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# BRIANKESSLER, INVENTOR & TOYMAKER



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# EDITOR'S NOTE

What's my Inspiration?

It's no secret in my house – I love toys! To this day, my mother and father make sure I have at least 1 toy for Christmas each year and for each birthday. They literally have done this my entire life. I've had very confused 5 & 8 year old sons over the years, but they've begun to look forward to my presents more than their own presents.

With 2 young boys, I've visited many toy stores, web sites, etc. I've researched educational value, what they might like, enjoy and most of all play with. All this research and watching them play with the new intricate devises, they always seem to gravitate to the simple basic toy in the end. They mainly play with the simple toys from my childhood.

I say all this to remind us to keep simplicity in mind in everything we create. We tend to over think with the hope of creating the next "greatest" invention. It's easy to forget the basic rule: KISS.

Mister Geppetto a.k.a. Brian Kessler

Our cover story this month is about Brian Kessler of Maui Toys. Brian is a serial inventor on his own accord that went on to invent, develop and market over 2,600 toys, goods & products over his short lifetime. He developed his first patent while still in High School.

Keeping it simple is what started Brian's family on the adventure since the 50's. Brian's farther, Milton Kessler, patented the simplest toy you could image and made it a household name. The Hula Hoop was developed in 1950 and brought the original hoop to market in 1958.

How much simpler could it be than a round circle hoop.

Brian's story is an inspirational one and utilizes how a simple idea spawned a multi-million dollar company buyout. It's an age-old saying, but it's always true: KISS!

Happy Halloween!

Mark R. Cantey

Mark R. Cantey VP & Associate Publisher





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MANAGING EDITOR MARK R. CANTEY

ART DIRECTION AND LAYOUT TIFFANY TALATO

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# CONTRIBUTORS



JACK LANDER, our regular columnist on all things prototyping, licensing and inventing, explores the gap between inventor and entrepreneur. Jack, a near-legend in the inventing community, is no stranger to the written word. 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



**DHANA COHEN** Co-founder of The Women Inventorz Network and the newly created Inventorz(VIRTUAL)Network. Dhana knows a thing or two about great innovation, as an inventor herself she struggled with who to contact, and who truly had her best interest in mind. Luckily she stopped inventing after several products and took her background in marketing and partnered with Melinda Knight, together they have developed the right connections, education and marketing for the inventor community. The new (VIRTUAL) InventorzNetwork.com is the only platform out there in the inventor industry, think Match. com meets Angie's List for the inventor industry.



**EDIE TOLCHIN**, known as "The Sourcing Lady" (SM), "invented" EGT Global Trading in 1997, with a goal to link U.S. inventors with Asian manufacturers, to provide an exclusive import service for sourcing, quality control, production testing and safety issues, manufacturing, international financing, air/ocean shipping, customs clearance arrangements, and dock-to-door delivery. Website: www.egtglobaltrading.com



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**JOHN RAU**, president/CEO of Ultra-Research Inc., an Anaheim, CA-based market research firm, has over 25 years of experience conducting market research for ideas, inventions and other forms of intellectual property. In addition, he is a member of the Board of Directors of Inventors Forum, based in Orange County, CA, which is one of the largest inventor organizations in the nation. He has been a contributor to Inventors Digest magazine since 1998. Mr. Rau can be reached at (714) 281-0150, or ultraresch@cs.com.

# Market Research tip of the Month

by John Rau

Common examples of the use of the term "due diligence" can typically be found in situations involving business and corporate financial transactions involving situations where a potential acquirer evaluates a company or its assets from the perspective of a potential acquisition or merger and conducts an analysis of the resulting potential shareholder value. Other examples include various types of audits, commercial real estate and related transactions, including environmental site assessments, etc. But, what about "invention due diligence"?

Russell Williams in his article "Marketing Your Invention"

(see http://ezinearticles.com/?Marketing-Your-Invention&id=3411834)

raises an important question, namely: "Inventors often wonder if they need to perform Due Diligence on their invention". The answer is "Yes" as some level of due diligence is always required before moving forward with an invention idea. This issue arises at many points in the invention development process. In his article, Russell Williams states that "The question of whether your invention will sell can never be known with certainty, but you can perform some steps to help you better understand the likelihood of success." That is why you do due diligence!

For the purposes of our discussion, think of the term "due diligence" as involving research, analysis and discovery to gather information about a particular issue or set of questions that need to be answered.

Usually, your initial due diligence focus would be on whether or not your invention is worth pursuing, starting with an assessment of whether or not anyone has invented and possibly patented your idea before. That is why you should always perform (or have performed for you) an initial patent search.

If your initial investigations, research and homework indicate that your idea has not been previously invented by anyone else (that is, not already patented and/or not in the market-place), then, assuming you want to explore patenting your idea, the next "due diligence step"

would be to assess whether or not your idea meets the three basic criteria for patentability. Namely: new or novel, useful and non-obvious. At this point in your due diligence assessment process, your initial patent search should have provided insight into the novelty of your idea and the real test of "non-obviousness" will be conducted by your patent examiner once you apply for your patent. Thus, your focus at this point would be to conduct due diligence

regarding the usefulness of your invention idea. Here the typical issues and questions that you will need to address include, at a minimum, the following:

- What problem(s), if any, does your invention idea solve?
- Is your idea innovative and, if so, why will customers prefer your problem solution in lieu of what they currently use?
- Where does your new product (or service) idea fit in the marketplace and who would use it and why?
- Who is your competition? What products or services are already in the marketplace that are similar to yours? If yours is better, then why?

Even though a prototype is not required in order to pursue a patent, you should think of prototype development as due diligence in the sense of proving that your new product idea will actually work. Prototype development will enable to check out the functionality of your product idea as well as give you insight into materials and component products required and perhaps even the manufacturing steps required. Having something for "show and tell" purposes will help you later as you search for licensing and manufacturing companies for your new product idea.

If you plan to license or sell your patented idea, then you should perform due diligence in the selection of those companies that are candidates to assess where your new product idea fits with their existing products. Conducting research will provide evidence as to how your invention idea will fit in the marketplace, but businesses will often be interested in how your product will fit in with their business. Having a good "where you fit" story will increase your licensing chances.

Another important due diligence step, as pointed out by Russell Williams in his article, is to seek ad-

vice and input from others. He suggests targeting professionals and experts in the field, asking for objective feedback and advice. Also talk to marketing professionals and sales people in the field. Getting input from independent third party type sources will give you guidance and opinions as to how you should proceed.

The final "due diligence step" is the one where you need to decide "Do you move forward with your invention idea and, if so, how, or do you move on to another new idea?" It's your decision!



Contact John Rau at: ultraresch@cs.com 714.281.0150

# UNDER THE RADAR

#### LIX Pen Lets Users Doodle in the Air

Hailed as the world's smallest 3D printing pen, the LIX Pen lets users draw complex designs in midair. Designed to be comfortable to hold and easy to use, the LIX Pen can be powered by a USB port and takes only a moment to heat up. The plastic filament used to create the 3D object is inserted into the pen's upper end, where it moves through a mechanism patented by the company to reach the hot-end nozzle. The nozzle both melts the filament and cools it down, allowing the user to draw complicated, 3D structures in the air. www.LIXPEN.COM



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#### Identilock Could Ease Gun Control Debate



The Indentilock gun could help alleviate some of the debate over gun ownership with its biometric lock, which ensures only the registered owner is able to activate it. Created by Omer Kiyani, who was shot when he was a teenager, the gun's biometric lock can be quickly unlocked—as easily as unlocking an iPhone, according to Kiyani. Once attached to the trigger mechanism, it can only be removed when it is activated by the authorized fingerprints, and it can be added to the gun aftermarket or during manufacturing. The FBI compliant lock also glows in dark, which makes it easy

to find in an emergency. Kiyani hopes the Identilock, which is still in the prototype stage, will help overcome the inevitable opposition from firearm manufacturers with its simple—and optional—approach.

http://news.discovery.com/tech/biotechnology/biometric-gun-lock-has-fingerprint-scanner-140505.htm

#### TIK (Thin is Key)

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You interact with it every single time you open or close a lock - it is your daily companion. If the key chair is a bulky piece and you keep it in your pocket, it might be an unpleasant cargo. This everyday carry needs to be simple and it should offer great flexibility in other dimensions so we can comfortably reach any keyhole. TIK (Thin is Key) is the world's leanest keychain, saves a whooping 40% weight compared to the same set of regular keys with a standard keyring. TIK also an eco-friendly product as it was built using useless worn out bicycle chain pieces. You can order your favorite shiny gold, elegant silver or stealthy black colors to match the style of your style iPhone from Kickstarter. http://thiniskey.com



# UNDER THE RADAR



#### Fabric Kills Bacteria in Ten Minutes

A new antibacterial fabric able to kill bacteria within ten minutes could have a significant impact on how hospitals control infections. The team created the fabric by growing silver-TCNQ nanowires on the surface of a cotton textile, which resulted in a 3D interwoven network of the nanowires. Dipping the treated fabric in a silver solution enables the nanowires and causes them to slowly release silver ions, which kills the bacteria within ten minutes of contact. Since the nanowires dissolve slowly, the fabric has a greater longevity than other antibacterial fabrics, and the



technique can be incorporated into different fabrics, such as cotton or nylon. The material could have applications in antibacterial bed linens as well as surgical aprons and bandages. http://www.gizmag.com/antibacterial-fabric-infectious-bacteria-10-minutes/31922/pictures

#### **Flag Stabilizer**





Invented 13 years ago and it has a coil that slips on to the flag pole and at the end of the Flag Stabilizer is a clip that clips to the flag itself. Once the Flag Stabilizer is on the flag pole it acts like the sail of a ship. The wind blows it's around once and it looks like the Sail of a ship and then the wind blows again and the flag then simply blows back to its normal state. We spent years finding the exact length of the Flag Stabilizer to make sure that it will work each and every time. While the Flag Stabilizer is on it allow the flag the flow with the wind. Every time you see a flag think that they could use a Flag Stabilizer so people do not have to un-wrap their flags.

www.flagstabilizer.com

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#### OneBowl - A Bowl that can cook, strain, eat, and store food

Unlike regular bowls, designer Justin Herd wanted to design a unique bowl that can be used to cook, strain, eat and store your food all in one. The OneBowl is an innovative new cooking product that makes cooking your food easier and safer. The OneBowl is the only bowl you will ever need. Use it to prepare and eat all your favorite noodle dishes like Ramen Noodles and Mac n' Cheese. Keep hands away from hot water while you rotate handle to strain water. Add fixins and eat right from the OneBowl. nRelease safety lock to disassemble and wash. mBPA-free microwave and dishwasher safe! Prepare your food and take it with you for later! OneBowl is diswashersafe, microwave-safe comes with a built-in strainer and a snap-on lid! Bowl can be pre-ordered at:

http://www.theonebowl.com





### **1** GET IT MADE

Contact Edie Tolchin — "The Sourcing Lady" (SM) for sourcing, China manufacturing, product safety issues, packaging assistance, quality control, production testing, final shipment inspections, freight arrangements, import services and delivery to your door!

### **2** GET A WEBSITE!

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#### SOLOWHEEL

The Solowheel is the smallest, greenest, most convenient "People Mover" ever invented. This gyro-stabilized electric unicycle is compact and fun to ride and is intended to be used as you would use an electric bicycle. The Solowheel provides a convenient hands-free experience. Because you operate the Solowheel entirely by shifting your body weight and adjusting the angle of your feet and lower legs, you have both hands free to carry anything you need. Carry a cup of joe, pull a rolling suitcase, even open doors. Or just put your hands in your pockets to keep them warm



http://inventist.com/index.php?option=com\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=8&Itemid=116

#### **Conveyor Chopping Board Self-Sanitizes**





The Conveyor Chopping Board concept would keep food prep surfaces clear and clean with its unique conveyor belt design. Shortlisted for the 2014 Electrolux Design Lab competition, the Conveyor Chopping Board was designed to address the difficulty of keeping cutting boards properly sanitized. A scale embedded in the device will weigh the food as it is being chopped, and the conveyor belt function will send the cutting surface through an integrated cleaner/sanitizer as it 'conveys' the chopped food to a dish at the other end of the belt. http://www.yankodesign.com/2014/05/15/the-chopping-board-advantage/

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#### Pocket-Sized Jumpr Jump-Starts Cars and Charges Phones

The impressively portable Jumpr is powerful enough to jump-start a car (or charge a smartphone) but small enough to be carried in a pocket or glove compartment. bOffered by Juno Power, the Jumpr is just a bit larger than some smartphones, and weighs in at only 7 ounces. It is equipped with a 6000 mAh lithium polymer battery and can produce a peak of 300 amps enough to jump-start most 4- and 6-cylinder cars, and comes with a set of proprietary jumper cables. Tablets and smartphones can be charged via the Jumpr's 5 V/2.1 Amp USB, while the device itself can be charged via a MicroUSB cable or a 12V cigarette port. http://www.cnet.com/news/pocket-sized-jump-starters/

# UNDER THE RADAR



#### Shake Your Power - Electricity from Music

Places like Kenya needs electricity at least to read at night or charge up a mobile phone gives people the chance of a better education and also access to services like the revolutionary mobile phone banking system, M-PESA. (Shake Your Power) SPARK percussion shaker enables people to generate electricity so they can plug in a light or charge up a mobile phone, simply through having a music jam. Using innovative kinetic energy technology, SPARK stores the energy created from shaking it in a rechargeable battery. Through playing music together, children and families can create their own power! the project is currently being funded on kickstarter here.



https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/726552172/shakeyourpower

#### Cue Performs Medical Tests at Home



Following the trend of fitness and health trackers, the Cue lets individuals perform medical diagnostics from their home. Being touted as 'the most advanced consumer health product to date,' the Cue is able test for vitamin D, fertility, testosterone, inflammation and influenza indicators—the most common tests performed by general practitioners. Nasal swap, blood or saliva samples are placed on a wand and then inserted into a single-use, microfluidic cartridge that

prepares the sample for the test. The test results are then transmitted to a companion app along with ideas for health improvement.

http://phys.org/news/2014-05-cue-tracking-device-health-info.html



#### Grip Chips Give Bionic Hands a Leg Up

Touch Bionics has introduced an array of new technologies, such as custom grips and touchscreen compatibility, to help control their high-tech, i-limb prostheses. The new developments include grip chips small, Bluetooth-enabled stickers that can be attached to any object to trigger the appropriate grip when the hand approaches. Up to 36 different grips can be programmed using a mobile app, including the option to create 12 custom grips. Also added to the list is the i-limb skin active TS, a covering that allows i-limb users to control touchscreen devices such as tablets and smartphones. http://www.medgadget.com/2014/05/touch-bionics-grip-chips-lethand-prostheses-think-for-themselves.html



# UNDER THE RADAR



#### BrewJacket Chills Homebrews from Within

The BrewJacket lets homebrewers hold their beer at the correct temperature without a refrigerator—saving space while also ensuring fine lager beer. Lager beers need to ferment at low temperatures, and so usually require refrigeration. Since beer fermentation vessels (carboys) are usually a bit large, they can take up a lot of space in a fridge—or even require a fridge of their own! The BrewJacket Immersion places the refrigeration unit inside the carboy itself, chilling the beer via a heat sink and a hard anodized heat transfer rod and



maintaining the beer at a consistent temperature for days. The system also includes an insulated jacket for the fermentation vessel. The unit can be used with both brewing carboys and buckets, which is also the key to its successful Kickstarter campaign this time around. http://www.brewjacket.com

#### Terahertz Technique Could Help Prevent Rust



A newly developed method of ensuring paint layers have been properly applied could help prevent rust as well as diagnose the early signs of skin cancer. Developed by Anis and Aunik Rahman, a father-and-son team, the system emits a beam of terahertz-frequency radiation into the paint, where it penetrates the paint layers without causing damage. As the beam moves through the layers, it is reflected back at different intensities of light, which reveals the thickness of the paint layers and allows the technician to determine if the coats have been properly applied—a key step preventing rust. The method could also be configured in a way that would allow it to analyze the skin's

structure and help to diagnose the early signs of cancer. http://www.gizmag.com/terahertz-radiation-car-paint/32174/



#### Nanoflower Delivers Anti-Cancer Cocktail

A new flower design that allows two anti-cancer drugs to be delivered at the same time could increase the effectiveness of drug-based cancer treatments. The effectiveness of many anti-cancer drugs is actually limited by the delivery method of the drug. Some drugs function better when delivered in tandem with another drug, and it was this 'cocktail' of drugs that lead the research team to develop their "nanodaisies." The nanodaisy delivery system is made from a hydrophilic polymer (PEG) embedded with a pair of anti-cancer drugs, which themselves are hydrophobic. The combination of qualities causes the drugs to cluster together, where they are wrapped by the PEG to create a daisy-shaped structure that can be injected into the blood stream to seek out cancer cells.



http://www.medgadget.com/2014/05/polymer-nanoflower-encapsulates-two-cancer-drugs-to-hit-tumors-with-more-punch. html

# BRIANKESSLER, INVENTOR & TOYMAKER

SKYBALL IS ONE OF 2,600 TOYS, SPORTING GOODS, AND PRODUCTS DESIGNED AND DEVELOPED, UNDER BRIAN KESSLER.

rian Kessler, founder and president of Maui Toys, comes from a family of inventors and innovators. His father, Milton Kessler, patented the product that

later became known as the Hula Hoop in 1950. With the support of radio and television host Art Linkletter, they brought the original hoop to market in 1958 and started one of the most popular fads of all time. Several years later with his own knack for creativity, Brian applied for his first patent while in high school.

Eventually Brian went on to invent, develop and market more than 2,600 toys, sporting goods, consumer and industrial products. His most recent business achievement was selling his 24 year-old company Maui Toys, to the world's third largest toy company, Jakks Pacific.

Born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio, Brian developed a diverse background, learning the manufacturing business by working for his father. During college, Brian worked in politics, primarily with the Kennedy family and then worked in the family manufacturing business before moving back to Washington D.C., where he became an independent TV producer for multiple networks including PBS. After spending a number of years in investment banking, Brian started Maui Toys in 1998. The company was founded with the principle idea to bring style, design and function to outdoor play.

Now as he expands his business operating a venture capital company dedicated to inventions, amongst other activities, Brian discusses how inventing toys led to a life of innovation through creation as he refocuses his efforts toward the energy, health and well-being, entertainment and transportation industries to bring new technologies to market.

#### Q: How has your role changed now that Jakks Pacific has acquired Maui Toys?

A: I now spend more time in product design than ever before, and have more of an opportunity to explore and focus on developing products in other areas. I spend less time managing day-to-day challenges, like personnel and maintenance issues and put more of my efforts into designing and developing new products and making sure our retail customers are happy with how our products are performing.



### 100% KID-PROOF Stays open side up, no matter what





The Disney Gyro Bowl is the first ever bowl that spins and spins, and stuff stays in! The inner bowl rotates to keep snacks off the floor, because let's face it, kids spill stuff. No matter how you drop, kick or roll it... it's virtually indestructible! Dishwasher safe and BPA free, moms and kids alike love the Disney Gyro Bowl!



#### Q: Tell us about your process of inventing from Creation to Application to Execution.

A: Well, there are a few pieces to the puzzle. First, it's finding the area or product that I want to change or make better. The second thing is figuring out how to go about doing that. During the creative process, I look at and observe the world around me, find a unique application and begin to evaluate this idea. Then, I come up with ways to apply those ideas to a bigger idea, which is my vision of a toy or product.

When creating or developing a product, I try and make sure it's something that people will find useful or it's something that people will need, want and pay for. If there's no market for it, then there's no ability for that product to progress. So after you validate that there is a large audience for your product, that's when the actual process of making it comes into play. No pun intended [laughs]! We modify each product several times to get it as close as possible to our initial concept.

Manufacturing methodology is required, figuring out how much it will cost and if it's worth the time and effort are also important



things to consider. Once these things are established, we then begin executing the steps into physically creating the product, bringing it and introducing it to the market for our consumers to enjoy.

It's a long and slow process, but once you have the final product and see that it's exactly how you envisioned it would be, you're eager to jump in the creativity box again to come up with something else that's even cooler!

# Q: What inspires you to create games and toys?

A: Inspiration comes by looking at the world around me through my own lens. From a young age, my father taught me to look at the world differently. In essence, as I look around and function on a day-to-day, minute-by-minute basis, Inotice everything around me. No matter what I touch or interact with my brain asks why this happening, what it was like before and how can I make it better?

This gave me the ability to see opportunities everywhere in the world. My next challenge was to learn to direct this talent. At Maui Toys, my main focus was on toy and sport products, and by having a unique perspective on how to invent, I was able to look at products that haven't changed in years and find new ways to make them fresh, exciting and unique. With this approach, I was able to explore different ways of creating and using these products.

# Q: How much of your day do you spend creating?

A: It's really a dynamic process. There will be days where I go about my day and if an idea comes to mind I'll explore it. Some days, I'll be in the production room for hours, playing and experimenting with different products, where one idea may lead to another, or I'll put one idea on hold altogether.

It all just depends on the day. But I'm not the type of person that sits in a chair for hours, trying to come up with an idea.

#### Brian during a talk at TEDxChapmanU



#### Q: Have digital games and toys changed the kinds of toys kids play with?

A: I think that portable electronics have really changed the way kids function. Since most kids these days have easy access to a handheld device, the way they interact with the world and with one another has completely transformed. The fact that kids games and entertainment work so well on these devices affect the landscape of the design of creating a "toy" to suit the needs of kids in today's world, and also overcoming the challenge of still making it relatable to keep them engaged.

It's been a fascinating journey for me to see people who love to play with my toys, use handheld devices to share videos of them interacting with our product and with their friends.

When we first introduced the Sky Ball, which is a play ball that bounces up to 75 feet, we weren't sure people would get why it's so different. When you looked at the original balls they looked like any old red ball. It



was when you bounced it that you saw how amazing the product is. Well, at this point YouTube was brand new and people were just figuring out how to use it. Next thing you know some kids posted bouncing a Sky Ball in a store and hitting the ceiling with it! Within days, other kids start posting videos of them also doing the same thing.

This then led to more people posting videos of them doing all kinds of fun tricks with Sky Ball. Sure enough, it was one of the first viral YouTube hits. We have had millions of hits with people playing with Sky Ball. Due to Sky Ball's fun features and this amazing social platform, the toy has gone on to sell over 30 million units.

It's interesting to see that in today's world, modern technology can be used for everything and can reach so many people, and to see the use of this technology excite people to have fun with our product is even more gratifying.

#### Q: What trends do you hope to see in the future for toys – for both children and adults?

A: This is an interesting question. I constantly ask myself, do people play differently today than they did 25 years ago? And I think the answer is, sure! Play evolves just like everything else does. When my father invented the first hula hoop, he was originally trying to mimic a very popular toy at the turn

of the 19th to 20th century; a wooden hoop that rolled down the street that you chased and controlled with a stick. And, low and behold it became the Hula fad in the 1950's.

Then 50 years later, I reinvented my father's invention by putting a liquid core inside the hoop. Now, the "Wave Hoop," which has sold more than 20 million units, stays in the air 5 times longer than the original hoop. Twenty years from now, it could be motorized, with digital sensors that take hooping into a whole new direction.

So, yes play is very evolutionary, but one thing I think that will remain the same is that people Alvin, the sassy animated character in the "Chipmunks" in one of the original shows back in the 60's and even recently in one of their movies, sang "All I want for Christmas is my Hula Hoop." Thanks to "Alvin", most people love having hoops under the tree Christmas morning.

In addition to the Maui Hoops, we have created a really cool new toy this year called Sky Bouncer Yoyo. It's an extension of the hugely popular Sky Bouncer, which is a flying disc I invented that also bounces 25 feet in the air. Sky Bouncer Yoyo takes a classic Yoyo and introduces a bouncing design that makes Yoyo-ing even more fun. Yoyos are still great holiday selling toys.

# Q: What is the busiest time for the toy industry?

A: [Laughs] This is actually a funny question also, since my busy time is different than your average toy company. Since I've developed products that

are mostly outdoor activity oriented, my "busy" season starts December 26th, the day after Christmas. That's when retailers want new products that will take their customers into the next year and the coming spring. So, our busy season runs from December 26th to July 15th when our customers are selling activity toys for Spring and Summer.

# Q: How do you know when your product is ready to go to market?

A: Rework, rework, and rework until the product can't get any better. It's a process of constant reengineering to make sure you've done everything you can think of to make it perfect before launch.

#### Q: Can you tell our readers about the benefits and challenges of bringing manufacturing back to the U.S. and how this change affects the quality, cost and sales of consumer products?

A: I come from Ohio, the epicenter for manufacturing companies. As I grew up, I saw our city fall apart, the manufacturing businesses fall apart altogether. As I remember that, throughout my life, I have dedicated my time to finding domestic sourcing whenever, wherever and however I can.

In the last 20 years, over 50, 000 manufacturing companies closed down and moved overseas due to various reasons. But recently, manufacturing has become

# "...TO SEE THE USE OF THIS TECHNOLOGY EXCITE PEOPLE TO HAVE FUN WITH OUR PRODUCT IS EVEN More gratifying."

quite costly overseas, so many companies are coming back to manufacture domestically. And even though there are a lot of challenges to bring things back domestically, due to some new competitive advantages things are changing.

Manufacturing products domestically cuts production time in half, as we consider time to process the products, costs, import and export regulations and delivery time. From scratch to finish, it's much faster to manufacture products here than it is to do it internationally. The cost of energy is also much cheaper domestically, and there are opportunities for finding better costs, even with plastic, a comparably lowercosting product here than overseas.

However, the challenge is finding and sourcing people who are knowledgeable and technically able to manufacture these products for companies to consider moving their whole operation to the U.S. As things currently stand in the marketplace, I strongly feel that many manufacturing companies will move back to the U.S. Things are gradually changing for the better and more and more opportunities are being created for this shift to occur. I'm proud to play a role in the movement to help bring manufacturing back to the U.S.

#### Q: In bringing manufacturing to the U.S., does it become more of a challenge to control costs and to find suppliers to manufacture your product?

A: The challenge, I think, is that everyone is relearning how to do certain things, because as we have it now, certain products just aren't made here, so we don't have as many people as we'd like who are able to physically make certain parts and pieces for these products. Therefore, companies are forced to outsource these products. It's harder to control the assembly process when certain pieces of the puzzle are made overseas. It becomes a bit more complicated.

# Q: How do U.S. consumers differ from foreign consumers?

A: Buying habits are different all over the place, even in same country, let alone different countries. The packaging requirements are different. Even the names of certain products are different or have to be changed due to trademark or copyrights not being available, or due to translation or language barriers. Testing requirements also vary from country to country, as well as tax rates in each region.

Consumer patterns and needs are also something we consider when marketing our products overseas. Having limited space in homes has become a factor of what product sells and what don't. Homes in some countries are not as spacious, so certain products don't fit into their lifestyle.

Retail distribution structure in each country differs as well, which affects the kind of products that go to market.

#### Q: What are some changes you've noticed throughout the years in manufacturing and within consumer trends/needs?

A: Time lines have gotten earlier and earlier in retail distributions. When I started 27 years ago, the global toy fair in New York City was in February and we had to make sure our products were on the shelves at a certain time before the holidays.

Now, Toy Fair has moved to October, four months earlier, so now we have to make sure we have products on shelves for next Christmas, which is 14 months later. This has drastically changed the way we market to the consumer. The timeline has shifted to a much earlier timeframe, so we need to be thinking ahead. We need to know what consumers will want 14 months from now. We must create our prototypes earlier than before, test them earlier and retest them to get the product out faster.

As we speak, I'm working on products that need to be ready at the 14-month mark, which is in just a few weeks, for the next Christmas in 2015.

#### Q: What other projects are you currently involved with beyond the toy industry?

A: These days I'm working on projects in transportation, health and well-being, energy, consumer products and entertainment. A recent project that I'm working on is in conjunction with Hybrid Air Vehicle Ltd. out of England, which is currently finishing up the first, what I call Jet Blimp<sup>TM</sup>. They're using modern technology to bring lighter-thanair vehicles into the 21stcentury. They have some amazing features on the design board and plan to have their first operating Jet Blimp vehicle in the air in 2015.

We have some exciting things going on in health and well-being that I can't discuss right now, but hopefully will be able to soon. Sorry it's totally top secret! And I have been working on some exciting entertainment projects in the internet space with Webisodes Network, who produces one of the top YouTube webisode shows called "Top Decking." These are just a few of the things I am doing these days.

#### Q: As an inventor, creator and innovator, what do you hope to see in the future in the world of innovation, specifically with toys and technology?

A: One reason I hope I live a really long time is because I love technology. Seeing how things have evolved and how they'll keep on changing is a fascinating thought. Just a few years back, LED light bulbs were rare to find and very expensive, and now, you can find them for a fraction of a cent and in almost any product. 25 years ago, TVs were built around tubes that projected an image, today LEDs and related technology create our gigantic flat screen TVs.

Now we see them being used in so many products, from toys, to medical devices, to everyday appliances. It's truly amazing to see a breakthrough and evolution of an idea or product. It's an unbelievable spectrum to



see how far we've come, and to know how far we will be able to go. I think in the next 20 years, we'll see humans and machines integrated more than ever before. Integration of technology with the human body will become an everyday event.

An easily understood example is that in the near future, we'll no longer have to think while driving a car. We'll just sit and the car will do the rest. And something revolutionary like this can really change the way we interact with one another. It will create new behavioral patterns where things are controlled by machines. I'm interested to see how this will affect the way toys are used and to see if it will create new play patterns.

Q: In closing, what words of encouragement do you have for young inventors who dream of bringing their ideas to life and wanting to make a difference in the world?

A: I always say, I don't think you have to be a son of an inventor to be successful. I think you just have to look at the world around you differently and find areas that have a need that no one else has satisfied yet. Be open to exploring and experiencing new things and let yourself go through the process from idea to creation to fruition.

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# protoTYPING

# Everyday Materials to Speed up the Prototyping Process

Depending on the product, it can take many iterations to find the right cocktail of components or chemicals to make an idea concept work. There are plenty of examples of inventor folklore as proof of this. WD-40 lubricant was not perfected until the 40th attempt, and James Dyson famously made 5,127 prototypes of his first bag-less vacuum cleaner. Since we all have a finite amount of time to work on our inventions, one of the keys to successful prototyping is speed. One of the ways to speed up the prototyping process is to use tools and techniques to make prototypes from flat pieces of raw material.

This allows the use of inexpensive materials and fast processing methods to learn as much as possible as fast as possible to narrow in on the best solution. Here are some ways to make great prototypes and from flat stock material.

Flat stock materials need not be exotic or expensive to use for product prototyping. One of the most robust flat stock materials is paper and paper products like card stock and cardboard. Everyone is familiar with



y Jeremy Lo

A card stock prototype for a pencil sharpener exhaust for a desk organizer prototype.

how easy paper is to cut, fold and glue and many of us have seen how strong newspaper can be when rolled up and made into bridges, as many have done in a grade school sci-

ence class. Card stock provides much more stiffness and is still very thin, so this gets used quite a bit in the Edison Nation design shop. We can use our CAD software to layout flat pattern shapes that can be printed on the card stock and folded into 3D shapes. Cardboard is also a good flat material. It is plentiful and free when cut from shipping boxes and has great strength. Combining paper materials with a hot glue gun can help many innovations take shape. This allows the use of inexpensive materials and fast processing methods to learn as much as

A foam core prototype of the Kraftlyn preservation

A foam core prototype of the Kraftlyn preservation keepsake box.

possible as fast as possible in order to narrow in on the best solution. Here are some ways to make great prototypes from flat stock material.

Foam core is another flat prototyping material that is similar to paper products and is readily available in retail stores. Foam core is great as it comes in many different thicknesses and it can be carved into 3D shapes. This is especially useful when trying to come up with form models or ergonomic studies for products when 3D printing is too expensive.



A housing for the Edison Nation conference room blinds that was designed as a series of flat patterns and cut on the laser cutter.

Paper and foam core rarely have the material properties of a finished product. When we need to use materials that have performance, we need to use special tools to process them. One of the most frequently used tools in the EN engineering shop is our laser cutter, which is used to cut flat stock material. We use an Epilog Legend 36EXT and it allows us to cut

through some plastics, wood, rubber, fabric and paper products, so they are very versatile.

When we design prototypes for laser cutting, we usually draw our shape in our Solid-Works CAD software and create tongue and groove features. Then, we cut them out of the desired material, mostly acrylic and ABS plastic. Once they are done, we puzzle them together and lock them into place with super glue or solvent. This allows us to create robust parts, and create prototypes for products that will hold water if necessary. This technique can even be used in finished products. Many low cost 3D printers like the Printrbot use this tongue and groove construction on the frames of their machines.

Another common technique used with the laser cutter is to design pieces that can be lined up and stacked together to make a prototype with more substantial thickness. This technique is commonly used when designing parts with gear trains. Typically, all of the pieces in the stack are given a



A prototype of Brian Smith's Slow Pull Dog Leash from Everyday Edisons, Season 4. Laser cut ABS plastic profiles were bolted together and the hand grip was rounded off with a sander to create a comfort grip.

common set of holes that are cut out in precise locations with the laser, and long screws or bolts are used to clamp them all together. Once they are clamped together, they can then be sanded or filed down to make curved shapes for grips or other features.

Metals are commonly needed to make great prototypes, but this requires more power than most laser cutters. To cut flat parts in metals or thick plastics we use a water jet cutter. The Omax Maxiem 1515 water jet that the EN team uses has 46,000 psi water mixed with a sand-like aggregate to cut through the material and the nozzle is on a gantry motion system that can be driven to cut any shape or logo drawn in CAD. Whereas the laser jet can only cut through ¼" thick plastic, the water jet is powerful enough to cut through up to 12-



The water jet can also be used to cut wood into precise shapes without having to use a saw.

inch thick steel. This is great for making prototypes that need metals either for strength or ability to take heat. The same tongue and groove design techniques can be used to make metal parts and can be brazed or welded together to make strong parts with 3D geometry without having to machine them out of solid billet. The water jet can also be used to cut wood into precise shapes without having to use a saw.

Using flat stock materials is a great way to make many prototypes quickly and find the best solution to the innovation problem in question. Plus, adding photos of prototypes to your product submissions may help you work through design challenges and helps us better understand your idea. Everyday materials and tools, like paper and scissors, are great for early concept work, and there are plenty of specialized tools that make it easy to cut complex 2D shapes out of tougher materials. Even if these tools are outside the price range of the individual inventor, the 3rd party costs for laser or water jet cutting are typically much less per cubic inch than 3D printing or CNC machine services.



Visit Jeremy @ http://blog.edisonnation.com/category/ prototyping/

# Novel Idea for an Inventors' Cooperative

By Gaylord Olson with Edie Tolchin

#### Background and introduction:

Independent inventors face severe challenges on the road to financial success. A very small fraction of inventors ever achieves success; the vast majority having nothing but major financial losses. Here are some reasons:

There is a lack of valid feedback about the invention. Family members and friends do not want to criticize and will almost always say how wonderful it is. Most patent attorneys will not be inclined to criticize the invention because their income depends on a steady stream of new customers. "Don't bite the hand that feeds you."

There is a perpetual multi-year time lag in having an invention examined at the patent office. The examiners keep busy analyzing inventions that mostly have no chance of commercial success, and oftentimes are found to violate the laws of physics. This time lag means that ideas which are valid and cost-effective are not put to use expeditiously. If a valid, cost-effective patent does get through the process above, there is little proven economical help for the inventor to deal with the licensing process with major corporations who could use the invention.

#### What can be done about this? Here is a possible solution:

#### An Inventors' Cooperative

This would be an organization with the following general goals:

- 1. Cooperative (non-profit) organization which might have thousands of independent inventors the more the better and will have transparent financial results.
- 2. Subgroups of technical specialist inventors, academics, and others will evaluate already submitted provisional applications.
- 3. Evaluators will be thoroughly vetted and legally bound to reduce the risk of ideas being stolen or misused. Signing non-disclosure agreements will be a pre-requisite for becoming an evaluator.
- 4. A ranking score will be given for each evaluation (perhaps with a score of 1 to 10) to judge its possibility for commercial success.
- 5. Ideas with a high score will be subsidized for a full utility patent application. Ideas with a low score will be turned back to the inventor.
- 6. The best ideas will be promoted to existing corporations or other entities and expedited for production and sale.
- 7. Support to the organization can come from member dues and also sharing of royalties from inventions put into production or otherwise used.

#### Definitions from Wikipedia.org:

"A cooperative ("co-op") is an autonomous association of persons who voluntarily cooperate for their mutual social, economic, and cultural benefit."

"A cooperative is a legal entity owned and democratically controlled by its members. Members often have a close association with the enterprise as producers or consumers of its products or services, or as its employees."

#### World's largest coop organization: Mondragon Corp.

Revenue	14.081 billion €(2012)
Employees	80,321 (2012)
Divisions	Finance, Industry, Retail, Knowledge
Website	mondragon-corporation.com

#### **Further thoughts**

The seven goals listed above are intended to be a broad-brush starting point for the organization. Modifications and suggestions for changes are welcomed for any of these goals. There are many questions that remain to be discussed and answered, such as:

Specific membership requirements regarding location of residence, minimum age, status as an inventor, and so on.

- 1. How to design and use a database containing the skills and knowledge of evaluators. What level of privacy for these people will be required? This might be something similar to a LinkedIn profile.
- 2. How might the vetting of evaluators be done? Should some or all evaluators be paid for their time and effort? How could this payment amount be established? Will all evaluations be done remotely (online and/ or via e-mail) or could some other methods be used?
- 3. How many evaluators are needed to give a valid, meaningful ranking, and how much time should be allowed for this? Would ten be an optimum number for the ranking scale, or should it be larger or smaller?
- 4. How much subsidizing should be done for high-ranking inventions? Should a formal patent search be part of the process? Will the inventor who receives a subsidy be able to choose any patent attorney for the utility patent preparation and filing? Could or should the utility preparation be done by attorneys hired by the organization?
- 5. What methods of promoting the best inventions could or should be used? Who will arrange and pay for licensing negotiations?
- 6. How will royalty amounts be established? How will membership dues and/or ownership in the organization be determined?

#### Here are links to other internet-based patent improvement ideas:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\_participation\_in\_patent\_examination http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article\_One\_Partners http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer\_to\_patent

#### And here is a new idea for improving the patent licensing process:

www.patentproperties.com

Comments and suggestions about the points above are welcomed. Please contact Gaylord Olson as follows:

E-mail: info@inventorscoop.org

Website: www.inventorscoop.org

About Gaylord Olson-

Mr. Olson is currently an engineering consultant and is a member of the Industrial Advisory Committee for Mechanical Engineering at Temple University. From 1988 to 2004, he was co-founder and president of Electrim Corporation in Princeton, NJ. Previously he has worked with EG&G Corp., Xerox Corp. and TRW Systems. He holds engineering degrees from South Dakota School of Mines and Technology and UCLA. Mr. Olson has seventeen patents granted, and one pending.



Contact Gaylord @ info@inventorscoop.org

# What exactly does the United Inventors Association do for independent inventors?

By Paul Niemann, UIA Director of Operations

The UIA is a non-profit educational foundation whose mission is to help inventors succeed in bringing their ideas to the market. It is also affiliated with almost 100 local non-profit inventor clubs around the country.



So what specifically does the UIA do for inventors?

- We create free educational programs for inventors which help them learn the inventing business.
- We do this through:
  - o Our presentations at trade shows.
  - o Our series of educational videos on the UIA website: www.uiausa.org
  - o Our email newsletter and blog
- We advocate to congress to enact legislation that is favorable to independent inventors.
- We provide access to manufacturers through trade shows and other programs. For example, we run

the Inventors Spotlight section at several trade shows. This allows inventors to:

- Make connections by meeting face-to-face with industry professionals from around the world
- o Develop profitable relationships with new retail partners
- o Reconnect with current customers, dealers and reps
- o Gain greater visibility and increase market share.
- o Introduce new products and services. This is the number one thing attendees are looking for when they meet with inventors

Here are five upcoming trade shows in which the UIA is involved:

• CHITAG: Chicago Toy & Game Fair: November 22 – 23, 2014 in Chicago, IL

Unlike most trade industry only shows, ChiTag is open to the public and exhibitors may even sell their products on the show floor. The UIA runs the LifeStyle Pavilion at the Chicago Toy and Game Fair.

www.chitagfair.com

• PGA Merchandise Show: Jan. 21 – 23, 2015 in Orlando, FL

The PGA Merchandise Show plays host to the biggest week of golf business January 20 – 23, 2015. The UIA and Invention Home run the Inventor's Spotlight area, where inventors can rent booth space.

http://inventortradeshows.com/show/pga

• Response Expo: April 21 – 23, 2015 in San Diego, CA

The Response Expo represents the Direct Response Television (DRTV) Industry, commonly referred to As Seen on TV. Industry professionals are always on the lookout for the next hit infomercial product. Inventors have incredible opportunities to demonstrate their products and network with industry execs in this high traffic area. The UIA runs the Inventors Spotlight area and handles booth rentals.

http://inventortradeshows.com/show/response/

• National Hardware Show: May 5 – 7, 2015 in Las Vegas, NV

Exhibiting at the Inventors Spotlight <sup>TM</sup> at the Hardware Show makes it easy for companies to find you. It's an excellent networking opportunity as well. The UIA supports the InventionHome Inventors Spotlight<sup>TM</sup> at the Hardware Show.

http://inventortradeshows.com/show/hardware/

• Licensing Expo: June 9 – 11, 2015 in Las Vegas, NV

This show is for inventors who want to license their brand. The UIA runs the Inventor Pavilion at the Licensing Expo

http://www.submitmyinvention.com/submit/licensingexpo

Questions about any of these trade shows should be sent to the UIA's Director of Trade Show Programs, Jessica Delich, at Jessica@uiausa.org

The United Inventors Association creates free educational programs for inventors, provides access to manufacturers through trade shows and other programs, and advocates to congress to enact legislation that is favorable to independent inventors. Join for free at www.uiausa.org



# TEAMIDEA CLUB

Edison Nation is pleased to partner again with FIRST Lego League for their annual Global Innovation Award. Ten teams from across the country were selected as semi-finalists in this year's Nature's Fury Contest. This month we're spotlighting the Team Idea Club from Louisville, MI.

Their submission for the contest is DRiNK. Working with disaster relief agency WaterStep, and GE Appliance engineer Paul Haney, we created DRiNK, a simple cart that can be 3D printed or assembled from old bicycle parts. DRiNK easily transports 10 gallons of water over rugged terrain, so that children can make just one daily trip to fetch their families' drinking water, which frees up time for them to attend school. DRiNK is also a lightweight compact alternative to a wheel barrow.



## ID: What advice or words of wisdom would you give other FIRST LEGO League innovators?

Never let anyone tell you that you are aiming too high. So long as you work hard and support each other, you can do anything you set your mind to. At the same time, don't forget to have fun because the memories you make here will last a lifetime!

# ID: If you win the Global Innovation Award, what's next for the team?

We want disaster relief agencies like WaterStep to be able to use our product for the good of as many disaster victims as possible, as well as for children in need of accessible water on an everyday basis. So we would definitely try to reinvent our product to lower costs and make it more durable in the long term.

# ID: What do you all want to be when you grow up?

Most of us want to be inventors, engineers and scientists who change the world for the better.

# ID: How does it make you feel to create something new?

It's a really cool experience. Creating something useful and interesting gives you this sense of accomplishment that's unlike anything else.

#### ID: How did the team problem solve together to invent, and what has it taught you?

Each person researched a different aspect of our problem and then we shared our research, brainstormed ideas and voted on our favorites. We remade our prototype three times before showing it to a designer and consulted with the disaster relief agency WaterStep. Through this, we learned that inventing is a collaborative process, not an independent one. It's about working together to solve people's problems.

## ID: Did you encounter any problems or obstacles during this year's challenge?

We created 10 different prototypes before settling on our current solution. It was difficult to sort through good and bad ideas and constantly rework your plans. In the end, we learned a lot about engineering and design.

# ID: Tell Inventors Digest about your team... how did you all come together?

We began through an organization called the Idea Club – which is a group of kids exploring STEM hands on. We have 10 students, 9-14 years old, from 4 different schools and all with positive personalities and strengths. Each person contributed a unique skill to the group like writing or programming or building with Legos. We didn't know each other at the start of the season but we've become close friends by the end of it.



#### ID: Who is your favorite inventor and why?

I really like Nikola Tesla. He gave himself up for science, often testing his experiments on himself. He created the A/C current and many other modern technologies that we use in our everyday lives.

#### ID: What inspired you about this year's challenge?

Being able to help people who really can't help themselves.

# **IMPROVING THE WORLD'S INNOVATION INFRASTRUCTURE**

By: Alexander Camarota

Office of Innovation Development, United States Patent and Trademark Office, Alexandria, VA, USA

eak intellectual property policy or enforcement in many developing nations can be a barrier to innovation and creativity. Through its Office of Policy and International Affairs, the US Patent and Trademark Office works with intellectual property organizations and foreign governments across the world to help improve the innovation climate for developing nations. The impact of good intellectual property policy is already helping to return value to producers in traditionally rural regions and cultivate the conditions

The mission of the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) is to grant patents and register trademarks for protection within the borders of the US. Patents are often recognized as seminal to the advancement of technology in the US and nearly all other industrialized nations. Trademarks are also integral to a robust economy by protecting brand identities and preserving the goodwill engendered between specific producers and their customers. Similarly, copyrights preserve artistic and cultural heritage and are powerful tools for job creation and revenue growth. The USPTO maintains a collaborative relationship with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), which is a specialized agency of the United Nations charged with promoting the protection of intellectual property (IP) worldwide. The USPTO plays a leadership role in WIPO, helping to shape international IP rules and participating in numerous cooperation and capacity-building programs to promote the utilization of IP for economic development.

Nonetheless, many countries lack effective IP laws, including enforcement measures, even as they desire to contribute significantly to the global economy. Weak IP regimes are a barrier to innovation and creativity, not just for the citizens of those countries, but for foreign entities who wish to invest or conduct business. The USPTO is committed, along with many of the world's other major IP offices, to building a global IP architecture that supports all users. While its main focus will always be protecting innovation in the US, many people might be surprised to learn about the USPTO's efforts to actively improve the IP climate around the world for inventors, brand owners, and creators.

Through its Office of Policy and International Affairs (OPIA), the USPTO administers, collaborates with, or provides auxiliary support to a variety of IP-focused programs and organizations, many of which serve innovators and producers in rural areas of developing countries. These programs and organizations are dedicated to helping IP owners leverage intellectual property policy and strategies in ways that improve the conditions of the community and environment in which they operate.

One such organization that the USPTO has collaborated with is Light Years IP (LYIP). This nonprofit is active in Sub-Saharan Africa and helps producers and exporters capture the full value of IP assets

# Light Years IP

contained in their region's distinctive products and exports. It is currently estimated that only 3% to 5% of the market value contained in high-quality products and exports from African countries are returned to the producers. The majority of the profits end up going to importers and resellers in foreign countries. IP value capture programs educate producers and exporters on how to leverage IP business tools and strategies that reclaim the potential value in their products.

An example in which LYIP has helped producers successfully capture the value in their IP is found

in Ethiopia. Ethiopian coffee varieties are recognized as among the world's best, but the value contained in the distinctive regional brands was primarily leveraged by foreign importers. LYIP worked closely with the Ethiopian government and Ethiopian coffee growers to design an effective trademark and licensing regime that helped distributors break free of commodity market pricing. The negotiations resulted in greater control of coffee distribution and increased market value capture for

Ethiopian growers, generating an additional \$100 million per year that

Photo credit: www.theecologist.org

went to the growers and exporters. LYIP is currently working on other IP value capture projects in several African nations.

In addition to working with nonprofit organizations, the USPTO provides targeted, demand-driven training programs to foreign government officials to assist in building and strengthening IP systems that are functional and complementary to a global IP architecture. Some of the most important work being done is in countries with large rural populations. OPIA has provided training on IP office administration to IP offices in Latin America and Asia to help them operate more efficiently and transparently. OPIA also coordinates patent examiner training in many IP offices throughout Africa. In addition to educating and training on IP administration, OPIA collaborates with other US government agencies to develop and deliver IP enforcement training worldwide, including programs on border measures, criminal investigation and prosecution, civil litigation, and judicial administration. These programs seek to address copyright piracy and trademark counterfeiting prevalent in marketplaces across the developing world. OPIA has helped improve the IP enforcement systems of many African nations across the continent, from Algeria to South Africa.

One of the most exciting and far-reaching impacts the USPTO has had on spurring innovation in rural regions is in the form of technology transfer policy advisory. In 1980, the US Congress passed

the Bayh–Dole Act, which allowed universities to retain ownership of patents resulting from federally funded research. This legislation jump started the modern university technology transfer system. Prior to Bayh–Dole, patents that were issued on research funded fully or in part by the US government generally became the property of the government. Bayh–Dole helped America reposition itself as the global leader in innovation. In the agricultural sector, innovations developed at our nation's research institutions have been instrumental in increasing efficiency, productivity, and safety in our nation's food supply. Bayh–Dole's success has been a beacon for countries all over the world, and the USPTO provides assistance to countries in developing their own technology transfer legislation based on Bayh–Dole. Most recently, OPIA advisors supported South Africa and the Philippines in passing their technology transfer laws and provided training on IP management. Other countries with large rural populations receiving OPIA assistance on technology transfer include Vietnam and Pakistan.

The USPTO has also taken new approaches to increasing beneficial technological presence in rural and developing regions. In 2012, in answer to President Obama's global development challenge to US government agencies, the USPTO introduced Patents for Humanity. This prize competition recognized patent holders who successfully deploy their technologies to address global humanitarian needs. Ten awards were given to a range of patent holders, from independent inventors to universities and corporations, who addressed problems ranging from clean energy in remote areas to combating tropical diseases. Along with recognition during a ceremony at the US capitol, the winners received certificates to accelerate the processing of select patent matters at the USPTO. These incentives encourage innovators to continue their efforts in developing regions and provide options to enhance their patent portfolios. Based on the program's success, OPIA has encouraged other nations, particularly China, to use it as a model for spurring innovation that addresses humanitarian needs.

The discrepancy between innovations in rural and urban regions has never been greater than it is now. As the world continues to become more interconnected, this imbalance poses lots of challenges but also an opportunity for all stakeholders—public and private sectors, IP holders, and consumers – to work together to improve the IP landscape. Strong IP policies benefit both the inhabitants of rural regions and those who seek to bring innovation to them.



The USPTO will continue to look for ways to strengthen the global innovation ecosystem and ensure that it remains fair and responsive for all users.

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http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/cog/ti."

# YOU HAVE THE IDEAS

# WE HAVE THE MOST SOLUTIONS TO BRING YOUR IDEA TO MARKET



Edison Nation is the only innovation partner that has multiple channels to take inventors' product ideas to consumers worldwide. Submit your idea to our **Open Search** today.





### Innovation Divaz Melinda Knight & Dhana Cohen from the Women Inventorz Network

Dhana Cohen is the co-founder of www.inventorznetwork.com the only connection platform in the inventor industry. From Media to Pitch sessions, to Industry Experts and Buyers, Dhana & Melinda have created an amazing network for all to get involved in!

### Q & A with Alastair Swanwick from Innovate Product Design

As co-founder of Inventorz Network, and a sponsor of the Inventor's Pavilion at the International Home and Housewares Show in Chicago last March I had the pleasure of meeting Alastair Swanwick. After speaking with him about his mission to provide inventorz with lower cost design, IP search and advice I knew his company was a great resource for our network. Here are a few great answers to questions we were curious about when it came to Innovate Product Design.

#### Q. Tell us why and when an inventor would come to you for design assistance?

We help individuals, entrepreneurs and start-ups design and develop their new product idea. We help them to turn their idea into a viable product that they can take to industry. From protection of their idea to having the product manufacture we offer low cost solutions that suits individuals' budget without compromising on quality or professionalism.

Q. How long has your company been supporting inventors all around the world?

We have been in business since 2001. We started our offices in the UK and have expanded to an office in San Francisco.

#### Q. Your company has won some prestigious awards. Can you tell us more about them?

We were much honored to have won the award for Best Business Services from the UK Trade and Investment Innovation Awards. The UK Trade and Investment Innovation Awards celebrates outstanding achievement and innovation in design, technology, business services, philanthropy, marketing and communications.

#### Q. What are all of the areas of design you can support inventors whether they are new to inventing, or well established?

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these is a unique service for obtaining the fast official feedback we know to be very useful when approaching the market.

Q. What is the biggest mistake you see inventors make before they request your expertise? We wouldn't say it was a mistake, we would say that they didn't have all the information at their fingertips. We try to help individual inventors make the best decision for them, by

educating them through all the information they need whether it is about self-manufacturing, licensing or the costs involved getting their idea to market. What we don't want to happen is for our clients to be out financially of house and home, but to enjoy this process and be happy with their product.

#### Q. . What is your number one tip for inventors?

Do your research. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Taking an idea to market is a great adventure, however there is no magic solution and in many respects it looks like hard work. On the other hand, as our friend Larry Udell (founder of the California Invention Centre) says, "This is probably the only way left in today's world where you can become a millionaire"



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# FINDING YOUR NICHE

# **BY JACK LANDER**



ast month I wrote about seeking a niche, and why it was usually more productive to attempt to market a niche item than to gamble on a mass market item. Mainly, the big companies who produce the mass market items have substantial departments of engineers and scientists who have probably thought of what we believe to be our innovative idea. And even if their idea is not yet exposed as a product or a published patent application, the secrecy of patent applications during their first 18 months presents a high risk to us inventors.

In addition, we are behind the curve on information. Think of Apple's recent market entry, the wrist i-Phone. We see it as a launched product, but the Apple engineers have been seeing it in various stages of development since its conception. So, what might occur to us as a great feature or app to add to the product may have already been thought of, and a patent applied for, by the Apple engineers. Apple may even patent features that it considers relatively insignificant from a marketing perspective, but can no longer protect by merely recording it in a lab notebook due to the "first to file" rights of independent inventors.

Should we give up? Not at all. But it seems advisable for most of us to invent things that will sell by the tens of thousands, rather than by the tens of millions. The advantages are clear: We are competing with a mere few of our fellow inventors, not with the hundreds of fellows at the "XYZ corporation" and all of its competitors. The smaller market channels that are open to us -- catalogs and the Internet, for example -- are more inventor-friendly.

Our typical inventions generally will be simpler, and our costs and time to develop them can be kept relatively low and short. We have less risk of theft if we unintentionally expose our inventions before we file for patent protection. We have less risk of losing our basic idea to our target licensee if we plan to license. Even though a large company may not infringe our patent, it may, in good conscience, design around it. (It has happened to me.)

So, where do we find the ideal niche market? Modifying an existing product is one way. the obvious advantage is that the existing product is understood by consumers, and that makes it easier to explain our version.

A typical niche market is that of handicapped pet items, although judging by the number of vendors of such products, this field may no longer be a niche. I found wheelchairs; walking wheels for dogs with missing or paralyzed rear legs; scooties for the same purpose, but with sliders, rather than with wheels; walking slings for dogs with wounded legs; splints and braces for legs and paws; prosthetics for amputees; safety belts, diapers, and special bandages. For cats, I found a privacy tent, cremation urn, and several of the items that were similar to those used by handicapped dogs.

Arthritis is a common disease, and leaves opportunityes for a variety of aids and tools. Here are a few I saw on the Internet: seat belt grabber for persons who can't twist around to clasp the belt; a handle grip for suspending one or more plastic grocery bags; an electric jar opener; a spring-loaded hydraulic seat lift that helps you out of a chair, or out of your car; and a buttoning tool, among others.

Although the items above have already been invented and produced, the field has limited competition, and each item -- especially those that are more specialized -- can often be reinvented with better features.

One of the items I see missing is a workable nail clipper for older people who can't bend over far enough to clip their own toe nails. An extended handle on a conventional toe nail clipper is not enough. Many older people have deformed nails that are cupped and thick, and even the large size nail clippers that are made for feet cannot be used due to the limitation in their opening. A serviceable clipper would also need significantly greater leverage than the conventional hand-held clipper in order to slice through the thickened nails.

Here's a somewhat bizarre variation of an available product, the DNA kit: A preservation kit for the DNA of recently deceased persons. The purpose would be to preserve ancestral DNA (http://www. youtube.com/watch?v=sAp1\_nA8QpU) for future uses. Analyzing great-grandma's DNA might be important to health providers in the future. A kit with gloves,



—tweezers, a nail clipper, and a clear plastic container -- all sterile -- that would be sealed with an o-ring, and screwed together with stainless steel screws, could be preserved for a century or more under almost any ambient conditions. This "time capsule" would have a compartment for a copy of the person's birth certificate and biographical information. The kit would be sold and serviced by undertakers, providing them extra revenue as well as benefits for the heirs of the deceased. I dreamed up this product a few years ago, but I doubt I'll ever do anything with it.

The point of the specific items above is not to direct you to potential sources for niche products, but to demonstrate the principle of inventions that complement existing products. Here are some of the ways to invent niche products by modifying existing products:

Can it be made...

- smaller or lighter?
- from more durable materials -- stainless steel
- instead of painted steel that may eventually rust --
- the DeLorean automobile, for example?
- less durable and less expensive for a market that is satisfied with a shorter life cycle?
- disposable instead of ongoing utility?
- portable instead of imobile?
- from different material?
- by combining the functions of two or more parts?

Many of the above changes will not be patentable, of course, unless they enable novel features. Merely changing from metal to plastic while maintaining the same design, for example, is generally not patentable. Another way to discover a niche product is to study items that you own and use, and find annoying. The throw-away dispenser of plastic packaging tape, for example, is one of the most aggravating devices I can imagine. Without a second thought, I would pay \$5 for a reusable functional dispenser that I didn't feel like throwing at the wall every time I send off a package.

Henry Ford drove his own Model T, and he knew its every flaw. Thus, its flaws were short lived. Ford made sure the design was as good as he could make it. But most manufacturing executives are not users of their own products. A Ford executive today probably drives a Lincoln, not a Fiesta, and therefore doesn't know its shortcomings. My point is that opportunities for improvements in ordinary products are abundant.

Change without novelty is not inventing, it's restyling. Inventing means adding value. It means being alert to needs, as well as having rapid intuition about how to solve problems, and fill needs. It's a matter of inventing on purpose.



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