evaluating other products. This is probably the most important point.

4. Prove your product works better. A demonstration is the best way. In our example, having a clear collection box to show how much dirt your invention picks up from ducts would be a good selling point.
5. Be sure your sell sheet, sales video or packaging has something special to grab people's attention. Often you get a better visual if you use Upwork (upwork.com) or Freelancer (freelancer.com) to find a graphic designer you can hire.

Other non-performance issues cause products to fail. They could require too much investment, either to manufacture or the investment in equipment to operate the product. They might require too much training for personnel to use.

All these things increase the cost and difficulty for customers to add or buy a new product. If it is too expensive or too much of a hassle, most people will pass on your product no matter how big of a benefit it can provide.

Finally, even if your product performs much better than all other previous products, if your customers don't quickly grasp this you will never overcome their skepticism.

Sometimes it's not enough to prove your product is better. Sometimes you have to show it is far superior. 🏆



Don Debelak is the founder of One Stop Invention Shop, which offers marketing and patenting assistance to inventors. He is also the author of several marketing books, including Entrepreneur magazine's *Bringing Your Product to Market*. Debelak can be reached at (612) 414-4118 or dondebelak34@msn.com.





Bites at the **Apple**

SERIES OF COURT SETBACKS HIGHLIGHT THE TECH BEHEMOTH'S VULNERABILITIES—AND STRENGTHS **BY LOUIS CARBONNEAU**

RECENT WEEKS have been rife with IP-related news: a big award and a Chinese threat against Apple (more on this below); a German victory by Nokia against Daimler that may disrupt its ability to ship cars; news that IP litigation finance has brought over \$1 billion in cash available to use in patent assertion campaigns.

As I try to focus on the macro picture, remember that for those who need their daily dose of news you can follow me on either LinkedIn or Twitter.

Pain in Cupertino

If you set aside the fact that Apple just passed a market cap of 2 trillion dollars—greater than the annual GDP of Canada—things haven't been too good lately for the Cupertino, California, giant.

First, it lost a fairly visible patent infringement case brought by non-practicing entity PanOptis that awarded damages of half a billion dollars; lost a series of motions trying to avoid a \$1.1 billion payment to CalTech University (along with Broadcom) on another patent case it lost in January; and was sued in China for \$1.4 billion in damages (with the added risk of an injunction) by Chinese operating company Shanghai Zhizhen Network Technology Co. (*Editor's note:* A non-practicing entity or NPE is a person or company holding a patent for a product or process but with no intention of developing it.)

Oh, and the United States International Trade Commission announced that it is launching an investigation following a complaint by Maxell that Apple is infringing its patents. Finally, just when the U.S. Congress seems to have rediscovered its “trust-busting” muscle, Apple was sued by Epic Games, the maker of the uber-popular Fortnite, on antitrust grounds.

So many bites at the mighty Apple. Are the winds changing?

Collateral damage

Regarding the PanOptis suit, half a billion is essentially pocket change for Apple. That's necessary collateral damage to the company's overall strategy that it can afford to lose a few cases here and there while discouraging many more aggrieved patent owners from even bringing their claims in the first place—the very definition of “efficient infringement.”

By simply developing internally new product features that are similar to what others have already implemented or are described in third-party patents, Apple is playing the odds that only a few of those will ever sue on the basis of patent infringement. Most patent owners are too small to contemplate picking a fight with such a giant.

Reinforcing the perception that it has a “no-settle” policy makes sense in this context. In reality, Apple is already licensed to many patent portfolios belonging to large patent owners (as we at Tangible IP often discover when taking a new portfolio under brokerage), generally as a result of company-wide, cross-patent licensing agreements.

But Apple is known to take a much different, much harder stance when it comes to NPEs and largely ignores individual patent claims from startups and inventors. The company's open lobbying over the years—along with many other large tech companies—to weaken the U.S. patent system has enabled it to play that long game successfully for many, many years.

Thus, for every PanOptis or CalTech case, there are hundreds of inventors whose ideas have been freely integrated by others without any due consideration for their contributions. As we often comment here, this is a long-term recipe certain to kill the innovative fiber of many American inventors.

The Chinese threat

But this strategy may not work in China. With the lawsuit brought by Shanghai Zhizhen Network Technology in a country that grants injunctions at a rate of almost 90 percent, Apple may be “one patent injunction away from not being able to manufacture any iPhones” (they all come from China), as one author noted.

In fact, for years I have been warning that while the United States was happily dismantling its patent enforcement system that used to be the envy of the world, the Chinese were busy building theirs.

First, they had to make it look like it was fair and neutral—with no preference shown to the local players—until people would generally become convinced of this very fact. And then it would start favoring the local players with no one left to argue that the country’s system is rigged in favor of the home team.

We will soon see if these predictions hold true. If they do, it will be the largest self-inflicted transfer of wealth from the United States to China over time.

As if U.S. companies needed to transfer more IP for free to China...

This is what happens when companies take the shorter view against a regime that is known to play the long game much better than anyone else.

Fortnite and sad reality

Finally, the lawsuit from Fortnite owner Epic is interesting. It is based on antitrust grounds and indirectly opens the door to extending the argument in our world.

Like an app developer on the iOS platform, Fortnite cannot sell its game on the App store without paying Apple a generous cut (generally 30 percent). When Fortnite tried to bypass this toll recently, Apple booted the company immediately—which Epic likely anticipated, as it filed its antitrust claim shortly thereafter.

What does this have to do with patents?

Very little at first sight. Actually, the only patent lawsuits so far on these grounds were brought by Apple itself (along with Intel) against patent owner Fortress Investment Group, primarily based on the alleged ground that the very NPE model is being anticompetitive.

The courts have not taken the bait so far. But if you turn the tables, couldn’t it be argued that the concept of efficient infringement, which

For every PanOptis or CalTech case, there are hundreds of inventors whose ideas have been freely integrated by others without any due consideration for their contributions.



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essentially concentrates most innovations brought to market in the hands of a few (the infamous “kill zone”), runs afoul of antitrust laws?

I did some research. Although I’ll be the first to admit I am far from an authority at searching legal precedents using a simple browser, I could not find anything directly on point (and would welcome contributions from anyone who did).

The closest argument I could find is Sonos CEO Patrick Spence testifying before the House Antitrust Committee that Google had blocked the company from enabling both Amazon’s Alexa assistant and the Google Assistant from being active at the same time.

Sonos recently filed a patent lawsuit against Google, for instance, “alleging that the company copied its smart speaker design while undercutting it on price, betting that the cost of a lawsuit would be less than the profits of dominating the market—a practice Spence called “efficient infringement.” (Google countersued, claiming that Sonos infringes several of its own patents). However, Sonos’ complaint is entirely based on patent infringement claims; no argument relating to anti-competitive practices are being alleged.

It would be interesting if Fortnite, or any other patent owner, could try the antitrust angle and force the U.S. government and the courts to take a stand on this efficient infringement practice that has come to be accepted as a sad reality of the market. Most vocal pundits decry this practice on many tribunes, including the recently introduced Inventor Protection Act, but no one seems able to defeat it.

Meanwhile, do not procrastinate before upgrading your iPhone to the latest model. It may not be available for very long if Apple gets bitten in the rear in China! 🍌

Louis Carbonneau is the founder & CEO of Tangible IP, a leading IP strategic advisory and patent brokerage firm, with more than 2,500 patents sold. He is also an attorney who has been voted as one of the world’s leading IP strategists for the past seven years. He writes a regular column read by more than 12,000 IP professionals.





Iancu Talks COVID

USPTO DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW RESPONSES SHOW MANY POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS FOR SMALL INVENTORS **BY GENE QUINN**

All Eye on Washington stories initially appeared on IPWatchdog.com.

RECENTLY interviewed Andrei Iancu, under secretary of commerce for intellectual property and director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office, via WebEx. The focus was the COVID-19 pandemic.

Topics included USPTO efforts to work with stakeholders, the role of intellectual property in finding cures and treatments, and general thoughts relating to what the office is observing.

According to Director Iancu, trademark filings are recovering.

Trust in trademarks

Patent applications are a lagging indicator of economic activity, because of the inevitable innovation lag that occurs from the time research is done and conception is made to when an invention is realized and a patent application is filed.

However, Iancu explained that trademark applications are more closely correlated with current economic activity.

“Trademark filings are correlated with the general state of the economy, as measured by the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) and venture capital investment,” Iancu said.

“Interestingly, trademark activities tend to follow the S&P 500 index.”

That said, it is heartening to learn that the USPTO is seeing an increase in trademark activity. This traditionally quickly translates into economic activity, because trademark rights in the United States are use-based (i.e., they must be used in interstate commerce in order to establish rights). To obtain a trademark in the United States, you must show that the mark is being used presently or that you have a bona fide intent to use it.

Relief for small inventors

In other good news, the USPTO has attempted to provide some relief to primarily independent inventors and small businesses—although it is applicable to anyone who has filed a provisional patent application.

The USPTO announced on June 11 that it will allow applicants to file a nonprovisional patent application claiming the benefit of a provisional application for up to an additional two months, without payment of a petition fee, if there were delays due to COVID-19.

This is significant but a bit byzantine. Applicants have only 12 months from the time they file a provisional patent application within which to file a nonprovisional patent



“Trademark filings (which show a recent increase) are correlated with the general state of the economy.”

—ANDREI IANCU, DIRECTOR, UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

application claiming priority to the provisional.

However, the Patent Law Treaties Implementation Act of 2012 allowed for an additional two months in the case when there was an unintentional delay. Because of the flexibility given agencies under the CARES Act, the USPTO decided it could extend that additional two months for free due to COVID-19.

So, if the 12-month period ended between March 27, 2020, and July 30, 2020, the two-month additional period to file is available.

There are a couple of things to note about this additional two-month period for filing a nonprovisional application—which many individuals, small businesses and startups have asked me about.

First, according to Director Iancu, the USPTO is assessing whether to extend this further. Second, there is likely a limit to what the patent office will be able to do because the 12-month period to file a nonprovisional patent application claiming benefit from a provisional is statutory.

Therefore, while the patent office is working to do what it can, inventors should speak with a patent practitioner or call the USPTO directly if they are contemplating going beyond 12 months from a provisional filing before filing a nonprovisional patent application.

Prioritizing life-saving patents

In still other positive news, the USPTO announced on May 18 that the office will allow for the free prioritization of COVID-19-related patent applications with one or more patent claims to a product or process that require approval by the Food & Drug Administration (so no software, for example). The program was authorized for up to 500 applications and is working as designed, Iancu said.

To date, nearly 25 percent of that original tranche of fast-tracked applications have been approved. As of the time of my interview with

Director Iancu, there had been 240 requests for COVID-19-prioritized examination, with 123 applications being granted prioritization. Thirty-one applications were refused prioritization for failure to meet the requirements of the program. Another 86 applications were still pending decision in the Office of Petitions.

“Keep in mind that it is only for small and micro entities; we did not make this program available for large entities who can better afford the prioritized examination fee,” Iancu said. “We want to focus resources on small and micro entities, and individual inventors, to help them out as much as possible to bring their inventions to market.”

Mum on vaccine timetable

What is lurking in those patent applications? Are there great cures, treatments, vaccines that can turn the tide?

Although Director Iancu is in as good a position to comment on that as anyone, patent applications must be maintained in secrecy until they are published.

Nevertheless, I tried to phrase the question in a way that Director Iancu could comment:

“So, Dr. Anthony Fauci opines all the time, and you are the one with your finger on the pulse of innovation and with access to all the patent files. Are you optimistic? Dr. Fauci seems to make a lot of predictions. Would you care to make a prediction?”

After giving me the famous Yogi Berra quip about predictions being difficult to make—especially about the future—Director Iancu didn’t want to make any predictions. 🐕

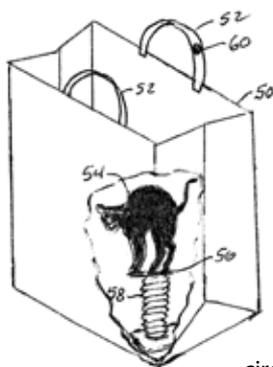
Gene Quinn is a patent attorney, founder of IPWatchdog.com and a principal lecturer in the top patent bar review course in the nation. Strategic patent consulting, patent application drafting and patent prosecution are his specialties. Quinn also works with independent inventors and start-up businesses in the technology field.



No Halloween? **BOO!**

FUN PATENTS WHOSE SPIRIT
LIVE ON—COVID-19 OR NOT

Editor's note: COVID-19 will undoubtedly change or even cancel Halloween in many places this year. Still, we want to keep the spirit alive with a few more recent Halloween patents from the United States Patent and Trademark Office database that IP Watchdog founder Gene Quinn discovered last year.



Halloween bag with pop-up surprise

U.S. Patent No. 10,364,068
Issued July 30, 2019

"A pop-up mechanism for use with a bag so that when operated by a user, a decorative object pops up from a hidden position within the bag to a position clearly in view. A twistable circular band is held within a sleeve at

the top of the bag. The band has attached thereto at least one finger tab, and a pivotal post having an end to which the decorative object is attached. When the finger tab is operated, the band twists and thereby pivots the post and the decorative object from the hidden position to the viewable position."

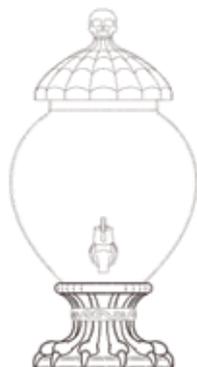
the top of the bag. The band has attached thereto at least one finger tab, and a pivotal post having an end to which the decorative object is attached. When the finger tab is operated, the band twists and thereby pivots the post and the decorative object from the hidden position to the viewable position."



Reflective Halloween pumpkin

U.S. Patent No. D839,129
Issued: January 29, 2019

Did anyone think this wasn't already patented? I'm positive I trick-or-treated in the '80s dressed as Raggedy Andy carrying a reflective Halloween pumpkin. I guess someone was late to the USPTO.



Halloween-themed serveware

U.S. Patent No. D826,633
Issued: August 28, 2018

In case you're a particularly "TALON"ted host and plan on entertaining this Halloween—using social distancing, of course. ☹️

Classifieds

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Best wishes, Jack Lander

TRADE SHOWS OCTOBER 2020

Editor's note: All major shows originally scheduled for this month, including those that were postponed until October, have been canceled for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

IoT Corner

The **Bluetooth SIG** (Special Interest Group), the organization behind creating and maintaining the Bluetooth protocol standard, is pushing for Bluetooth-enabled wearable devices to become COVID-19 exposure detectors.

Although Google and Apple have developed an exposure solution for their smartphones, there is still a gap in exposure coverage—especially for children who do not use smartphones or when adults leave their phones behind. For the plan, the concept may include a low-cost Bluetooth wearable that can notify the user if he or she has been in the vicinity of anyone with COVID.

The tech may also be integrated into existing wearable devices developed by some of the 130-plus SIG member organizations. —*Jeremy Losaw*

Wunderkinds

Fifteen-year-old **Ethan Wittman** of Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, created hole covers that make golf ball retrieval more sanitary by enabling golfers to touch nothing but the ball after sinking a shot. His product, Holey Ballz, comes in two versions. The Hole Cover is domed and prevents the ball from entering the hole; the Shallow Cup partially allows the ball to drop in. A large portion of the invention's proceeds will be donated to Feeding America, a non-profit organization of 200-plus food banks.



What IS that?

Judging from reviews we've read, the **Viz-A-Ball** from bowling ball maker Brunswick is usually bought for kids. It's a great fit for Halloween, given that it glows in black light. Spare fact: Apparently, you'll have to pay to have the finger holes drilled.

45

The number of different trademark categories by the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Categories 1 to 34 cover goods, and 35-45 cover services.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

1 True or false: John Lennon's name is trademarked.

2 Which one of these statements about Thomas Edison's childhood is not true?

- A) He almost drowned.
- B) He did not learn to talk until he was almost 4.
- C) He wanted to be a singer.
- D) He only spent 12 weeks in school, at age 7.

3 Thomas Jefferson and President John Adams had a well-chronicled friendship. Which one died first?

4 Which TV/movie character uttered this invention-related quote? "Do. Or do not. There is no 'Try.'"
A) Yoda B) E.T. C) Mr. Peabody D) Doc Brown

5 True or false: The patent for actress Hedy Lamarr's Frequency-Hopping Spread Spectrum invention—later used to develop many wireless communication technologies—was confiscated.

ANSWERS: 1. True. It is registered in Japan by his widow Yoko Ono Lennon, now 87. 2. C. Edison wanted to be an actor but was self-conscious about his high-pitched voice. 3. Both died on July 4, 1826, the 50-year anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Adams mentioned on his deathbed that Jefferson had outlived him, unaware Jefferson died 5 hours earlier. 4. A. 5. True. The reason most commonly given is that she was an Austrian immigrant, often seen as an enemy to the United States.

DON'T MISS A SINGLE ISSUE!

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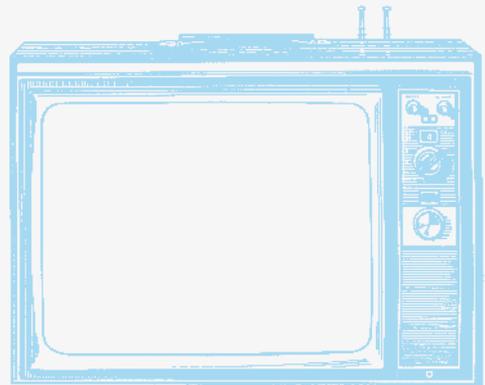
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