

# Inventors

DIGEST

## Safety Guardians

IPOEF INVENTORS OF THE YEAR  
LEE AND ERIN HANSON

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# BACK TO SCHOOL?

# IP MADE EASY

This August, as students sharpen pencils and minds, **IPO Education Foundation** is launching **IP Made Easy**, a tutorial that makes intellectual property exciting and accessible.

Know a teacher guiding young inventors, a parent of a curious creator, a college student with a side hustle, or a first-time entrepreneur with a big idea? This fun, engaging, and totally digestible tutorial is for them.

Packed with real life stories, surprising examples, and zero legal jargon, it's the perfect starting point for anyone new to intellectual property.

**IP Made Easy**, your IP tutorial to discover how intellectual property is everywhere and why it's worth protecting and teaching.

**Check it out at [IPOEF.org](http://IPOEF.org)!**



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# From Idea to Asset

*The business case for patent intelligence tools is extensive and not too expensive* **BY DANIELLE DOUGHERTY**

**H**aving spent my career conducting patent searches and advising clients from solo inventors to multinational corporations, I've seen firsthand how critical early-stage patent intelligence can be. But for independent inventors, the path to protecting and commercializing an idea is full of costly steps, and every dollar counts.

So, when it comes to investing in a self-service patent intelligence tool, I understand why the first question is whether it's worth it. Does it really make a difference?

In my experience, the answer is yes. Here's why.

**Avoids reinventing the wheel.** Without a clear picture of what's patented, it's easy to invest time and money in an idea that's already out there.

A DIY, inventor-friendly patent intelligence tool gives you instant access to global patent data, helping you validate the novelty of your invention before you get too far down the road. That alone can save thousands in wasted filing fees and development costs.

A patent intelligence platform also lets you refine searches as your invention evolves—because innovation is rarely linear. Unlike

static, one-time reports, a subscription gives you ongoing access to revisit and update results as your invention changes.

**Strengthens your patent strategy.** A tool that helps you explore similar inventions can improve the quality of your patent. By seeing how others have claimed their ideas and where they left gaps, you can draft stronger claims and position your invention more strategically in the market.

This kind of insight is hard to get from a standard, outsourced patent search. The tool can provide insight into whether your invention will potentially infringe on another patent or invalidate a patent that might block your entry.

Patent intelligence tools are designed to surface patterns, highlight competitors and reveal white space that's ripe for innovation.

**Keeps you ahead of the competition.** You may be small, but you're not invisible. Companies monitor the patent landscape to identify threats and opportunities. With a DIY tool, you can do the same—tracking new filings in your space, watching what competitors are doing and adjusting your plans accordingly.

This kind of competitive awareness isn't just for big corporations anymore. It's a smart move and necessary for any serious inventor.

**Makes for smarter business decisions.** Patents are business assets. Investing in the right tool turns them into a source of strategic advantage.

Whether you're preparing to license your idea, pitch investors or file internationally, having hard data to back up your market opportunity and IP positioning can set you apart.

**One-time cost, long-term value.** Modern patent intelligence platforms are now more affordable and user-friendly than ever—offering AI-powered search, visualization tools and intuitive interfaces designed for non-IP professionals. The upfront cost of such a tool often pays for itself many times over in avoided mistakes, stronger patents and better business outcomes.

For independent inventors serious about success, patent intelligence isn't a luxury. It's a strategic investment.



**Danielle Dougherty** is a senior solutions consultant and strategic adviser at FluidityIQ, with over 20 years' experience across law firms, corporate IP teams and service providers. She specializes in patentability, FTO, invalidity, landscaping, white space and competitive intelligence. Danielle holds a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from the University of Connecticut and is a patent agent.



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# Semantic Search and You

*AI-powered tool needs your thoughtful prompt construction to maximize results* **BY JEFF ROY**

**AI**-powered patent search tools are changing the way innovators access and unlock patents.

Information that once required expert knowledge of complex Boolean syntax is now accessible to anyone. Just type what you're looking for, and the system interprets your intent.

Although this shift has democratized access to patent insights, it has also inadvertently bred the misconception that good results no longer require good questions.

There's a growing expectation that AI-powered tools will deliver perfect results every time, no matter the input from the vague and non-descript to the most specific. When that doesn't happen, technology gets blamed as faulty or insufficient.

In reality, much of the magic (and limitation) lies in how the prompt is constructed.

## Specificity counts

Let's say you're craving spaghetti and meatballs for dinner. Would you type "pasta" into your web browser and expect to find the best Italian spot nearby?

No. You'd get specific: "Italian restaurant within 2 miles that serves pasta and is open past 8 p.m." That query includes critical context: cuisine, location, hours of operation and dish type. It narrows the results to what you want.

A patent search works the same way. If you enter a single phrase like "foldable smartphone" into a semantic AI tool and expect a perfectly filtered list of results, you're using the wrong approach.

Boolean searches are explicit and often unforgiving, demanding precision from the user. Semantic AI, by contrast, is powerful precisely because it can interpret nuance, relationships and context without the need for complex syntax, specialty language or lists of synonyms. But it needs your guidance.

## The right prompt's power

It's tempting to see AI as a genie: Input your wish, and out pops the answer. But semantic search, especially in the high-stakes world of patents, is more akin to consulting a skilled researcher who understands subtleties but relies on you to frame the question with care.

Compare these two prompts:

"Expandable electronic device"

"Foldable smartphones with flexible OLED displays, hinge mechanisms and touch-sensitive input, published after 2012"

The first is vague; it's the "pasta" of patent searching. The second is detailed, constrained and clear. It helps the AI zero in on what you really want.

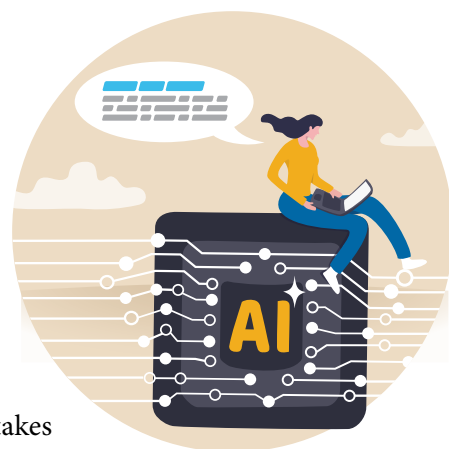
## Semantic search and your role

The real promise of semantic search is in its ability to surface related but non-obvious results, to find conceptually similar art. But this promise is only realized when users take the time to craft thoughtful, specific prompts, bringing their domain expertise and search intent to the process. Be sure to:

- Add context: Include features, applications, dates, or geographies.
- Be specific: Think of your prompt like an expert briefing, not a keyword dump.
- Iterate: Review your results, revise your prompt and try again.

If you bring clarity and domain knowledge to your prompt, the AI can return richer, more relevant results.

So the next time you open your semantic tool, don't just type "pasta." Treat your query like the key to unlocking smarter discovery.



Learn more at [fluidityiq.com](https://fluidityiq.com) or [linkedin.com/company/fluidityiq](https://linkedin.com/company/fluidityiq).

## A First Meeting That Will Always Last



There's her little face in the pop-up ad, the very first one in the upper lefthand corner among four rows of little faces—pictures of 28 different women—to promote IPWatchdog's second annual Women's IP Forum September 15-17 at IPW Studios in Ashburn, Virginia.

That positioning of Judge Pauline Newman was deliberate by Gene and Renee Quinn, who lead one of the world's most influential IP-related websites (a longtime contributor to *Inventors Digest*). IPWatchdog is a strong supporter of Judge Newman, currently suspended in a controversial, age-related action by the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit (see Page 44).

I have accepted a Polk Award, the highest journalism honor short of the Pulitzer Prize. I have flown on chartered planes and stayed in the finest hotels with a world champion baseball team, and witnessed the ultimate celebration in their lockerroom. I was on a first-name basis with Sparky Anderson and Ernie Harwell. I was a weekly correspondent for *The Sporting News*, one of America's most venerable publications. I have interviewed music stars ranging from Tom Waits to Niko Moon, even being invited to chat inside the latter's tour bus.

But when Renee Quinn introduced me to Judge Newman at IPWatchdog Live this past March, it ranked with all those thrills for a couple reasons.

Even with just a couple minutes to visit, I found the woman called "the heroine of the patent system" charming, cogent, coherent, even chatty. A living legend who was three months shy of turning 98, she exhibited similar competence during speaking appearances at the event.

Judge Newman's impact on the legal system and society through her rulings is impossible to fully convey in this space. Not only did she help create the federal circuit, she has become known as its "Great Dissenter" whose positions have often been adopted by the Supreme Court on appeal.

IPWatchdog, whose September forum will open with a keynote conversation featuring acting USPTO Director Coke Stewart, shares *Inventors Digest's* commitment to active inclusion of women in IP as contributors and decision makers. Few have achieved this with such distinction as Judge Newman and Renee Quinn—the latter who played a vital role in building a massively successful IP website as a brand building expert and who is half of "IP's First Couple" (*Inventors Digest* November 2024 cover story).

To have both be part of such a memorable introduction was an honor and pleasure that still extends infinitely beyond those 2 minutes.

—Reid  
(reid.creager@inventorsdigest.com)

# Inventors

DIGEST

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
REID CREAGER

**ART DIRECTOR**  
CARRIE BOYD

**CONTRIBUTORS**  
ELIZABETH BREEDLOVE  
LOUIS CARBONNEAU  
DON DEBELAK  
JACK LANDER  
EILEEN MCDERMOTT  
WILLIAM SEIDEL  
EDIE TOLCHIN  
LARRY UDELL

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**  
JORGE ZEGARRA

INVENTORS DIGEST LLC

**PUBLISHER**  
LOUIS FOREMAN

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**Ad rates, subscriptions & editorial content:**  
520 Elliot Street  
Charlotte, NC 28202  
info@InventorsDigest.com  
www.InventorsDigest.com  
reid.creager@inventorsdigest.com

## Horrors!

### 2 HIT MOVIES FACE PLAGIARISM SUITS

**A** **HORROR MOVIE** that recently began appearing in theaters has an unwanted real-life subplot: a copyright infringement lawsuit that goes so far as to allege plagiarism.

The action against “Together,” built around a supernatural encounter that leads to a couple seeing their bodies fused together, was filed in a California federal court in May. The creators of the independent film “Better Half” claim “Together” shares its premise, plot points, characters, dialogue, pacing and even specific sequences.



“Together” was a surprise Sundance Film Festival hit this year. “Better Half” premiered in 2023, with little fanfare. In the lawsuit, its producers say they “sat in stunned silence, their worst nightmare unfolding” when they watched “Together” at Sundance.

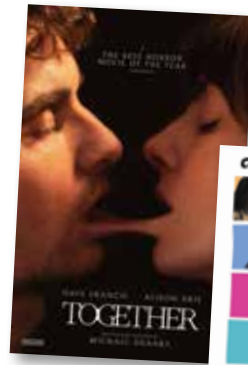
StudioFest, which produced “Better Half,” claims “Together” co-stars and co-producers Dave Franco (above right) and Alison Brie (above left) turned down an offer for them to star in its movie with the intention of creating a copycat film.

Franco told LADBible: “We have an extensive paper trail that proves how ridiculous these claims are. We have the receipts, and I hope you can understand that we are moving forward and we are going to celebrate this film that we put our literal blood, sweat and tears into.”

Brie and Director Michael Shanks issued similar statements, Shanks adding that he completed the first draft of the movie in 2019 and registered it with the Writers Guild of America that same year.

The complaint says Patrick Phelan wrote the “Better Half” screenplay in 2019 and that the

casting director for the film emailed the WME agents who represent Franco and Brie to offer them \$20,000 for the lead roles. The full script for the movie was attached in the message, the lawsuit says.



### ONE OF WHAT KIND OF DAYS?

On July 30, the same day “Together” was to debut in theaters, a plagiarism lawsuit was filed against the makers of the movie “One of Them Days.” This claim featured expert opinion from a veteran screenwriter.

The movie, which stars Issa Rae and hit theaters in January, is about two friends trying to hustle rent money. The film reportedly made over \$51 million on a \$14 million budget.

In the suit, Joshua Isaacson, Shon Oku and Tyrone Perry—writers of the 2020 script for the movie “One of Those Days”—say Rae’s movie too closely mirrors theirs in character development, plot structure and overall tone. The suit says screenwriter John Brancato reviewed both scripts and found enough similarities to indicate intentional copying.

The writers of “One of Those Days” say they unsuccessfully presented their script to Roman Arabia and partner Xavier Charles, owners of Green Eggs Go H.A.M. (GEG), in April 2024. Charles used to work on Rae’s show, “Insecure.” Rae’s production company announced “One of Them Days” just weeks after.

Neither Rae nor TriStar Pictures—reportedly working on a sequel—have commented on the suit.



### CONTACT US

#### Letters:

*Inventors Digest*  
520 Elliot Street  
Charlotte, NC 28202

#### Online:

Via [inventorsdigest.com](https://inventorsdigest.com), comment below the Leave a Reply notation at the bottom of stories. Or, send emails or other inquiries to [info@inventorsdigest.com](mailto:info@inventorsdigest.com).



# A FASTER PATH TO SMARTER INNOVATION

HOW IP.COM SUPPORTS THE FUTURE OF IP, AI,  
AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS **BY CHRISTOPHER IRICK**

**A**round the world, innovation is no longer just a function of invention. It is a strategic asset, deeply linked to economic resilience—and increasingly reliant on ever-evolving technologies like artificial intelligence (AI).

As intellectual property ecosystems transform under this new reality, the need for advanced, efficient, ethical, AI-supported innovation infrastructure has never been more urgent.

The United States Patent and Trademark Office has emerged as a global leader in this space, signaling its commitment to responsible AI leadership through the AI and Emerging Technologies Partnership—and through its significant investment in deploying AI to improve prior art searches and overall examination quality.

As governments, enterprises and inventors look to chart a path through this rapidly shifting IP landscape, one innovation intelligence company has been boldly helping lead the way: IP.com.

For over 20 years, IP.com has empowered public and private innovation stakeholders with increasing AI-powered tools to enhance ideation, evaluate novelty, clarify patent landscapes and protect inventive work around the globe. As the world rethinks how to balance open innovation with strategic security, IP.com's solutions are not only timely but essential.

## Leader in global IP growth

IP.com has shaped some of the most important developments in IP modernization over the past two decades.

Used by patent trademark offices around the world, its enterprise-grade, class-leading semantic AI increases examiner efficiency, powers millions of prior art searches and accelerates the IP and innovation work of inventors, engineers and IP professionals.

Today, IP.com's Innovation Power (IP) Suite® serves clients ranging from small inventors to multinational

R&D operations. As patent filings increase globally and emerging technologies blur jurisdictional boundaries, its commitment remains the same: helping innovators create confidently, compete fairly and protect what matters—their intellectual property.

## National vision, global innovation

The systems that support innovation and intellectual property protection must be modern, data-driven, future-ready and responsible. That vision was echoed in the U.S. government's recent executive order on artificial intelligence (EO 14179) and the newly published

"America's AI Action Plan," which emphasize the need for safe and trustworthy AI systems to drive economic growth and national security.

The order reflects a global movement toward building responsible AI systems that deliver long-term value, foster trust and safeguard the integrity of innovation.

IP.com's innovation platforms are deeply aligned with this broader call, providing AI solutions that are secure and responsible from the ground up. From operating in a private environment to being fully International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR)-compliant, IP.com's approach delivers IP-advancing AI solutions that are safe and accountable so inventors, R&D teams, IP professionals and federal agencies can work smarter, faster and more securely.

## The IP Suite difference

IP.com's dual-engine, AI-fueled IP Suite mirrors how high-performing teams think while aligning closely with the strategies and priorities shaping the future of intellectual property. It responsibly integrates AI into IP processes to foster innovation within a secure, inclusive framework free from ideological bias.

The IP Suite is built to deliver actionable insights grounded in proprietary data.

## IP.com's Innovation Power (IP) Suite® helps a wide range of clients create confidently, compete fairly and protect intellectual property.

With security at every level, IP.com offers best-in-class capabilities that protect sensitive data while accelerating innovation workflows. Transparent and traceable outputs reinforce trust and accountability while empowering teams and simplifying complex technology landscapes.

That means inventors and engineers can use the IP Suite to safely push innovation boundaries at a rapid pace. By integrating ideation, quantitative novelty analysis, prior art analysis and invention disclosure generation into one simple, intuitive AI workflow, IP decisions can be made better and faster to maximize ROI.

As global innovation accelerates, the broader collaboration IP.com enables through its IP Suite is essential to aligning stakeholders around shared priorities and helping to build a resilient, secure and future-ready IP ecosystem.

For entities managing high-value innovation or sensitive research, the risk of proprietary data being exposed or exploited through unsecured AI models has become a pressing issue. The IP Suite is built to meet this challenge.

Designed for enterprise and public-sector use, the platform operates entirely within secure, explainable and ITAR-compliant environments—ensuring that no prompts, queries or intellectual property are ever shared with external models or third parties. This architecture preserves data sovereignty while also upholding innovation ethics.

Furthermore, the IP Suite helps U.S. companies and government agencies protect innovations while countering the risk of IP theft. IP.com's solutions are uniquely positioned to help enable rapid, secure AI adoption in sensitive environments.

### The IEEE content advantage

IP.com further enhances innovation processes by offering engineers direct access to fully searchable IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) content—one of the most trusted and timely sources of technical knowledge in the world. Whether evaluating the novelty of a new design or researching prior art, engineers benefit from the ability to explore a vast collection of peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings and technical standards—all integrated within IP.com's IP Suite.

By embedding IEEE content directly into the research workflow, IP.com empowers engineering teams to make more informed technical and strategic decisions. During concept validation or patentability assessments, having authoritative, high-quality IEEE literature at their fingertips helps engineers validate ideas, identify gaps in the landscape and avoid costly duplication of effort.

Combined with IP.com's advanced analytics and private, secure AI tools, the integration of IEEE content ensures that engineers not only innovate efficiently but do so with the clarity and depth of insight required in today's fast-moving R&D environments.

Few platforms offer this kind of integration. Fewer still deliver it with such semantic precision and ease of use.

### A shared responsibility

Innovation's challenges—technical, strategic or ethical—are shared across geographies. And so must be its solutions.

IP.com is committed to supporting innovation ecosystems worldwide with tools that uphold the values of fairness, security and excellence. Whether advancing a single patent application or shaping and managing an entire IP portfolio, our mission remains to help innovators move forward—smarter, faster and together.

**MORE INFORMATION:** [www.ip.com/AI](http://www.ip.com/AI)

**Christopher Irick** is chief marketing officer at IP.com, where he leads the branding, positioning and multi-channel marketing of IP.com's pioneering generative and semantic search AI technologies. A certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt with a distinguished career in global product marketing, he has a proven track record of launching innovative, blue ocean technologies.



## INVENTING 101

# Sell Your Invention On Commission

BY DON DEBELAK

**I**NVENTORS often have more ideas than money, so they can have a tough time figuring out how to proceed. One option most inventors don't often consider is selling on commission.

In this scenario, an inventor gets orders for his or her product and then has a manufacturer make it. But instead of a license agreement, the inventor becomes the sales representative and takes a commission.



The inventor may have to surrender control of the idea, especially if development costs are high. But he or she can often still have a great deal of input, and can usually negotiate a long-term commission agreement.

This is often an easier deal for the manufacturer to accept—and the inventor makes more money at a 10 percent commission rather than a 3 percent to 5 percent royalty.

The secret is to land a big order or several smaller orders so that manufacturers will be interested in talking to you, provided the product fits within their manufacturing capability. The inventor is selling the product with the backing of an established company, which both

enhances the inventor's credibility and provides the funding needed to launch the product.

### Basic sales pitch points

You are selling only two points when going for sales on commission.

The first is that you have an order or commitment from a significant customer or multiple smaller customers. The second is that the manufacturer has available capacity and will only need to make minimal changes to its manufacturing process.

A bonus for the sale is if you can also show that there is an easy-to-penetrate distribution channel to sell to in order to expand the customer base.

You won't always know which manufacturers have the right equipment in place and need to add production to fill up your plants. So you may need to call on quite a few manufacturers before you find one that has the right equipment and the available capacity for your product.

### Key move

The key to lining up a selling-on-commission agreement is to know who the major players are in the distribution network, and preferably to have their support for your product idea before you approach a manufacturer. That's the only way the manufacturer will be convinced that you can actually sell your product.

Use trade magazines and attend trade shows to find the distributors and manufacturer's representatives in your area. Then talk to those contacts to see if they believe your idea will sell.

You should be able to get a selling-on-commission agreement if you get these contacts to endorse your product idea—or better yet, if they let you know they will buy the product if and when it becomes available.

## VITAL VOCABULARY

**NPE** A non-practicing entity is a person or business that holds patents or intellectual property rights but does not get involved in the production of products, or developing the patented technology. An NPE is a sort of "patent collector," seeking to profit by licensing the patents to other companies or even via litigation for patent infringement.



## SHADES OF IP

PATENTS

TRADEMARKS

COPYRIGHTS

TRADE SECRETS

# The **Trademark's** Many Benefits

**I**N THE May 2025 Inventor School, we told you what can be trademarked. Now, we'll tell you why it's such an important intellectual property asset.

The most commonly asserted benefit of owning a registered trademark is legal protection. It creates a public record of ownership and exclusive rights to use the mark in connection with goods and services listed in the registration. This gives the owner the right to take legal action against anyone using the mark without permission.

A trademark also makes it less complicated to conduct business by helping to distinguish your product or service from those of competitors. This can also promote stronger brand recognition and customer loyalty—with brand identity facilitating marketing that can manifest itself through advertising and promotional opportunities.

Having a trademark can give your business more value—both real and perceived—with the value of the trademark growing in concert with the business.

Thinking of going international? A U.S. trademark makes it easier to register your mark in other countries in the event you want to expand your invention's reach.

You have the option of statewide or federal trademark protection, achieving the former by registering your trademark with your local Secretary of State's office. However, a business with a state-level registration cannot stop a competitor in a neighboring state from using an identical name. You receive much more comprehensive protection with federal trademark registration through the United States Patent and Trademark Office.



## Pros and cons

### Pros:

- Requires very little investment by the inventor.
- Can be the quickest route to full market penetration.
- May produce reasonably quick income.
- The inventor continues to have input into his or her product's success.
- Provides instant credibility to customers.

### Cons:

- Inventors don't always have control of their product.
- Doesn't establish an inventor's company or brand.
- Requires sales and marketing enthusiasm and expertise.
- Works best with products with large customers or a narrow distribution channel.

**Don Debelak** is the founder of One Stop Invention Shop, offering marketing and patenting assistance to inventors. He is also the author of several marketing books. Debelak can be reached at (612) 414-4118 or [dondebelak@gmail.com](mailto:dondebelak@gmail.com). Don's Facebook page: [facebook.com/don.debelak.5](https://facebook.com/don.debelak.5).



## FREE ONLINE HELP

In Part 7 of the eight-part recurring series, "The Path to a Patent," USPTO experts will teach participants how to use its Patent Center to file and manage patent documents online. The virtual session, September 11, 2-3:30 ET, will feature filing application documents in DOCX format, including using Patent Center training mode to practice filing.

Part 8, September 18 and also 2-3:30 ET, will discuss common patent filing mistakes and post-filing support. For more information on either presentation, go to [uspto.gov](https://uspto.gov) and search Path to a Patent.

## GOOD TO KNOW

The USPTO announced that starting September 1, 2025, all Patent Trial and Appeal Board hearings will be in person. All parties will be expected to appear in person for hearings absent a showing of good cause.

Good cause will generally be limited to circumstances such as financial hardship, medical emergencies or other comparable obstacles. The approval of one party to appear virtually does not establish good cause for other parties in the same matter to also appear virtually.

Hearings will be held at one of the USPTO's offices. Parties may request a specific office location for their hearing. The PTAB will attempt to accommodate these requests.

The public still can remotely attend PTAB hearings.

SEPTEMBER

01

# Analytics Answers

HOW TO MEASURE YOUR SUCCESS ON LINKEDIN, FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM AND TIKTOK **BY ELIZABETH BREEDLOVE**

**O**NCE YOU've set up your social media pages in connection with promoting and selling your invention, started posting and maybe even run a few ads, you might find yourself wondering: "Is any of this actually working?"

Understanding how to measure your success doesn't require a marketing degree or hours spent staring at graphs. You just need to know what to look for, where to find it, and what those numbers mean for your business.

That's where analytics help. They allow you to track whether your content is being seen, how people are engaging with it, and whether those actions are leading to something valuable: someone clicking on your website, sending you a message, or making a purchase.

Let's walk through the four major platforms and what matters most on each.

**LinkedIn:** Best for professional connections and business-to-business growth

This site is often overlooked by entrepreneurs who aren't in the corporate world, but it can be a powerful tool—especially if you're targeting other businesses, want to license your product or are looking for professional services.

On LinkedIn, your audience likely includes potential partners, corporate buyers or industry insiders. The best metrics to watch here include:

- Impressions: How many people are seeing your content? This gives you a sense of your posts' reach.
- Engagement rate: How many people are interacting with your posts by clicking, liking, commenting or sharing? LinkedIn shows you this rate as a percentage, which helps you understand how appealing your content is.
- Follower growth: A steady increase in followers can mean your content is connecting with the right people over time.

- Profile views: If you post something interesting and your profile views increase, that's a good sign people want to learn more about you or your business.

One sometimes-overlooked piece of the LinkedIn analytics puzzle is checking to see who has viewed your profile (a feature limited in the free version but available if you pay for LinkedIn Premium). This can tell you if you're attracting the right kinds of professionals or companies. If you're seeing product developers or buyers from companies you admire viewing your profile, you're likely on the right track.

**Facebook:** A heavy hitter for small businesses

This remains one of the most reliable tools for small business owners. It offers some of the most detailed analytics through its "Insights" dashboard (available if you have a business page). The most helpful data here include:

- Reach: How many people saw your post?
- Engagement: This includes likes, comments, shares and clicks. More engagement on a post usually means Facebook will show your post to more people.
- Page views and follows: Are people interested enough to check out your business page and follow it after seeing a post?
- Click-throughs: If you're linking to a website or product page, are people clicking those links?

On Facebook, engagement often ties closely to visibility. A post that gets more comments and reactions is more likely to appear in more people's feeds, reaching a greater audience.

**Instagram:** A visual platform full of insights

This site can feel intimidating at first, especially if you're not used to posting photos or Stories, but it can be one of the best places to show off physical products, packaging, behind-the-scenes looks or even your personal story as a maker or entrepreneur.



Instagram's built-in analytics (called "Insights") are available with a free business or creator account. Through Insights, you can track:

- Post reach and impressions: How many people are seeing your content, and how often?
- Engagement (likes, comments, saves, shares): Not all engagement is equally valuable. "Saves" and "shares" often mean your content is especially helpful or inspiring.
- Profile visits: If people are checking out your profile after viewing a post, that's a good sign.
- Website clicks: If people are exiting Instagram using a link you share, it shows interest in what you have to offer.

Instagram is very visual, but you don't need professional photography or videography. Even simple photos taken in good lighting with a clear caption can go far. The trick is in the storytelling: sharing why your product matters, how it works, or what problem it solves, then pay attention to what content performs well and use it to guide future posts.

**TikTok:** A rising star, especially for inventive ideas

It's not just for teenagers dancing to pop songs. In fact, many small inventors have found success using TikTok to explain their products, show prototypes or share quick, behind-the-scenes videos.

TikTok's algorithm rewards content that is interesting or entertaining, even from accounts with very few followers. That means you don't need a big audience to see results, but you do need to know what works for you.

Some of the most helpful TikTok metrics include:

- Views: A simple way to gauge interest. If your video is getting a lot of views quickly, it's likely being pushed to more people by the algorithm.
- Average watch time: This tells you how long people are watching before they scroll away.
- Shares and saves: These are strong signals that your video made an impact.
- Follower growth: On TikTok, it's common to get a big boost in followers after a video takes off.

TikTok's strength is in showing your personality and your process. A short clip of you packing up orders, explaining a problem your invention solves or testing something new can go a long way.



**Analytics allow you to track whether your content is being seen, how people are engaging with it, and whether this leads to customer action.**

### Measuring success

So, how do you know if you're succeeding?

Ultimately, success looks different for every entrepreneur.

For some, success is growing your follower count and brand awareness. For others, it's more sales or email signups.

That's why it's important to set social media goals. Once you know your goals, you can look for metrics that match.

Want more website visits? Track your link clicks. Want to build relationships with potential buyers? Watch your comments and messages. Want to grow a loyal audience? Keep an eye on follower growth and saves.

Be careful not to get overly caught up in tracking everything. But focus on a few key numbers that reflect your goal, check in on them regularly and make small adjustments as you go.

The more you understand what works, the less time you'll waste on what doesn't. 📌

**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.





# SWEET

## Intrigue

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW CANDY LAND EDITION HIGHLIGHTS CURIOSITIES INVOLVING ITS BENEVOLENT, POLIO-STRICKEN INVENTOR

BY REID CREAGER

The original Candy Land game board shows an illustration of a boy and girl at the starting point.

The boy has a line down his leg, which has long been speculated to depict a brace because of polio.

**F**IRST, THERE'S that unexplained vertical line running down the little boy's cartoon leg—only to disappear in the game's next iteration.

Then there's the inventor for whom there is *maybe* one or two known photographs from her 78 years and precious little public information about her life, though she created one of the most iconic board games of all time.

Such a scenario would befit Parker Brothers' mystery classic Clue. But it is actually associated with a different game also first published in 1949: Candy Land.

Some Baby Boomers, this one included, recall a starkly simple fantasy trek involving yummy resting spots such as Lollypop Woods and Ice Cream Floats, with the goal of reaching Home Sweet Home before anyone else. Recently announced plans to release a 75th anniversary of the game—a year late—have sparked media attention and a dig into its history that refreshes more sweet curiosities than what's inside a gumdrop, as well as the endearing saga of a woman's passion to help disease-ridden children.

### Empathetic escape

The game's inventor is not in dispute. Neither is her intention to give a nation of stricken, immobile kids a dreamlike escape involving their favorite treat.

Schoolteacher Eleanor Reynolds Abbott contracted polio in 1947 and shared a San

Diego hospital's ward with children suffering from the infectious disease. Polio was a recurring epidemic in the United States from 1915 to 1950. It could cause paralysis, mostly in children, with infection lasting 6-8 weeks.

More than 42,000 cases were reported in 1949, the year Candy Land was released. Many swimming pools, beaches, playgrounds and more were closed as part of a quarantine—but unlike the COVID quarantine that began in 2020, this one involved children.

Kids in hospitals were allowed only infrequent visits from their parents. Some children were confined to a machine called an iron lung to help them breathe, often lying on their backs and only looking at a tile ceiling.

According to the website Learned Science, Abbott's board design featured a winding path of colorful squares “that allowed both physical and mental stimulation just by tracing the ribbon with your eyes.” The milestones on the track “helped manufacture a sense of movement in a child's mind.”

The original Candy Land game board shows an illustration of a boy and girl at the starting point. The boy has a line down his leg, which has long been speculated to depict a brace because of polio. (A “CBS News Sunday Morning” feature on the game, aired July 13, shows this at the 2:47 mark.)

Was this an actual rendering of a child with polio? Abbott never confirmed this. It isn't even

known if she had anything to do with the original artwork, though many suspect she did.

### Scant information

The CBS report skimmed on details about Abbott, or how she approached toymaker Milton Bradley about getting the game into American homes. Tim Walsh, author of the book “Timeless Toys” and host of the channel “Seize the Play,” thoroughly researched the subject.

After conceiving Candy Land and playing it with children at the hospital, Abbott was encouraged by parents and hospital staff to have it mass-produced by a game company. She traveled to Milton Bradley headquarters in Springfield, Massachusetts, and met Mel Taft, recently hired as an inventor relations executive.

According to Walsh, Abbott sketched out the game on butcher’s paper and presented it to Taft, who liked it and her immediately. Milton Bradley executives decided to make Candy Land a temporary, fill-in game for the company, selling it at 83 cents.

Temporary became permanent in a hurry, even after Jonas Salk’s polio vaccine was perfected in 1955 and quarantines ended. The game’s major financial success enabled Abbott to live comfortably while donating much of her proceeds to children’s charities, all with little fanfare.

How little fanfare? This from a 2020 story in Abbott’s hometown *San Diego Union-Tribune*:

“We know that Eleanor Abbott lived with her sister for nearly 30 years in a simple clapboard house at 5018 Monroe Ave. in Talmadge.

“We know, thanks to probate files and newspaper clips, that she was born in 1910 and died

at age 78 in 1988, 43 years after the death of her father, a watchmaker at Baranov’s jewelry store downtown. Both are buried at Greenwood Memorial Park.

“We also know that Abbott contracted polio at age 36 and, while convalescing in the hospital polio ward in 1947 with numerous children sufferers, she created the game of Candy Land, popular with ensuing generations of children. Beyond that, she is pretty much a mystery.”

Walsh uncovered a little more. She was born in Canada in 1910. In 1948, she filled out a Census form listing her occupation as watch repair; her 1959 form listed her occupation as toy game maker. In the early 1960s, she wrote to the *Union-Tribune* advocating for fallout shelters to protect kids.

And this somber nugget: When she died, her obituary only listed the day she died (December 6, 1988), and the day, time and place of her graveside services.

Very little is known about Eleanor Reynolds Abbott (left), and very few pictures of her exist. A 75th-anniversary game was announced in July, although Candy Land made its debut 76 years ago.



**The game’s most important distinction was its creation as an escape during a time of national crisis.**



The board has evolved to include characters Hasbro introduced after it bought the rights to the game from Milton Bradley in 1984.

### From game to brand

The original “Candy Land” was literally child’s play—young child’s play.

Because players moved the then-wooden pawns (evolving into gingerbread figures in 1955) by turning over cards with colored squares or images that take them to the next corresponding color square or image on the board, they didn’t have to know how to count. The same may hold true for the game’s current company, Hasbro—which in July announced plans to release its 75th anniversary edition of the game even though it was first published by Milton Bradley in 1949, 76 years ago. (Hasbro correctly released a 65th anniversary edition in 2014, so it’s unknown how and when the company changed its math.)

Hasbro, which bought the game from Milton Bradley in 1984, has since turned the game into a brand—complete with a feature film released

in 2005, the same year the game was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame. The company introduced King Kandy, Lord Licorice and a host of other characters for a new generation.

A 76-year existence has spawned numerous changes. “Sunday Morning” interviewed kindergarten teacher Tiffany Fox of Galion, Ohio, who has nine different versions of the game. And reinforcing the truism that simple often simply isn’t good enough, the new 75th anniversary edition is said to require strategy.

The CBS report also raised eyebrows via a comment from Brian Baker, senior vice president of board games for Hasbro. He said, to the astonishment of the interviewer and possibly others, “We have sold over 75 million copies of Candy Land.”

The question is, who is “we”? Toy historian Walsh said the game has sold about 75 million copies overall, which includes Milton Bradley’s ownership from 1949 to 1984. And the 2020 *Union-Tribune* story said Hasbro sells about 1 million copies of Candy Land per year, certainly not near a pace at which Hasbro would amass 75 million sold in 41 years.

### Invisibly beautiful

Authors Sandra Miller and Margaret Moorhead might have the best chance to uncover more about Abbott. Said to be writing an upcoming book on Candy Land, they approached the *Union-Tribune* five years ago for more possible contacts she may have had. They showed “Sunday Morning” what could be the first known photo of her, courtesy of her high school yearbook.

For others, the mystery of what she looked like adds to the allure. In Walsh’s “Seize the Play” report five years ago, he showed a photo of a picture frame with no one in it and said:

“She was kind, creative, selfless and generous. She saw a need and she filled it. She saw suffering, and she tried to alleviate it. ... We don’t know what Eleanor Abbott looked like. But we know she was beautiful.” 🍬

## INVENTOR ARCHIVES: SEPTEMBER



**September 15, 1852:** Jan Ernst Matzeliger, inventor of the first automatic shoe last, was born. A last is a mold for a person’s foot.

On March 20, 1883, the Suriname-born Matzeliger received U.S. Patent No. 274,207 for his machine that held a shoe on a last, pulled the leather down around the heel, set and drove in the nails, and discharged the finished shoe. It could produce 700 pairs of shoes a day.

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# A New Look?

## It's a Cinch

PRODUCT DEVELOPER OVERCOMES MYRIAD OBSTACLES AFTER INVENTING WIDGET FOR RE-STYLING WOMEN'S TOPS **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

**L**ESLEY MILLER of Noblesville, Indiana, is an inventor and product developer who has, according to her website, “a God-given desire to create, and the unstoppable curiosity of a 7-year-old who just can’t resist taking things apart.”

Here’s her story about the creation of a widget that helps fashionably re-style a shirt or blouse.

**Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): What is the backstory for your invention?**

**Lesley Miller (LM):** I licensed my first product before the days of Google and have since discovered that once a specific problem plants itself in your brain, it’s hard to shake. One of these frustrations came from all of the shirts in my closet that just didn’t fit well; and, after a spirited cleaning, I had a full bag to donate.

The very next day, I happened to catch a TV segment where a gentleman demonstrated a tucking method he claimed would make you look more fit and trim. Since it sounded easier than sit-ups, I gave it a try. To my surprise, it actually worked.

The shirt looked more flattering, but the technique was tedious and required adjusting throughout the day. I accepted the challenge and set out to create an easy-to-use, versatile device to help women enhance the look and fit of their basic, boxy and baggy tops. After numerous iterations, fine-tuning and testing, the pieces came together, and I was thrilled to introduce TwirlyT.

**EGT: Why is TwirlyT unique? Have there been any knockoffs?**

**LM:** There are several clothing cinching devices available. However, most are limited to one style and function, are difficult to use, expensive, or

add bulk inside of your clothing right where most of us don’t need it.

TwirlyT can be utilized in several innovative ways, is easy to use and produces a flattering fit at a budget-friendly price.

Last year, TwirlyT was honored to be selected for a special launch on The Grommet in celebration of International Women’s Day, where it earned “Product of the Week.” The surge in sales caught the attention of overseas sellers, who unfortunately hijacked my Amazon listing.

At the time, my trademark was still pending, and despite my management team filing over 30 unauthorized seller cases, they were not able to resolve the issue. I had to sabotage my own listing to protect my brand’s reputation.

There was, however, a silver lining. I decided to pivot from 3D printing to investing in professional injection molding tooling. The result is a significantly improved version of TwirlyT—now proudly bearing my registered trademark—and I couldn’t be happier with how it turned out.

**EGT: What is the TwirlyT made of?**

**LM:** I initially produced inventory on my 3D printers but have upgraded to a molded part made from high-quality, textured silicone that is flexible but strong and features a grippy surface—which helps keep your flattering look in place throughout the day.

**EGT: How is the product used?**

**LM:** TwirlyT is used to enhance the look and fit of knit tops, T-shirts and scarves. It allows women to create a tailored fit by adjusting the amount of fabric pulled through the opening. Instructions and a QR code allow “Twirlers” to select from several styling options.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TWIRLYT

**Overseas sellers “hijacked my Amazon listing. At the time, my trademark was still pending, and despite my management team filing over 30 unauthorized seller cases, they were not able to resolve the issue. I had to sabotage my own listing to protect my brand’s reputation.”** —LESLEY MILLER



With so many people “gifting” TwirlyT to bridesmaids, teachers and friends, we gave the packaging a fun, spiffy, gift-ready makeover.

**EGT: How are you selling TwirlyT (your website, Amazon, retail)?**

**LM:** Amazon, The Grommet, and my website, with plans to expand my reach in retail shortly.

**EGT: Where are you manufacturing? Have you had any issues?**

**LM:** TwirlyT is made in the USA by Solid Designs in Holland, Michigan.

Look for an experienced manufacturer who can offer you wisdom and guidance. I have found that there are benefits to staying local, such as decreased shipping costs and a more hands-on partnership.

As with all vendors, have a “Plan B.” Be a good customer: Give generous lead times, be specific and clear about your expectations, and pay your bill early.

**EGT: Tell us about the grant you received from *Clean Living* magazine.**

**LM:** *Clean Living* allowed me to display TwirlyT during their Oscars event in Bel Air, California, alongside an inspiring lineup of fellow women founders.

The event was held March 1-2, 2025, at a beautiful hilltop mansion. I met many amazing,

brilliant founders who I now cherish as friends—truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience!

There’s always something that adds a bit of spice to the story: I spent weeks preparing just the right clothing, shoes, jewelry, nails, etc. The evening before the event, I found a local optometrist’s office to have the nosepiece on my glasses replaced. They were kind enough to make the repair free of charge.

After putting my glasses back on, the technician noticed they sat a bit crooked and offered to straighten them. I will never forget the look on her face when she snapped the earpiece completely off the frame. She was able to find a mismatched one that she “Frankensteined” back on. I had to attend, wearing my sassy new clothes and jacked-up glasses!

**EGT: What is your patent status? Any advice for inventors considering filing a patent application?**

**LM:** My patent for TwirlyT is pending. I anticipate it will be granted within the next couple months.

I recommend learning how to write a provisional patent application. You will discover new things about your invention and be able to assist your attorney with filing a more comprehensive document.

Unlike most clothing clinching devices, TwirlyT is not limited to one style and function; is not difficult to use; is not expensive; and does not add bulk inside clothing.

**EGT: What has been your biggest obstacle in product development?**

**LM:** Honestly, I've been my own biggest obstacle. I have a strong tendency to want control over every detail, which can slow things down and lead to a burnout.

While I've gained valuable experience with licensing and direct distribution through other inventions, marketing and product promotion are areas where I've had the steepest learning curve. Letting go, asking for help and trusting others with the parts I don't know, as well, have been both challenging and incredibly rewarding.

**EGT: Will you be adding to your product line?**

**LM:** Like most inventors, I have several other projects in different product categories and development stages. This is the part I love.

**EGT: Any further guidance for novice inventors?**

**LM:** Get a 3D printer and learn simple CAD. It will save you time and money developing

prototypes. I have had ideas that I can hold in my hand within a couple of hours.

When it finally comes together, resist the temptation to keep messing with it!

Join a group like the United Inventors Association or Women Inventors Club. They are free to join and truly there to help.

Instead of asking people you know what they think of your invention, ask them what they would change.

Growth happens when you listen to the things you don't want to hear.

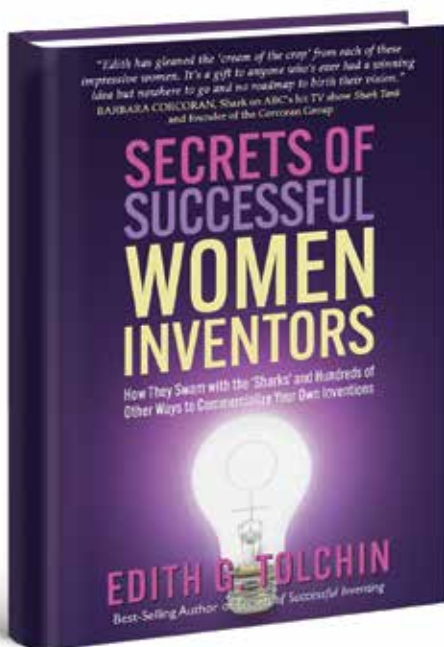
Inventing is like a rollercoaster. Some days I am barely tall enough to ride. 🎢

*Details: [twirlyt.net](http://twirlyt.net), [mytwirlyt@gmail.com](mailto:mytwirlyt@gmail.com)*

**Edith G. Tolchin** has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000 ([edietolchin.com/portfolio](http://edietolchin.com/portfolio)). She is the author of several books, including "Secrets of Successful Women Inventors" (<https://a.co/d/fAGivZJ>) and "Secrets of Successful Inventing" (<https://a.co/d/8dafJd6>).



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**Edith G. Tolchin**  
(photo by Amy Goldstein Photography)

### Edith G. Tolchin knows inventors!

Edie has interviewed over 100 inventors for her longtime column in *Inventors Digest* ([www.edietolchin.com/portfolio](http://www.edietolchin.com/portfolio)). She has held a prestigious U.S. customs broker license since 2002. She has written five books, including the best-selling *Secrets of Successful Inventing* (2015), and *Fanny on Fire*, a recent finalist in the Foreword Reviews INDIE Book Awards.

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# INVENTOR(S) OF THE YEAR





# Safety First

LEE AND ERIN HANSON ARE STEWARDS OF PROTECTION,  
THROUGH INNOVATIVE SPORTS EQUIPMENT AND  
A STEADFAST COMMITMENT TO INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

BY REID CREAGER

**T**OM BRADY could not have been a seven-time Super Bowl champion and three-time NFL most valuable player without elite protection behind the line of scrimmage.

Erin and Lee Hanson, champions in a similarly competitive arena, embody the same lofty standards as they create and advocate for protection of two different kinds.

The co-owners of Guardian Innovations, LLC have developed several sports-related products to protect young bodies, led by the flagship Guardian Cap XT—a soft-shell helmet cover made of closed cell foam designed to reduce repetitive impact that in 2022 was mandated by the National Football League for all teams’ use during contact practices. This self-described “calling” is reinforced by their commitment to intellectual property protection for their products, not just to defend their substantial research and development investments but to safeguard against infringers putting athletes in harm’s way with inferior knock-offs.

This dual mission, part of a lifetime of service for the public good, has earned the Hansons the Intellectual Property Owners Education Foundation’s 2025 Inventor of the Year Award.

## Patience and IP foresight

Lee and Erin Hanson exemplify how IP is much more than a powerful, proven means to exclude illegal competitors. It’s a gateway to opportunity for other possibilities and successes related to inventions, sometimes even unforeseen.

They co-founded Guardian Innovations in 2010 after being approached to redesign the traditional football helmet. They knew the sports equipment business was not ready for their idea. They knew the NFL wasn’t ready for it. But they also knew something had to be done.

As founder of The Hanson Group, LLC—a materials science company specializing in advanced raw materials for the coatings, adhesives and plastics industries—Lee Hanson has extensive knowledge and a long track record related to innovative technologies. Nonetheless, he said, “The industry was not ready for that whole engagement of a soft-sided helmet.

“Our outlook was, ‘We know it works; we know there’s something here. If we don’t do it, who the heck is going to do it?’”

Erin Hanson said: “For us, it was a calling to serve. We felt very grateful that we had been very successful as a financing group and felt like

The Hansons formed Guardian Sports in 2010 after being asked to redesign the traditional football helmet. Their Guardian Cap (above, original and 2.0) is now mandated for use in the NFL during all contact practices. Subsequent safety inventions include Guardian Chinstrap, Guardian Infill, LOOP multi-sport headgear, and PEARL lacrosse balls.

The 2.0 version of the Guardian Cap, introduced this year, features a sleeker design that allows teams to customize with team logos.

somebody needs to do something, and nobody was stepping up.”

Even without an outside investor or possible partner, the Hansons went to work securing IP for the Guardian Cap.

“When we created the Guardian Cap, our patent attorney, Chris Arena, worked all different angles and wrote continuations on it—and utility patents and design patents and everything else,” Lee said. “We took it to the marketplace. After the first two or three years, people were laughing at us.”

But after dogged persistence and NFL research that showed the efficacy of the product—a 52 percent reduction in NFL concussions, according to Erin—the couple’s IP foresight proved invaluable.

The biggest competitors in the helmet industry, who shot down the idea of a soft-shell helmet, learned that the Hansons’ protection was bulletproof.

“At Schutt, for example, their CEO came to us,” Lee said. “He was a patent attorney. He said, ‘Lee and Erin, you’ve created something that works and works really well, and you wrapped patents around it—and there’s not a thing we can do about it. We can’t knock you off.’”

Although foreigners constantly try to infringe, “Manufacturers in the United States won’t even try to touch it,” Erin said. “They won’t even try to make an iteration of it because our patent game is pretty dang strong.”

### Convincing the NFL

The Hansons are humbled yet proud that the Guardian Cap survived the industry’s early doubters; players who didn’t like its aesthetics; the endless scrutiny of the traditional football coach; and so much more to become common equipment at NCAA and NFL contact practices. The debut of a 2.0 version this year, featuring a sleeker design that allows teams to customize with team logos, was another milestone event.



They're also surprised—because the NFL was not part of their original plan.

As parents of five active kids, protecting them from sports injuries was the foremost motivation. The Guardian Cap “started out as a youth safety product,” Lee said. “We weren’t targeting the NFL. We were targeting youth—young, developing brains with parents who have control over the safety of their child.”

“But when the college teams started using Guardian Caps and then the NFL, we realized when it happens at the top level it all filters down. Colleges want to replicate the NFL, high school wants to replicate college, and so on.”

She recalled attending an NFL concussion symposium in 2010, soft-shell helmet in hand.

She reminded that this was “pre-concussion movement, pre-CTE, pre everything. So at the

The caps’ big NFL break came in 2015, when the league held another helmet safety conference and announced the first Head Health Challenge. “We applied to that, which put us on their radar,” Erin said. “They came back to us in 2021 and said they were doing more extensive testing.

“The NFL is so much more invested in player safety than people realize. They have tons of safety data and cameras at every practice, feedback from players. When they saw that 53 percent reduction in concussions, they were blown away.”

Anecdotal evidence amped up the momentum.

“We had former players who were now repping other manufacturers’ products who said the before and after was astounding: ‘I went to class, and my head wasn’t spinning. I didn’t have a headache. I wasn’t fuzzy.’

**“[Competitors] said, ‘Lee and Erin, you’ve created something that works and works really well, and you wrapped patents around it—and there’s not a thing we can do about it.’ —LEE HANSON**



time, they didn’t want to change the look of the game. They didn’t want to change the sound of the game. They wanted a different outcome but without changing any of the parts.”

Adding to the resistance was football’s macho mentality: “The players want a different future outcome for themselves. But we’re asking them to be the tough guys, right?”

“If you show up at practice and you’re that one guy and say, ‘Hey, I’m interested in my future health so I’m gonna wear this Guardian Cap, the coach is going to look at you and say, ‘This guy is smart’—or, ‘This guy is soft.’”

When entire college teams—including Clemson University—went with the Guardian Cap, the tide began changing. (That number has surpassed 275.) Practicality began to prevail. “Coaches were like, ‘I’m not going to lose my star player in a practice drill on a Wednesday.’”

As Lee Hanson said, “The best ability is availability.”

Injuries came down, including from quarterbacks’ hands hitting helmets. We knew were on to something.”

They got a voicemail from NFL legend Peyton Manning, ordering caps for his son’s eighth-grade team. The challenge had been met, she said, to “prove that you’re causing something not to happen.”

Such proof entails extensive testing—for the Hansons, amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Two years of testing preceded the sale of the first Guardian Cap in 2012.

“We continue to test,” Erin said. “Universities have done testing. The NFL is heavily invested in testing through its lab, Biocore. Every time we have a new iteration, that thing gets tested before it ever sees the light of day.”

They wish infringers had the same commitment. When the Hansons hear about a knock-off, Erin said, “We pick up the phone and say, ‘Whatever



“If they have IP around it, they’ve taken a big step.”

Erin sums up their thought process: “We’re not interested in going down a road with somebody and something that you put all of your time and energy into, and then it’s ripped off three months later.”

IP is “definitely a necessary thing for fundraising,” Lee said. “We just never raised funds.”

“We had people come to us in the beginning wanting to invest,” Erin said, but “we didn’t know if [the Guardian Cap] would make it. We didn’t want to lose anybody else’s money.”

With the product and IP securely established, the Hansons are free to pursue opportunities related to their invention—and other inventions—that include marketing, advertising and more.

“It gives you protection around the product, protection around the brand,” Erin said. “When you are investing so much money into a marketing team and building a brand, the last thing you want is someone to come out with the same name, the same logos.”

Little wonder that between The Hanson Group and Guardian Innovation, the bulging toteboard currently shows 23 patents and six trademarks that are registered.

### A palette of purpose

Far from being a one-trick pony, the Hansons and Guardian steadily and purposefully fortify their stable of safety-themed innovation.

When the Hansons set out to redefine the football helmet in 2010, one of their sons was beginning to play football. Three years later, a son who was a lacrosse goalie sparked the motivation for another game changer.

“We were at one of the safety conferences for the Cap,” Lee said, “and one of the technical guys

The Guardian Chinstrap addresses the fact that half of helmet-to-helmet hits are also facemask to facemask. The chinstrap has been shown to reduce about 40 percent of impact during those collisions.

it takes, please do not put those on your players’ helmets. You don’t know where those came from, or the testing behind them.”

### One essential question

A shared emphasis on testing can help legitimize and grow a product. Shared intellectual property protection can facilitate collaborations between entities of all different types and sizes.

Guardian Innovations has no investors—“It’s just us,” Lee Hanson said—but when the company receives collaboration requests from inventors, an elementary rule starts all conversations.

“We have people come to us all the time now saying, ‘Can you help us get our project started?’ My first question is, ‘Do you have IP around it?’

**“For us, it was a calling to serve. We felt very grateful that we had been very successful as a financing group and felt like somebody needs to do something, and nobody was stepping up.”** —ERIN HANSON



said, 'We are having problems with the lacrosse balls. They are getting harder and harder over time, hitting players and breaking orbital sockets, jaws and more.'

This common problem with traditional balls, made from vulcanized rubber overseas, result in their becoming greasy and hard. Leveraging their more than 25 years as owners of a chemical engineering business, Lee and Erin developed the PEARL ball—the only lacrosse balls manufactured in America and formulated out of an elastomer that meets lacrosse ball specs and standards without changing over time.

With the increasing popularity of flag football, especially with girls, Erin is proud of Guardian's LOOP headband for non-helmeted sports. Stylish and comfortable, it reduces the impact of incidental hits in a fast-paced game.

"You really didn't want those 5-, 6-, 7-year-olds playing tackle," she said. "That's when we said the headband is the way to go."

Any helmeted sport poses the constant threat of the wrong kind of hit in the wrong place. "Fifty percent of helmet-to-helmet hits are face-mask to facemask," Lee said. "No one is doing anything about these hits"—so enter the Guardian Chinstrap, developed in partnership with SoftShox and Stanford University, which he said has been shown to reduce about 40 percent of impact during such collisions.

Guardian's innovation spans the whole field, figuratively and literally.

In the turf industry, the company created Guardian Infill, a USDA Certified bio-based TPE used as a sustainable alternative to crumb rubber, and Guardian Pad, a high-impact, recycled polyurethane underlayment for turf fields. Lee also recently launched Catalyst Technologies and the first commercially viable polyurethane disposable glove that features superior tear resistance, tensile strength and flexibility compared to latex and nitrile gloves—without causing skin irritation. They have the potential to become ubiquitous in hospital, cleaning and food processing environments.

### The new and newest

Possibilities excite the Hansons as much as what they have accomplished. More innovation—and the resultant IP—are constants.

IPOEF INVENTOR OF THE YEAR  
**AWARDS CELEBRATION**

Lee and Erin Hanson will be honored as part of ceremonies at the JW Marriott in Washington, D.C., on December 16 to celebrate accomplishments in the fields of IP, innovation and creativity, with a shared purpose of raising money to support IP education.

IP practitioners, IP professionals, government officials and attendees from all over the world take part in this event to promote IP awareness and support the work of IPOEF to further efforts of promoting an understanding of and respect for intellectual property and its value to society.

**To register:** [ipoef.org/awards-celebration](https://ipoef.org/awards-celebration)  
**Past winners:** [ipoef.org/inventor-of-the-year](https://ipoef.org/inventor-of-the-year)

They're already working on the 3.0 version of the Guardian Cap; the NCAA will use the 2.0 this year. In the past several months, they have been working with the University of Massachusetts on a thin material to be worn under a baseball hat that reduces the impact to the head from batted balls, which Lee said have an average exit velocity of 83 mph.

The Hansons say their professional skill-sets—he a lifetime chemical engineer, she with a Bachelor of Science and a concentration on math—are diverse yet complementary.

"I love numbers and I love logic, so that helps," Erin said. "But the best training for the company that we've grown is raising a big family. You learn how to organize a lot of things—time management, motivation, managing expectations."

Speaking of numbers, she said their 2025 goal is not in revenue: "Our goal is to serve 500,000 athletes in some way by the end of the year—how many different individuals we're making safe in some way."

"God gives everybody a purpose," Lee Hanson said. "This is one of our purposes." 🙏



# LOOK AT

LEMELSON CENTER'S CHANGE YOUR GAME INTERACTIVE SPORTS EXHIBIT SEEKS TO DRAW OUT THE INVENTOR IN US

BY REID CREAGER

**“LOOK AT THIS!” “LOOK AT THAT!”  
“LOOK OVER HERE!”**

The Lemelson Center's new Change Your Game/Cambia tu juego sports exhibit—3,500 square feet of high-tech wow, teeming with some of the most transformative innovations in recent memory—elicits those finger-pointing moments while being uniquely hands-on.

The hands-on part is where you look at something else: you, as you literally touch upon the power of human ingenuity.

This game-changing, interactive display involving the games we play isn't as much about showing what other people have created as it is revealing the index of your possibilities.

“You're learning about other inventors, people who invented for sports, but we want visitors to sort of move from there to some self-reflection,”

said Eric S. Hintz, PhD and acting director of the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, the site of the exhibit.

“Our educational goal for the exhibition is to say, ‘Hey, look at all these cool stories,’ and then reflect that from people's own lives: How can I be a game changer in my own life? How can I engage my own inventive creativity?”

## **Marrying thought and touch**

Years in the making—following comprehensive research, as well as the physical machinations of assembling—Change Your Game opened in 2024. It includes 60-plus sports technology inventions from collections throughout America and features six areas of exploration:



the introductory Starting Line; four Motivation Zones that each highlight a core motivation for invention in sports—achieving a Competitive Edge, promoting Health and Safety, facilitating Fairness and Accuracy, and enhancing the Fun and Accessibility of sports to diverse participants—and a finishing End Zone.

Each Motivation Zone has an interactive element, often a touchscreen. Hintz used an example to explain how it works.

“When you walk into the gallery, the first motivation that you encounter is Competitive Edge—inventing technologies to help win more games, go faster, jump higher, speed faster. The interactive there is called swimsuit designer, so you put yourself in that role.

“And so, you have a series of decisions to make. Number one, what shape of swimsuit do I want?

Do I want a one-piece? Do I want a two-piece? Do I want a tankini?

“The screen in front of you will have a little knob that you turn, like a wheel, and you use it to show you what it looks like, and then you push the button and you select it.”

The user moves through a series of other choices. What kind of fabric? In the very literal sense of “hands on,” visitors can even feel different fabric types to help them make their choice.

If a friend is iterating with you, you can compare your choices, even compete. The purpose is to encourage everyone to react to challenges, problem solve, and better understand how his or her uniquely inventive mind works.

**Above:** At the Catching Cheaters panel in the Fairness and Accuracy zone, visitors learn about corked baseball bats, deflated footballs, scuffed baseballs, and performance-enhancing drugs, as well as the innovations officials use to ensure fair play.

## Sports: Inspiring innovation

"There is usually a crowd of people at the swimsuit designer interactive," said Dr. Joanna Garner.

A research professor and executive director of The Center for Educational Partnerships at Old Dominion University, Dr. Garner worked with the Lemelson Center and Dr. Avi Kaplan, professor in the College of Education and Human Development at Temple University, to research the optimal intentions and processes of the exhibit.

"The interactives are one of my favorite parts," she said. "Because I'm a psychologist, I just love to see people and that kind of spark or that recognition of their own inventiveness, and see people playing and learning at the same time."

Dr. Garner said a key component of making choices is "the idea of constraints—how we can't just choose anything and combine anything in our lives, right? We have to usually have a particular goal that usually must optimize whatever it is that we're making."

The immense impact sports has on the world was a primary driver when conceptualizing the exhibit, which dramatically shows how invention and innovative technology have become increasingly essential in athletics.

Hintz, the center's acting director and a historian focused on the history of science, technology and invention, said sports is broadly identifiable for multiple reasons: "Even if you're not into sports, you probably have a pair of tennis shoes. You probably have a swimsuit somewhere, right? And someone has to design this stuff. Someone has to invent it."

"The more we thought about it, in every sport even the apparel is associated in some way or another with technology."

Change Your Game features inventions made for and by athletes, including Gatorade; innovative skateboard and snowboard designs; prostheses and adaptive devices; and helmet safety innovations provided by former NFL star Shawn Springs through his company, Windpact. At a Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation event last year, Springs and Dr. Garner discussed his Crash Cloud technology and what motivated him to invent.

"By my 10th year in the league, I noticed there was a lot of noise around traumatic brain injury," the 13-year veteran and subject of a December 2020 *Inventors Digest* cover story told the Lemelson Center in a separate interview. "I became curious about why the technology that my father wore in the 1980s was the very same technology that I was wearing in the NFL more

Below: Prototype of the original Jogbra, 1977; one of the first mass-produced skateboards, 1964; the Quickie sports wheelchair, 1980s; and a view of Change Your Game from the Health and Safety zone.



**“Our educational goal for the exhibition is to say, ‘Hey, look at all these cool stories,’ and then reflect that from people’s own lives: How can I be a game changer in my own life?”** — ERIC S. HINTZ, PHD



than two decades later, and I was hoping that my kids wouldn’t be wearing this same technology.

“My sons, like I did with my father, took a particular interest in football and wanted to play in college. And right then and there, I knew it was a problem I wanted to solve—to make the game safer for the next generation of athletes.”

### **The role of inventive identity**

In addition to the measured thought processes and planning surrounding the themes that dominate Change Your Game, Drs. Garner and Kaplan conducted post-opening research and prototyping.

Throughout the entire process, much of their work in collaboration with the Lemelson Center has revolved around a term they coined: inventive identity, and how we search for and understand it as part of a deeper understanding of who we are.

Dr. Garner said considerations in the exhibit’s theoretical framework included self-perception—“the kinds of words you would use, characterizations you would assign to yourself. Or it could be about your beliefs about the world and about your ability to be inventive in it. It could be about your inventive purposes and goals that you might have in a particular domain of life.

“And your inventive action possibilities: How can you actually be inventive? What are the strategies that we use? What are the actions we use to be inventive?”

Such enthusiastic self-analysis is part of the Lemelson Center’s broader mission to spark the human drive that can uncover our varied abilities to confront challenges and solve problems. This includes programs and ongoing activities like the neighboring Spark!Lab, another immersive, hands-on space that provides visitors a chance to explore their inner inventor; research fellowships that enable scholars and students to

advance our understanding of the history of invention and innovation; and public programs and digital resources to promote invention’s many success stories.

“Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson’s vision for the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation was to create a national home for the stories of invention. They understood that documenting the history of American ingenuity isn’t just about preserving the past; it’s about inspiring the future,” said Rob Schneider, executive director of The Lemelson Foundation. “The Lemelson Foundation’s support for dynamic exhibits like Change Your Game directly reflects this, showcasing how inventors have reshaped our world—from the sports field to the operating room. We are proud to partner with the Smithsonian to foster an appreciation for the central role that invention plays in our lives and to encourage the next generation of innovators.”

*Details: [invention.si.edu](http://invention.si.edu)*

## **ABOUT THE LEMELSON CENTER**

**Vision:** We envision a world in which everyone is inventive and inspired to contribute to innovation.

**Mission:** The Lemelson Center engages, educates, and empowers the public to participate in technological, economic, and social change. We undertake historical research, develop education initiatives, create exhibitions, and host public programming to advance new perspectives on invention and innovation and to foster interactions between the public and inventors.



# BRIGHT IDEAS

## Hengbot Sirius

AI ROBOTIC DOG

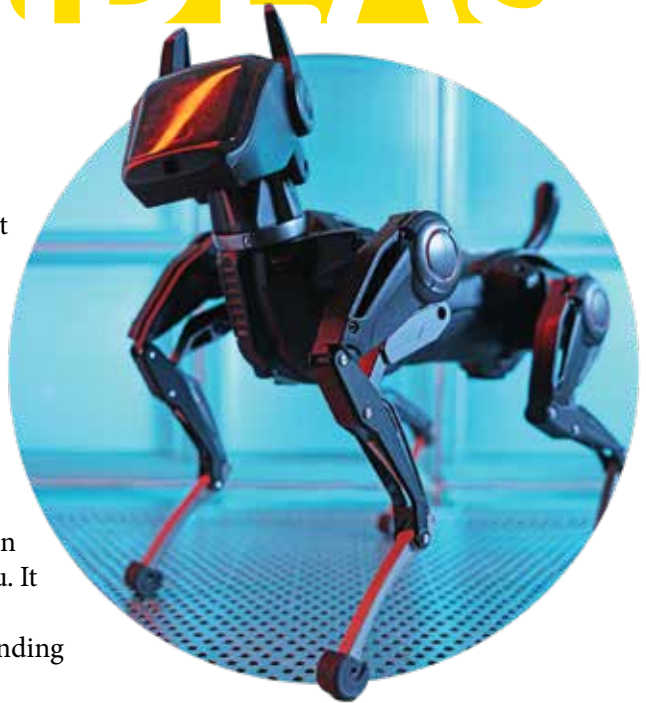
[hengbot.com](http://hengbot.com)

Billed as the “world’s first trainable AI robotic dog,” Hengbot Sirius is playful, curious and independent, with agile movements.

Sirius’ makers studied real dogs to create an extensive motion library of hundreds of distinct actions. It “scampers, hops and plays with the delightful, unrestrained energy of a happy puppy,” powered by a drivetrain capable of speeds up to 0.5m/s and faster.

Using a TOF sensor, the dog navigates your personal space and is not in your way when you walk. Multimodal interaction means Sirius is meant not just to hear you but understand you. It can differentiate between people it “knows” and does not.

Set to retail for \$1,299, Sirius is to be shipped to crowdfunding backers in October.



## Cross Spin

CROSSWORD  
PUZZLE-BASED GAME

[jopatgames.com/pages-cross-spin](http://jopatgames.com/pages-cross-spin)

This board game challenges players to exercise their skills in language comprehension, reasoning, spatial awareness and sense for abstract connection.

Every player chooses a matching crossword puzzle from a 10-board booklet. Based on how many words fit in the puzzle, the same number of category cards are then drawn. With 160 different cards, Cross Spin’s categories are numerous and eclectic.

Players try to solve their puzzles by thinking of words that match the category cards and fit into their puzzle. The winning player then flips a 20-second hourglass, and remaining players must finish as much as possible before points are tallied.

Cross Spin retails for \$24.99.



## CardMill

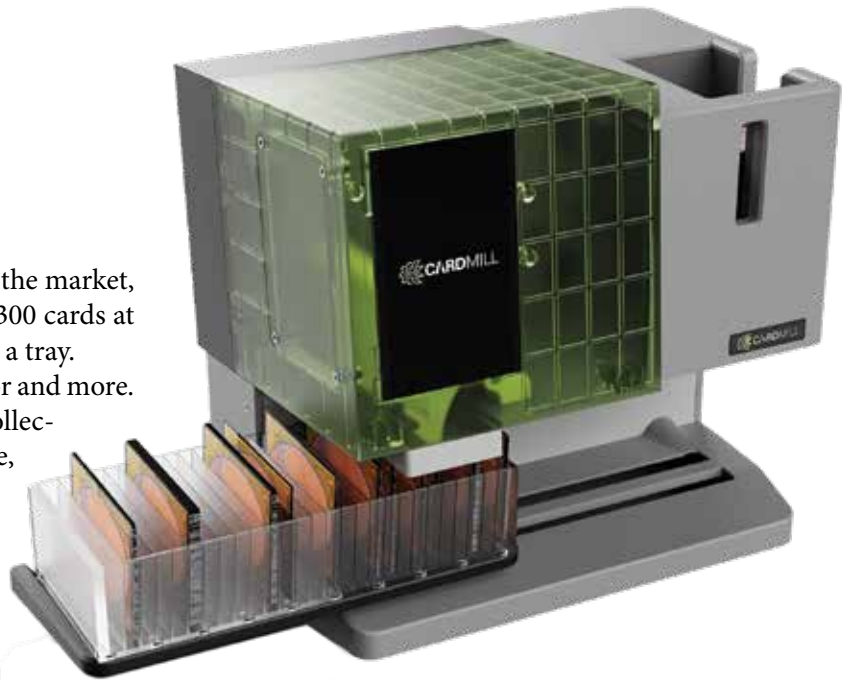
CARD COLLECTORS'  
SCANNER AND SORTER  
[cardmill.com](http://cardmill.com)

Purported to be the only one of its kind on the market, automated CardMill scans and sorts up to 300 cards at once, distributing them in separate areas in a tray.

You can sort alphabetically, by set, by color and more. The AI model learns and grows with your collection. A digital library allows you to organize, filter, track price trends and add your inventory to your favorite collection tracker.

Features include a touchscreen; internal camera with Intelligent Identification; 300-card hopper, and two sliding trays—one with 27 sorting slots for alphabetizing, and another with 13 sorting slots.

CardMill is available to crowdfunding backers for \$400, with a planned December delivery. Future retail pricing is unknown.



**“Our ancestors have invented.  
We can at least innovate.”**

—AMIT KALANTRI

## Normatec Elite

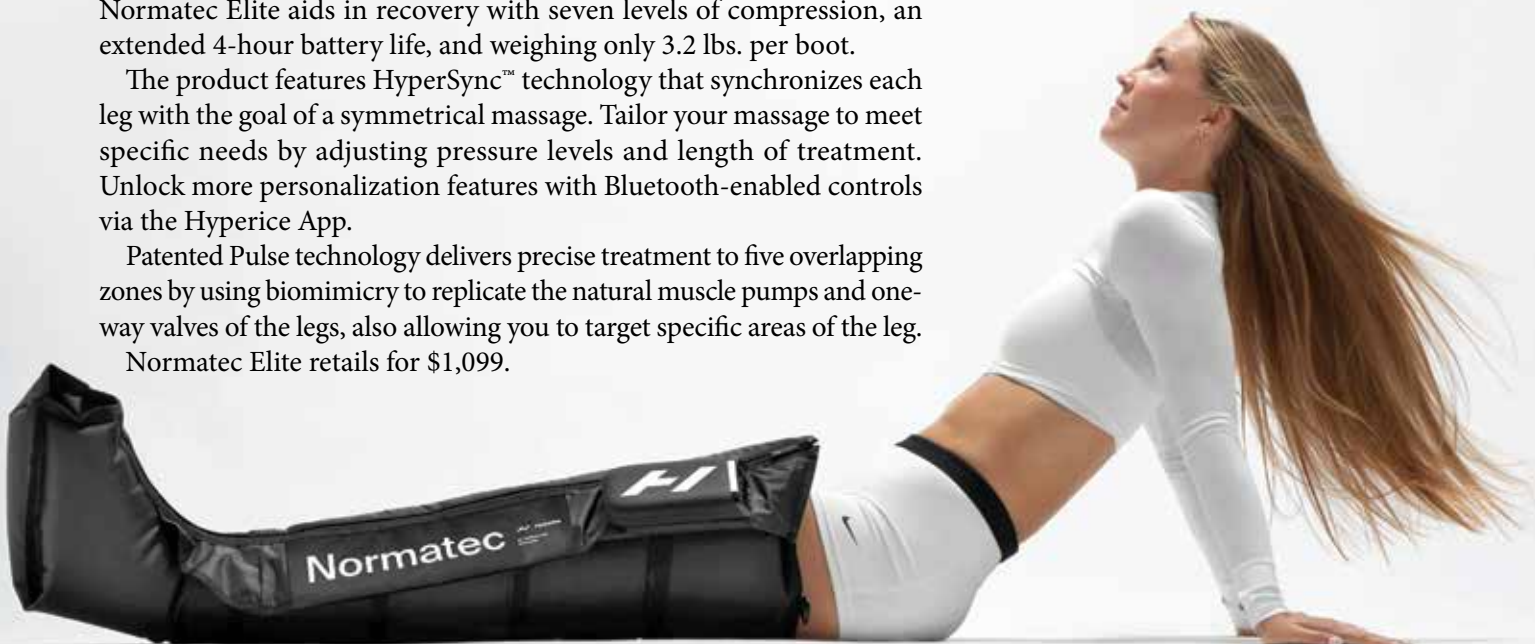
COMPRESSION LEG MASSAGER  
[hyperice.com](http://hyperice.com)

Normatec Elite aids in recovery with seven levels of compression, an extended 4-hour battery life, and weighing only 3.2 lbs. per boot.

The product features HyperSync™ technology that synchronizes each leg with the goal of a symmetrical massage. Tailor your massage to meet specific needs by adjusting pressure levels and length of treatment. Unlock more personalization features with Bluetooth-enabled controls via the Hyperice App.

Patented Pulse technology delivers precise treatment to five overlapping zones by using biomimicry to replicate the natural muscle pumps and one-way valves of the legs, also allowing you to target specific areas of the leg.

Normatec Elite retails for \$1,099.



# Seeking That Magic Bullet

WINNING OVER THE CUSTOMER IS COMPLICATED, THOUGH SOMETIMES WITH SIMPLE ANSWERS **BY WILLIAM SEIDEL**

**I WAS PRESENTING** a remarkable discovery from 10 years of university research to the largest consumer product company in the world. After dismissing over 200 other projects, they wanted an in-depth presentation of our universally effective disinfectant.

There were 12 attendees from four countries and three states on the Zoom call.

After 75 minutes of thorough questions and answers, the chief scientist of the company looked at her associates and said, “I think we found the magic bullet.”

I was impressed, but I had to look it up.

In medicine, the magic bullet concept refers to a drug that selectively targets and destroys disease-causing agents without harming healthy cells.

For example, in 1909 the first compound that was considered a magic bullet targeted the syphilis-causing bacteria while sparing human tissue.

Similarly, the isolation of insulin treatment for diabetes and the discovery of antibiotics like penicillin are considered medical magic bullets.

Psychologists redefined the Magic Bullet Theory to mass communications and renamed it the “Hypodermic Needle Theory.” It suggests that media messages injected into the minds of a passive audience can influence and control their ideas, beliefs or behaviors.

In the 1920s, mass radio communications grew—and so did mass markets. Market expansion depends on the reach and frequency of the media.

More important, the message “injected into the minds of a passive audience” is the determining factor.

In 1938, after the radio broadcast of “War of the Worlds,” listeners believed an alien invasion was real and caused widespread panic. Psychologists were quick to cite the Magic Bullet Theory as an example of the manipulative power of mass media. It also drew attention to the importance of managing the message and clarity in communications.

It was used in 1963 by skeptics of the Warren Commission’s investigation that suggested a single bullet caused seven distinct wounds in President John F. Kennedy and Texas Gov. John Connally. Because of the implausibility of one bullet causing so many injuries, it got the nickname the “Magic Bullet Theory.”

Marketing redefined the magic bullet as a single, simple solution or tactic that can guarantee success and solve all marketing challenges. It’s generally viewed as a quick fix and a myth because of the word “all.”

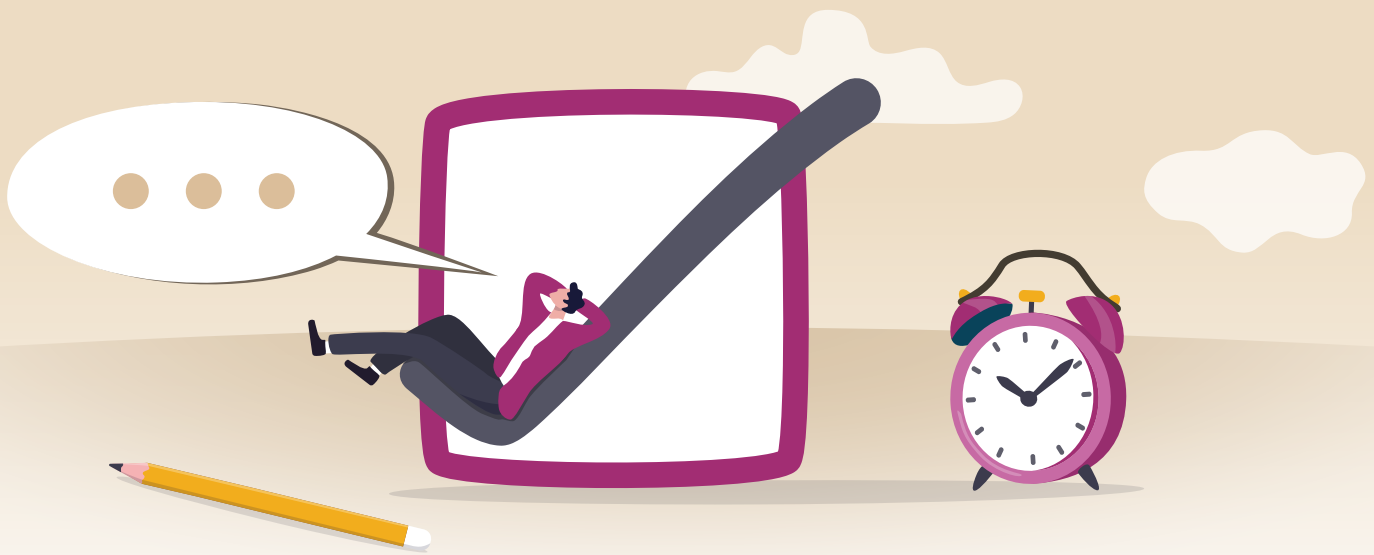
Where the science paradigm of the magic bullet is in the discovery, for marketing it is the degree of customer acceptance.

## ‘Right’ marketing is timeless

Winning over the customer is complicated because every product, market and customer are different. It requires masterful coordination of tactics, messages and media with a forward-thinking strategy to deliver persuasive messages.

Facts are that the “right” marketing can immediately spark changes in consumer behavior, industry standards and the trajectory of an entire market. When this is working, it sounds like a magic bullet to me.





## Simple is memorable, reduces anxiety and avoids information overload. It requires less energy and time to process, and offers a sense of certainty and control.

Television was made to sell products. It exemplifies the Hypodermic Needle Theory, which states a strong, clear and emotional message “injected” into a passive TV viewing audience creates high-volume acceptance.

TV demonstration works to educate and entertain while selling the merchandise.

With the introduction of cable in the early 1980s came a programming void filled by infomercials. From the Thighmaster (\$900 million) and Ginsu Knives (\$3.2 billion) to the George Foreman Grill (\$12 billion) and the Total Gym (\$2.5 billion), infomercials have and still generate billions.

The commonality: reaching a massive passive TV viewing audience with the “right” message.

The reason you see the same ads over and over is because the frequency is increased when the message has the highest response. To market anything, it is crucial to understand the media reach, frequency and message and how it affects the customer.

The advent of digital marketing in the late 1990s catapulted opportunities to new heights. Established forward-thinking companies quickly adapted to the changes. We don’t think of Walmart in this way, but with Walmart.com the company quickly complemented and expanded its existing business with 20 times the product offerings.

Digital marketing provides access to enormous audiences. When coupled with great products like Uber and Airbnb and the “right” marketing, this results in success.

The rise of TikTok from lip-syncing and dance videos to a global phenomenon affected social media and the fashion industry, and became a dominant force with young audiences.

### Simple simply wins

The point is to reach the broadest audience with the best possible message. This is exactly what psychologists were suggesting over 100 years ago, injecting messages into the minds of passive audiences to influence and control their behavior.

Psychology supports the idea that people are quick to accept simplicity, because our minds search for the simplest answers.

Simple is memorable, reduces anxiety and avoids information overload. It requires less energy and time to process, and offers a sense of certainty and control.

Remember “KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid”? The average adult reading level is 7th grade, and 130 million read below a 6th-grade level. Most blockbuster ads are written at a 7th-grade reading level.

There are many power messages to promote products, services and political agendas: “The Real Thing,” “Happy Meal” and “Just Say No!”

When the message is “right,” the product or the company doesn’t need to be mentioned: “Snap! Crackle! Pop!” ... “Just Do It” ... “Finger Lickin’ Good.” These messages are the flagship of the brand.

What’s in a tagline?

“The joy of driving” didn’t work in America for BMW. In 1973, its agency rebranded it as the “Ultimate Driving Machine.”

This identity drove BMW to a leading position for over 50 years. In marketing, the magic bullet may be the message.

Psychology is all about behavior, thoughts and feelings. And marketing is all about consumer motivation.

When marketers understand what drives consumers,

they create campaigns that resonate with their audience to drive sales.

## Branding is the bullet

The magic bullet is alive and well—and injected into our minds. It’s called branding!

Building a brand takes time. It occupies a top-of-mind position, instills trust and simplifies decision-making.

Branding is the reason people ask for a Heineken instead of a beer.

When a brand works, it lifts every product and every part of a business like a rising tide lifts all boats. Sounds like a magic bullet to me. 🍻



**William Seidel** is an author, educator, entrepreneur, innovator, and a court-approved expert witness on marketing innovation. In his career and as the owner of America Invents, he has developed, licensed, and marketed billions of dollars of products.



## AI ABCs

### TURING’S CHESS MATCH

To examine the history of AI and understand the thought processes that led to its evolution, the name Alan Mathison Turing will invariably emerge.

Generally considered the Father of Modern AI, Turing was an English mathematician, computer scientist, logician, cryptanalyst, philosopher and theoretical biologist. He is credited with first using the term “artificial intelligence”—a concept that seeks to create machines capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence—in 1956 at the renowned Dartmouth College summer workshop.

As long ago as the 1930s, Turing was articulating and writing about concepts including algorithms, computation and the dominances of machines. His seminal 1950 paper, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” posited the question, “Can machines think?”

This sparked debate and research that still endures. His Turing Test, which evaluates a machine’s ability to exhibit intelligent behavior independent of humans’, was a foundation for that research.

Chess played a role in Turing’s research, based on the notion that a chess-playing computer could play by searching through all available moves. This was impossible as a practicality due to the incredibly high number of moves that would involve, but he experimented with designing chess programs to advance his theory and predicted that someday, computers would be formidable as a chess player.

In 1996, Deep Blue, a chess computer built by IBM, beat world champion Garry Kasparov in a six-game match. This exhibited the powerful calculating power of a machine through massive technological advancement but did not contribute to understanding how humans think—a

prime component in building and growing AI.

*Britannica* wrote: “Deep Blue’s 256 parallel processors enabled it to examine 200 million possible moves per second and to look ahead as many as 14 turns of play. Many agree with Noam Chomsky, a linguist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), who opined that a computer beating a grandmaster at chess is about as interesting as a bulldozer winning an Olympic weightlifting competition.”

—Reid Creager





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# Prototyping the Small Stuff

LITTLE TABLE SAWS CAN BE OF EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY—BUT KNOW HOW TO NAVIGATE SOME OF THE QUIRKS **BY JACK LANDER**

**3-D PRINTING** has opened the door for a significant increase in small and miniature product prototypes. Creating the hardware for little products has been difficult for those of us who do not have a milling machine.

I'm one of those deprived persons, although I had a substantial shop years ago.

We sold our family-size home several years ago and bought a condominium—and believe me, the condo is *mini*. No basement for machines, sawdust, metal shavings, etc.

When I told my wife, Mary, that I was buying a table saw, she said OK with a blank expression. But I had to keep it outside, covered with a tarp, and I couldn't turn it on because the noise would irritate our neighbors.

Well, I wasn't just reminiscing about the good old days when I had noisy machines. I actually bought my table saw. The sturdy

table is about six by eight inches, and it weighs about seven pounds.

The designer and manufacturer demonstrate outstanding customer concern for the exceptional quality of this product.

The track for the miter gauge is precisely machined to within a hair's width for smooth and accurate tracking as you push the miter gauge and your workpiece into and through the saw blade. The blade can be lowered or raised by inserting an Allen wrench through the small hole surrounded by three flathead screws.

A rough cutting blade and a fine cutting blade are included in the package, along with three Allen wrenches and a sanding disk that can be used on the same arbor as the saw blades. A soft bristle brush is included for cleanup of chips. Also standard is a flex hose to guide the exhaust from the chips into a container.

## Getting things in line

My main purpose for buying this machine was to precision-cut small pieces of 3/32 inch-thick acrylic sheets. The edges of the cut need a few strokes with a fine file, but the face of the cut is OK—very smooth.

My only complaint about this machine is the imperfect match

**Failure to align the guide accurately will result in binding and possibly stalling the motor, in which case shut off the machine.**



between the numbers across the upper edge and those across the lower edge. These numbers are intended to line up the left guide (has thumb nuts on its top) parallel with the saw blade when sawing without the miter gauge.

Failure to align the guide accurately will result in binding and possibly stalling the motor, in which case shut off the machine. Do not attempt to remove the work until the motor is electrically shut off.

If you purchase an identical model saw, set the guide and the saw blade parallel to each other by inserting a steel rule between them. Then, read both scales, noting any difference between the numbers. Use this difference to correct future settings.

### Set the blade high, or else

One last caution: Keep the blade at its highest for most uses.

I learned the hard way several years ago. I was sawing a large piece of 1/8 inch-thick acrylic, and I had set the saw blade about half an inch above the surface of the acrylic.

Visualize this: As the blade attempts its cut, it is trying to lift the workpiece, but before breaking through it crawls under and grabs the sheet and heaves it toward the worker. (I've got the scars on my right arm to prove the danger of such a setup.)

Now, if you set the blade substantially higher, the thrust is mainly downward with no lift, no grab.

Of course, the above kind of accident is less likely to happen on the small version of a table saw.

No brand name appears on the saw, or in the instructions. I suppose that it is made in China, but the manufacturer should be proud of the design and workmanship.

Onward to discover a mini drill-press of equal quality. 🛠️

**Jack Lander**, a near legend in the inventing community, has been writing for *Inventors Digest* for nearly a quarter-century. His latest book is "Hire Yourself: The Startup Alternative." You can reach him at [jack@Inventor-mentor.com](mailto:jack@Inventor-mentor.com).



# A Nose for Creativity and Gratitude

(Editor's note: These updates are not usually written by the subjects, who seldom are writers. This is not the case with Cara Brzezicki, an accomplished writer of children's books as well as being a multiple inventor. Her attitude of gratitude even in the face of rejection is a tribute to her and the inventing spirit.)

**S**INCE BEING on the July 2024 cover of *Inventors Digest*, I have been extremely blessed:

AutismProducts.com, one of the largest online neurodivergent stores, purchased a large order of Flusher Blockers.

"Shark Tank" contacted me to pitch my invention The Coffee Stopper, which was exhilarating. I made it through to the producers, although they passed on me. I was so incredibly grateful to even have the chance to pitch, and I know this is just the beginning.

I also received my first rejection for The Coffee Stopper patent. This happens on most nonprovisional patent applications, so I was not shocked. I have been tediously working through each detail that is outlined in that lovely document.

My newest book, "Boogers Are NOT Snacks," was published at the end of August. Deb, the librarian at my son's school, gave me the idea after noticing this habit while speaking to the littles. She asked them (kiddingly) if boogers were snacks. I loved the idea and ran with it!

I also have the honor of speaking at Colorado Startup Week on September 17 from 9 to 10 a.m. at Venture X Denver. I am extremely excited and hope that my title, "Start Before You're Ready," helps so many budding entrepreneurs ignite their dream. —Cara Brzezicki





# Patent Monetization For Startups in Distress

MAXING OUT YOUR VALUABLE IP ASSETS BEGINS WITH IMMEDIATE PATENT AUDITS, SECURING DOCUMENTATION  
BY LOUIS CARBONNEAU

**T**HE TIME-HONORED TRADITION of startup failures continues unabated, with the familiar 90 percent failure rate serving as a sobering reminder that most unicorns are, in fact, mythical creatures.

The 90 percent figure isn't venture capital folklore. It's backed by rigorous research from

CB Insights, Startup Genome and economists at Harvard Business School. The scale is staggering: 3,200 U.S. VC-backed startups folded in 2023 alone, with 75 percent of venture-backed startups never returning cash to investors.

"Complete capital loss" has become the modal outcome—which is consultant-speak for "Your money is gone. Please try again."

As such, we at Tangible IP have been recently bombarded with inquiries from trustees, receivers, investors and entrepreneurs who need to quickly liquidate their IP assets. Little do they know ...

... These spectacular failures often leave behind genuinely valuable patent portfolios. The question isn't whether these assets exist (they do) but rather, how to extract value from them before the bankruptcy vultures pick the carcasses clean.

Now for the part that would make venture capitalists weep if they weren't too busy chasing the next unicorn: National Bureau of Economic

Research studies show that small firms systematically produce superior inventions compared to their large competitors.

The data are deliciously ironic. Average invention quality declines by 2.7 percent when firm size doubles, while startup patents receive significantly more citations from subsequent innovations—the academic equivalent of a standing ovation.

The explanation is elegantly Darwinian: Resource constraints force startups to focus on their highest-impact innovations. When you can afford to file 10 patents instead of 10,000, you tend to patent things that matter.

Startup patents must be "absolutely bullet-proof." A single flaw in a critical claim can sink both the patent and the business. Large companies can afford to patent the "System and Method for Clicking on Things" (yes, that's essentially a real patent), while startups must concentrate on breakthrough technologies with genuine commercial potential.

This creates our central paradox. The companies most likely to fail often hold the most valuable IP assets. It's like discovering that the restaurant just going out of business had the best tacos in town.

## Maximizing your value

When the startup founders have evacuated (usually to their next venture or a mindfulness retreat in Tulum), and the board members are frantically calculating how much they can recover before the creditors circle, patent monetization becomes a peculiar form of financial archaeology.





## The companies most likely to fail often hold the most valuable IP assets. It's like discovering that the restaurant just going out of business had the best tacos in town.

The challenge is extracting value from valuable assets under the worst possible circumstances. Imagine trying to sell Picassos during a fire alarm.

The fundamental rules are refreshingly straightforward, though honored more in the breach than the observance. The dos and don'ts of selling distressed IP assets:

**The sacred do's:** Conduct immediate patent audits before anything else vanishes, maintain all patent fees with religious devotion (patents expire faster than milk in these situations), engage IP brokers who specialize in distressed assets (we do) rather than your cousin who “knows about patents,” and bundle related patents as families. Nobody wants to buy a single spark plug when they need an engine.

Most critically, inventory and secure all IP ownership documentation—assignments signed by founders, employment agreements and anything proving the company actually owns what it thinks it owns.

**The mortal sins:** Never delay patent maintenance payments (the USPTO doesn't accept “the dog ate our payment” excuses), resist the pressure to accept the first lowball offer, absolutely

don't attempt patent enforcement litigation when you're already hemorrhaging money, and never ignore existing licensees or contracts—they complicate everything but can't be wished away (except that trustees in bankruptcy can sometimes purge some licenses). Also, make sure someone who can explain the technology (ideally the inventor(s)) is available during the monetization process and compensated for his or her time.

The delicate art of managing boards and creditors requires setting expectations somewhere between fantasy and despair.

Remember: Only 1 percent of patents are actually marketable, distressed sales realize 10 percent to 30 percent discounts compared to healthy company transactions, and success rates hover around a modest 40 percent of bankrupt firms managing to sell at least some patents (averaging only 18 percent of their portfolios). These aren't the numbers that make for inspiring TED talks, but they beat liquidating everything for office furniture value.

Here's where the cosmic joke reaches its punchline.



Optimal patent packaging requires 6-12 months of careful preparation, while bankruptcy proceedings compress this timeline to 60-90 days. It's like being asked to perform brain surgery during an earthquake—technically possible, but the conditions are less than ideal. For context, voluntary patent sales typically take 6-9 months minimum for due diligence and deal closing, while distressed sales must move from due diligence to auction in roughly 2.5 months.

The bankruptcy system operates with all the patience of a toddler at bedtime. In Chapter 7 liquidation, patent licenses have a brutal 60-day expiration date; if they're not assumed within 60 days of case commencement, they vanish into the legal ether and cannot be resurrected.

The automatic stay protections add another layer of complexity, freezing pre-petition IP infringement claims while potentially allowing post-petition actions to proceed. It's a legal framework designed by people who clearly never had to sell anything quickly.

This creates the perfect storm of institutional dysfunction: The highest-quality patents from genuine innovators must be liquidated under conditions that would challenge a seasoned auctioneer.

Therefore, it is paramount that anyone charged with monetizing the assets of a failed startup quickly carves out the IP portfolio and contacts a professional broker who can analyze and assess the portfolio—and, in the right circumstances, rapidly bring one of several buyers in their network who are willing to move fast in exchange for a discounted price tag.

It sure beats the alternative, where one watches the portfolio die on the vine—one missed payment at a time. ☹

**Louis Carbonneau** is the founder and CEO of Tangible IP, a leading patent brokerage and strategic intellectual property firm. He has brokered the sale or license of 4,500-plus patents since 2011. He is also an attorney and adjunct professor who has been voted one of the world's leading IP strategists.



## THROWING IPRs AWAY

In recent months, a curious phenomenon has taken hold at the USPTO: Interim Director Coke Morgan Stewart, wielding discretionary denial authority like a bureaucratic bouncer at an exclusive nightclub, has been rejecting *inter partes* review (IPR) petitions that challenge the validity of a patent with increasing frequency—often despite the Patent Trial and Appeal Board finding that the challenges met the statutory thresholds for institution.

The trend has turned many petitions that were initially accepted into paperweights, citing parallel litigation, timing issues, or just an intuitive sense that “now isn't the right time.” Petitioners have begun to wonder whether it's easier to get past TSA with a jug of shampoo than get an IPR instituted in today's climate.

The United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, that ever-watchful appellate guardian of patent sanity (in theory), has so far tiptoed around the issue like a chaperone at a middle school dance—present, observant, but loath to intervene unless someone sets the curtains on fire. The court generally lacks jurisdiction to review institution decisions,



even when they start to smell more like policy preferences than reasoned adjudication.

Still, murmurs of “arbitrary and capricious” are growing louder—and if the discretionary denials continue to rise, the federal circuit might finally be forced to decide whether the USPTO interim director's unchecked discretion is administrative prudence or something that needs to be reined in.

# Ideas: What Are They Worth?

COMPLEX ANSWER LIES IN DILIGENT RESEARCH  
TO DETERMINE POTENTIAL MARKET VALUE **BY LARRY UDELL**

**A** **S A PROFESSOR** of new ventures and having taught entrepreneurship since the late 1980s, I have seen hundreds of new product ideas. But how do we know if they are any good? What do we do with them?

This dilemma has faced millions of creative people on a regular basis. Often, we read or hear about someone who has become independently wealthy with an idea. If it was easy for them, why can't we do the same thing?

Ideas, inventions and innovations have undergone a dramatic transition over the past many decades. The result was an increasing emphasis on intellectual property, which describes an idea or invention in legal terms. In today's corporate world, intellectual property means patents, trademarks, copyrights, trade secrets, etc., but can be on a balance sheet as an asset—especially if it produces income that is normally in the form of royalty.

What is an idea worth?

This challenging question has been addressed many times over the past 40 years. In a great many cases, I was right—or at least close.

The value of anything you possess is determined by what someone is willing to pay for it. Think about that for a moment.

Let's say you had a garage sale and priced something at a dollar. At the end of the day, after no one had purchased it, you lowered the price to 50 cents. So it is with an idea.

When ideas become potential products and a patent application is filed, the expenditure of money begins the process of creating a possible asset. It serves as a guide to examine market feasibility and explore competitive advantages, market size and realistically look at what the asset is worth.

The true, intelligent judgment of value can realistically be based upon the amount of research that goes into determining that value,



**When ideas become potential products and a patent application is filed, the expenditure of money begins the process of creating a possible asset.**

plus objectively calculating the results of the research. This is a complex process that must be diligently conducted so that the most information on everything having to do with the idea, invention or technology is gathered.

In-depth research to determine “What’s it worth?” should be conducted by someone with experience. The results must be carefully compared to the competition or the most logical company to approach for a licensing agreement.

Don’t become a disillusioned inventor; the world of wealth and opportunity may be waiting! But you have to do your diligent homework. 📌

**Larry Udell** is executive director of the California Invention Center and founder of the Licensing Executive Society, Silicon Valley Chapter. He is a teacher, lecturer and consultant who has created more than 35 corporations. He consults to Fortune 500 firms and smaller businesses.





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## NEWMAN UPDATE: Longer Ban Is Affirmed

*All Eye on Washington stories originally appeared at IPWatchdog.com.*

**T**HE SPECIAL Committee of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit that has been investigating the alleged misconduct of Judge Pauline Newman since April 2023 has recommended extending her suspension from the court. The D.C. circuit affirmed it on August 22.

Federal Circuit Chief Judge Kimberly Moore first identified a complaint against Newman, then 95, for refusing to submit to medical testing to show her competence. Since then, Newman's suspension has been upheld. The Judicial Council of the Federal Circuit last adopted the report and recommendation of the special committee in September 2024.

In August 2023, the panel issued a 319-page report recommending the suspension, characterizing Newman's refusal to submit to medical testing by the committee's selected doctors as "serious misconduct" that has "[t]hwarted the process Congress created for determining whether a life-tenured judge suffers from a disability."

Newman's counsel, Greg Dolin of the New Civil Liberties Alliance, has argued this sanction amounts to a "floating" period of punishment and effectively equates to Newman's removal from the court. —*Eileen McDermott*



**Eileen McDermott** is editor-in-chief at IPWatchdog.com. A veteran IP and legal journalist, Eileen has held editorial and managerial positions at several publications and industry organizations since she entered the field more than a decade ago.



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## IoT Corner

European cybersecurity company **Modat** discovered that about 1.2 million health care IoT devices and connected medical systems are currently exposed online. Private medical records, including detailed scans and personal patient information, are leaking onto the web due to basic security failures and not a sophisticated cyberattack.

The early August report said these files are often stored alongside the patient's name and other identifiable details.

The United States is the most affected of all countries, involving more than 174,000 health care IoT devices. In addition to the loss of privacy, consequences could include leaving people open to black-mail over a health condition or targeted fraud.

## Wunderkinds

**Rebecca Young**, a 12-year-old attending Kelvinside Academy in Scotland, designed a solar-powered blanket. Her invention, which integrates a heated blanket into a backpack powered by solar energy, earned a Commendation Medal in the UK's Primary Engineer MacRobert Medal competition. She was inspired by people who sleep on the streets of Glasgow. The blanket features a control circuit that automatically switches the blanket on and off based on temperature readings, conserving battery life.



## What IS That?

The **Levenkeness Soft Bread Plush Pillow**, almost 3 feet long, is a creative way to loaf around.

## Get Busy!

The United States Patent and Trademark Office's annual event for independent inventors, entrepreneurs and small business owners, **Invention-Con**, returns September 9-10 from 1 to 3:30 p.m. ET both days. The virtual event is live from USPTO headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. [uspto.gov/about-us/events/invention-con-2025-empowering-american-ingenuity-and-innovation](https://www.uspto.gov/about-us/events/invention-con-2025-empowering-american-ingenuity-and-innovation)

## WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

**1** Lewis Howard Latimer, a black inventor and patent draftsman born September 4, 1848, did *not* invent:

- A)** An evaporative air conditioner
- B)** A computer-like calculator
- C)** An improved toilet system for railroad cars
- D)** An improved way to manufacture carbon filaments for electric bulbs

**2** Which happened first: the first cellphone call, or Richard Nixon's resignation as president?

**3** **True or false:** Some historians believe Catherine Greene, Eli Whitney's wife, was the mastermind behind the cotton gin.

**4** **True or false:** Actress Julie Newmar, who played Catwoman on the original "Batman" TV show, invented and patented both a brassiere with hidden straps and pantyhose with a shaping band.

**5** Which cartoon TV show was copyright registered on September 14, 1993?  
**A)** "The Simpsons" **B)** "Rugrats"  
**C)** "Ducktales" **D)** "Pinky and the Brain"



**ANSWERS:** 1. B. 2. First cellphone call, April 3, 1973; Nixon's resignation, August 8, 1974. 3. True. The claim is that Eli Whitney merely built it and applied for the patent, because women could not apply at that time. 4. True 5. A.

# DON'T MISS A SINGLE ISSUE!

Whether you just came up with a great idea or are trying to get your invention to market, **Inventors Digest** is for you. Each month we cover the topics that take the mystery out of the invention process. From ideation to prototyping, and patent claims to product licensing, you'll find articles that pertain to your situation. Plus, **Inventors Digest** features inventor pros and novices, covering their stories of success and disappointment. Fill out the subscription form below to join the inventor community.



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Entrance to the new exhibition, *Change Your Game*.

# Change Your Game / Cambia tu juego

Now open at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History

***Change Your Game / Cambia tu juego*** is a 3,500-square-foot bilingual exhibition presented by the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation that masterfully blends sports, invention, and identity, showcasing how innovation has transformed sports, and by extension, our daily lives.

***Change Your Game*** invites visitors to step into the inventor's shoes. Through interactive zones and hands-on activities, visitors of all ages are encouraged to problem-solve, iterate, and unleash their creative potential. It's a powerful demonstration that invention isn't only about grand scientific breakthroughs, but also about everyday challenges and the ingenious solutions that arise from them.



Interactive Exhibition ↗

Smithsonian photos by Jaclyn Nash.



The exhibition features **60+ sports technology inventions** across six areas of exploration: a **Starting Line** that introduces the exhibition, four Motivation Zones highlighting core drivers of sports innovation—achieving a **Competitive Edge**, promoting **Health and Safety**, facilitating **Fairness and Accuracy**, enhancing the **Fun and Accessibility** of sports for all participants—and finally, an **End Zone** that brings everything together.

Learn more

