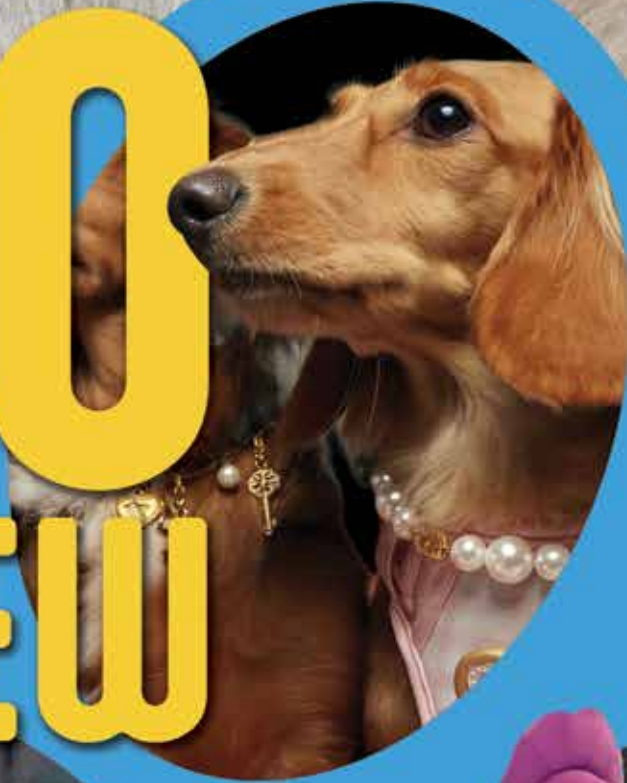


Inventors

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Focus on the Fun and Fascinating

New Voices, Good Choices



Katy Perry has a little more time as a 41-year-old before celebrating another birthday on October 25 (my birthday, too). Since her recording debut in 2001—a gospel album—she has morphed into one of the world's most successful pop artists and crossed over into mainstream TV as a judge on “American Idol,” while starting her own shoe line.

The former Katheryn Elizabeth Hudson knows that to enjoy sustained success, you can't keep doing the same thing over and over. You have to reinvent yourself through evolutions big and small.



Forty-one-year-old *Inventors Digest* is an ongoing case in point: constantly adding, subtracting, refining to present fresh emphases and respected points of view. Meet Rose Marie Iskowitz and Ben Greenberg.

Rose Marie debuts this month with *Psyched In*, which will examine the underrated psychological aspects of inventing and entrepreneurship. She'll provide firsthand experience regarding more empowered ways of thinking and help inventors safeguard against some of the mental pitfalls that can be damaging not only to ideas but our ability to realize our dreams.

An inventor, entrepreneur and strategic business adviser, Rose Marie is creator of the RISE Cognitive Blueprint (also referred to as the RISE Method), a science-informed curriculum for young adults. “Sometimes we don't realize that so much of our thoughts and our beliefs about ourselves, they're actually not true,” she recently said in an ONNJ interview. “They may actually be just ideas that were implanted in our childhood or through environment and different experiences.”



Just as Rose Marie asks us to challenge pre-conceived notions that may limit us, Ben Greenberg—our new Prototyping columnist—approaches the inventing journey in a similar way. His recently released book, “The Inventor's Playbook,” not only presents an experienced, professional guide for turning ideas into market success but discusses the thinking behind the process.

The founder and owner of Inventions Unlimited, Ben isn't entirely new to *ID* readers. His quick-read monthly 1-2-3 feature addresses common questions by inventors.

Katy Perry's 2013 hit “Roar” celebrates confidence and personal empowerment. Rose Marie and Ben are here to remind you of their crucial role in the inventing process and more.

—Reid
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Inventors

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CORRESPONDENCE

“Short-form Video, Re-Imagined”

April 2026:

Great article. Very informative for us novice inventors.

—Toni Catterton

President, Pro Network Group

North Port, Florida

(Monthly contributor Elizabeth Breedlove is an expert on social media. Readers are encouraged to send us tips for posting short marketing videos on social media.—Editor)

HALLOWEEN AND INNOVATION: SO INTERTWINED, IT'S SPOOKY

It's hard to believe it has been 10 years since *Inventors Digest's* October 2016 cover package, “Halloween Innovated.” Even harder to believe that technology has escalated so much that those inventions seem almost primitive compared to today's.

Horrorbuzz.com—one of many sites tracking the latest in Halloween innovation all year—reports that one of the hottest trends of 2026, not surprisingly, is “the rise of smart costumes that integrate artificial intelligence, LED systems, motion sensors, and augmented reality elements.”

Halloween is now a strong presence in digital communities, with ties to entertainment and gaming. This transcends “Here's my cool costume this year”; it's a form of communication and self-expression.

Halloween is also morphing somewhat from an emphasis on products (costumes) to interactive experiences, including interactive haunted attractions and mixed-reality events. Much of this is driven by social media.

Traditionalists who get store-bought costumes for their kids and take them

trick-or-treating will always have their place. But technology and Halloween are as natural a marriage as Gomez and Morticia Addams.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN ... AND DOLLY PARTON

The August 25 death of music superstar and humanitarian Dolly Parton sent many fans to YouTube to relive and discover some of her most memorable performances.

One was her March 24, 1999, collaboration with Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris on “Late Night With David Letterman” in which they sang Neil Young's “After the Gold Rush”—rendering harmonies that some claim were clear perfection.

While introducing the singers, Letterman mentioned the song would be accompanied by a glass armonica on the show for the first time and that Benjamin Franklin invented it. His instrument, from 1761, was made of nested glass bowls that produce an ethereal, haunting sound when touched with wet fingers.

A Ben Franklin instrument being mentioned and played during such an iconic performance was worth a mention here, and is worth your time to watch.

Search Letterman, Parton, Ronstadt. Young, by the way, is also an inventor with seven patents.



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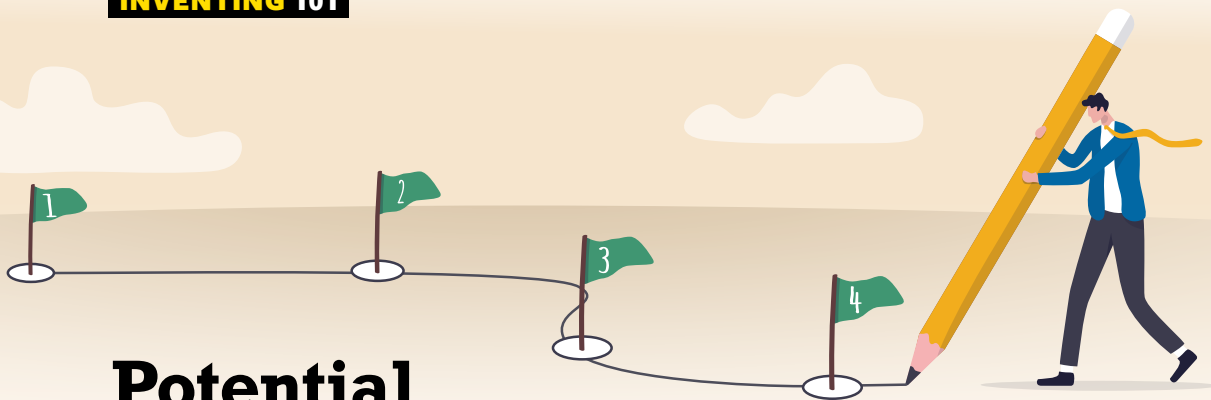
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INVENTING 101



Potential Commercialization Paths

BY DON DEBELAK

To commercialize an invention, you need a plan—a step-by-step guide on how you will introduce your product.

This serves two purposes. It tells you the manufacturing cost you need and which early contacts you need to make.

The four key stages in commercializing an idea:

- Locate small outlets for early sales
- Locate larger outlets to grow the business
- Develop a key contact who can help you and who may be an investor
- Locate sales help in the market

These tasks may seem daunting, but they are not that hard.

Start by building your knowledge of the industry via websites of industry trade magazines. Trade magazines are targeted to people in the industry, with articles on what people in the industry are doing and how they do it. They

also talk about different distribution tactics companies use.

Most important for an inventor is that trade magazines carry press releases about new products and new initiatives companies are taking. These frequently list a point of contact, or they tell you how to request more information.

Trade magazines often have articles on sales outlets and possibly retailers, internet sites, distributors and sales organizations. These data are crucial for you.

Another good thing about trade magazines is that writers often take phone calls from readers, so you can ask questions about their articles and the industry. This gives you a treasure of information about the industry.

Determine which small and larger sales outlets are available for your product by asking questions, such as:

Have there been any recent individual entrepreneurs who have introduced a product over the last few years?

Do you know the sales outlets they used to start the sales of their products?

Do you know if they had any important contacts to help them launch their product?

Do entrepreneurs typically move to larger outlets after they get established?

VITAL VOCABULARY

anticipation

Yes, an old Carly Simon song and ketchup commercial jingle—but in patent law, this refers to an invention that's not considered novel because it has been previously disclosed in a single prior art reference. This can be used to reject a pending patent application or invalidate claims in an issued patent.



Protecting a Trade Secret

Unlike the other three kinds of intellectual property—patents, trademarks and copyrights—a trade secret involves no filing or mandatory registration (though the latter is recommended). But not protecting a trade secret can prove costly.

A trade secret is a business's proprietary information, such as a recipe or manufacturing process. The United States Patent and Trademark Office says trade secrets must meet all three of these criteria or cease to exist:

- Information that has either actual or potential independent economic value by virtue of not being generally known
- Derives value from disclosure or use of the information by others who cannot ascertain the information through proper means
- Subject to reasonable efforts to maintain such information secret

There is no limit on the amount of time a legitimate trade secret can be protected. Protection is at both the federal and state level in the United States.

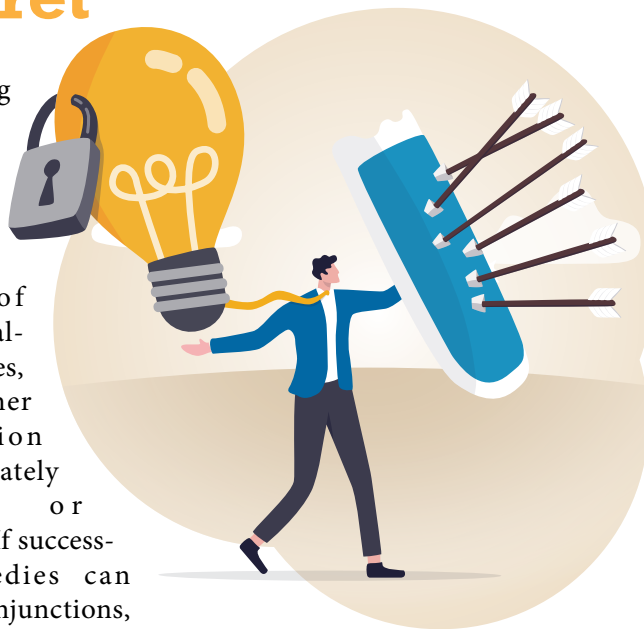
The Defend Trade Secrets Act allows for civil actions in federal court for misappropriation or theft of trade secrets. Misappropriation can also include breach of a duty to maintain secrecy, or breach of a confidentiality obligation.

State law typically governs on local matters, with the Uniform Trade Secrets Act adopted in most states.

Among the factors courts consider are length of secrecy, extent of confidentiality measures, and whether information was adequately marked or restricted. If successful, remedies can come via injunctions, damages, and attorney's fees. Theft of trade secrets can rise to a criminal offense, covered in the Economic Espionage Act.

To best protect your trade secret, identify and explain all formulas and processes; document its creation; limit access to authorized personnel; use confidentiality agreements; implement security measures; train employees on confidentiality policies; and monitor for leaks.

Formal registration can be made through the USPTO or your state's secretary of state to provide a public record. —Reid Creager



What are the larger outlets entrepreneurs typically go after?

If people ask about your product, don't be evasive. Tell them you have a patent (best) or patent pending, and describe your product.

The more questions they ask you, the better off you are. Tell them you are looking for

someone in the industry to be a part of your team on at least a part-time basis.



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.

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Refining a Moving Experience

Conveyor belts have made many improvements since their introduction in the 1700s **BY REID CREAGER**

"Oh, this is easy!" Lucille Ball says to "I Love Lucy" co-star Vivian Vance as they begin wrapping chocolates approaching them on a conveyor belt.

During the past 74 years, millions of people around the world have seen what happens next in the iconic physical comedy performance that first aired on September 15, 1952. The conveyor belt speeds up; the two newbie workers frantically stuff chocolates in their mouths and elsewhere to try not to fall behind.

Real-life conveyor belts are usually more reliable, with proven successes in various stages dating to the concept first known in the 1700s. The process has evolved with no true inventor, though Thomas Robins of New York City is generally acknowledged to have received the first patent for the modern, heavy-duty conveyor belt, in 1911.

Wood-and-leather start

Robins created more efficient conveyor systems for the Edison Ore-Milling Co. His invention (U.S. Patent No. 981,312, more than four years after the application) was designed to carry coal and other materials over short distances, using steel rollers and rubber belts to carry heavy materials without breaking down.

The design, which won the grand prize at the Paris Exposition, was the basis for the steel conveyor belts that became popular in the food industry.

But as with much innovation, Robins' system improved on a concept long in existence.

According to industrial supplier SEMCOR, American inventor and industrial automation pioneer Oliver Evans included a wooden

conveyor belt system in his patented design in 1790. His invention, which included bucket elevators and modified Archimedean screw conveyors, resulted in a flour mill capable of continuous manufacturing with no human labor.

The late-1700s conveyor belts, used at ports moving goods on and off ships, were made mostly of wood and leather and operated by pulleys and hand cranks.

Steam-powered belts began in the first decade of the 1800s, with its first recorded iteration used in the British navy for food production. But these belts were still fragile and susceptible to too much heat or cold. The introduction of a vulcanized rubber belt system in 1844 made conveyor belts more attractive in a wider number of industries—including mining with its heavier materials.

Further belt-tightening and advancement came with Swedish engineering company Sandvik producing steel conveyors for the transportation of mined aggregate and coal in 1902; mining engineer and inventor Richard Sutcliffe introducing the first underground conveyor belt in 1905, made of cotton and rubber; and Hymle Goddard patenting the first roller conveyor in 1908.

Ford's 'better idea'

Shortly after Robins' patent, Henry Ford took the conveyor belt concept and streamlined it to the point that many falsely believe he invented it.

First employed on December 1, 1913, Ford's system revolutionized manufacturing.

His standardization of parts allowed for interchangeable components, reducing the need for custom-fitting and enabling faster



Lucille Ball's conveyor belt chaos in an iconic 1952 "I Love Lucy" episode was not the first time mass production challenges had been captured on film.

assembly. Each worker specialized in a specific task, increasing efficiency and reducing training time. The moving belt's continuous flow of materials and components minimized downtime and maximized the use of labor and resources. The process also allowed engineers to conduct extensive time and motion studies to identify and eliminate production inefficiencies.

But many workers hated it.

"The line was seen as an insult to skilled craftsmen and another example of the overwhelming patriarchal control a company could have over its workers in the age of mass production," according to *Smithsonian* magazine.

"The horror that was felt about assembly-line style mass production is seen in films like Charlie Chaplin's 'Modern Times' and Fritz Lang's 1927 film 'Metropolis.'"

Was the chocolate conveyor belt mayhem in "I Love Lucy" borrowed from earlier works?

Latter-day improvements

Synthetic belts came to the fore in the 1960s. Their 1940s origins can be traced to World War II, when materials to create conveyor belts were harder to get and necessitated the use of new materials.

Synthetic belts provided unprecedented resilience and flexibility.

Plastic modular belts developed in the 1970s continued the flexibility trend, featuring

INVENTOR ARCHIVES: OCTOBER

October 17, 1961: **Hot Rocks** candy was trademark registered.

People of a certain age will remember the candy for its popping once you put it in your mouth. It's made by embedding tiny, pressurized carbon dioxide bubbles into the candy.

The candy is still made, manufactured by Zeta Espacial S.A. and distributed in the United States by Pop Rocks Inc. of Atlanta.

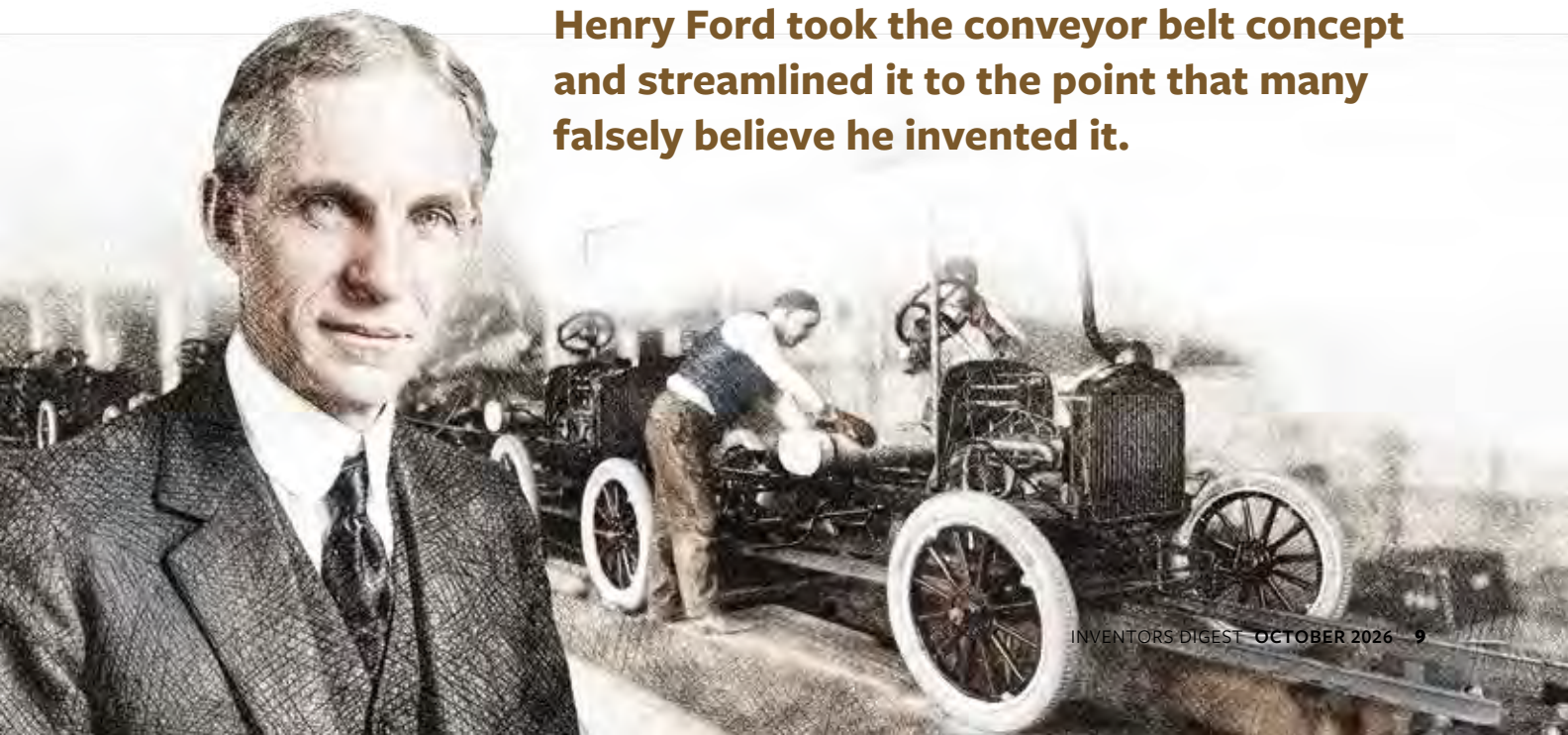
interlocking blocks that can carry heavy items and are easy to replace—along with the rust-free properties that make the belt an ideal carrier for food.

Today's conveyor belts move everything from luggage to people on moving walkways. Smart technology allows the belt conveyor to communicate with other machines and analyze power usage to reduce consumption when full power isn't needed, or shut themselves down when not in use. The belts can also detect safety hazards.

Before filming their famous scene, Lucille Ball and Vivian Vance visited See's Candies factory in Los Angeles. They dipped chocolate and met employee Amanda Milligan, who appeared in the episode.

Founded in 1921, the company still exists with 250 worldwide locations—evidence of America's love of candy and the proven benefits of literally keeping things moving. 🍬

Henry Ford took the conveyor belt concept and streamlined it to the point that many falsely believe he invented it.



Edison, da Vinci, Tesla — and the Military?

A prolific inventor, the armed forces are said to be responsible for about half the products in supermarkets **BY WILLIAM SEIDEL**

How do you feed an army? More important, how do you nourish one?

Military rations must be compact, lightweight, durable, portable and safe in every climate from the freezing Arctic and humid jungles to scorching deserts.

The military demands urgent solutions. Directly or indirectly, the military funded, developed and validated thousands of products—many of which went on to commercial success.

From battlefield to consumers

Author and food science writer Anastacia Marx de Salcedo argues that military influence touches half of the items in supermarkets.

The pattern repeats throughout history: Military need drives government funding and accelerated development, resulting in large-scale deployment. Then private companies adapt successful technologies for consumer markets.

As mentioned in a recent column, dehydrated foods have been a military staple since ancient times. During World War II, military funding helped expand large-scale commercial dehydration systems that later supplied supermarkets. This led to vitamin-rich frozen orange juice concentrate.

Minute Maid introduced one of the first frozen-aisle staples. Tang followed as a shelf-stable dehydrated citrus drink.

Improved dehydration technologies also produced potato flakes and cheese powder now used in instant soups, seasoning packets and boxed macaroni and cheese. This technology made Cheetos and Pringles possible.

Refrigerated railcars, known as “reefers,” revolutionized the transport of perishables,

medical supplies and blood plasma. This made military logistics more efficient and national food distribution possible.

That shift supported centralized agriculture and the rise of supermarket chains, where food no longer had to be produced locally. Reefers facilitated more efficient large-scale supply contracts.

Clarence Birdseye invented flash-freezing in the 1920s. The military refined and accelerated the technology, adapting it for mass-producible combat logistics. This was the birth of the frozen food industry and changed how Americans shopped, cooked and ate.

Freeze-drying was pioneered by Nestlé for coffee. The military quickly found many applications throughout the food chain because it increased shelf life, reduced weight and volume and improved the quality of fruits, vegetables, meats and even ice cream.

SPAM is the most recognized example of restructured meat. This process binds undesirable animal trimmings together, reducing food waste, costs and shipping.

This also made sense for fast-food chains and deli products. We can thank military innovation for the McRib, Chicken McNuggets and many deli meats.

Role in food science

Before modern food preservation, armies relied on hardtack, salted meats, smoking and imperfect canning. Though they traveled well, they were bland and nutritionally limited.

Napoleon’s armies were dying because of malnutrition, starvation and unsafe water. He offered a large cash prize for a practical preservation method—and Nicolas Appert won in 1809

by sterilizing food and sealing it in glass jars. This was the foundation of modern canning.

During the Spanish-American War, thousands of soldiers were sickened from toxic chemical additives. This, along with public outrage over contaminated food, unsafe preservatives and unsanitary meatpacking, led to the Poison Squad, the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 and eventually the Food and Drug Administration.

These developments pushed science to the center of food production, exposed the dangers of unregulated preservatives, established food-safety regulations and required product approvals.

In the early 1900s, the Second Industrial Revolution brought transformative technologies: widespread electric power, synthetic chemicals, mass production and transportation. Electric motors automated food processing while synthetic chemicals enabled safer preservation and extended shelf life.

Military requirements for mass distribution drove major advances in high-volume food production.

Breakthroughs in transportation made supply lines faster and delivered hot meals to

the front lines. Troops no longer needed salted meats and hardtack.

Food science provided microbiologically safe, chemically stable and calorie-dense nutrition. The challenges became preserving taste, nutrients, preventing spoilage, reducing weight and delivering safe food at enormous scale.

A ration is measured in calories per ounce. The military spent over a century engineering high-calorie emergency rations that were dense, nutritionally complete and melt resistant.

Energy bars are core to all military rations. They are available today as Clif Bars, KIND bars and PowerBars.

These products, designed for athletes, hikers and active consumers, reflect both military-ration development and commercial improvement. Today's products balance protein,

From Iron Rations to C-rations to K-rations and eventually MREs (Meals Ready to Eat), each generation reflected a better understanding of how to deliver calories, shelf life and portability in the field.





carbohydrates and fats for physical activity while delivering a sweet, palatable flavor—unlike some of their military predecessors.

The Logan Bar was a high-calorie emergency bar developed by Hershey for World War II. It was intentionally distasteful to prevent soldiers from eating their emergency rations prematurely, and was short-lived as an emergency ration.

From Iron Rations to C-rations to K-rations and eventually MREs (Meals Ready to Eat), each generation reflected a better understanding of

how to deliver calories, shelf life and portability in the field.

Packaging changed the meal

The supermarket is as much a story of packaging as it is of food.

The U.S. Navy's Strato-Plates were prepackaged meals for long military flights. This was the predecessor of the compartmentalized aluminum tray that became the TV dinner, and much of what you find in the frozen food aisle.

Advances such as high-pressure processing use pressure to kill harmful pathogens after the food is packaged. This "cold pasteurization" process preserves flavor and texture without heat and is used for juices, deli meats, salsa and guacamole.

In the 1950s, the U.S. Army Natick Labs developed a laminated plastic and foil pouch designed to be lighter and less cumbersome than cans while storing fully cooked, shelf-stable food without refrigeration. Today, retort pouches are used for everything from seafood and meats to sauce packets and pet food—even juice boxes.

The military does not commercialize anything. Instead, it funds and accelerates development for the needed solutions while its large-scale deployment validates what works.

Perhaps most important, the military is the ultimate test market with an enormous customer base. It can quickly eliminate what fails and expand what works.

In war, solutions are needed in extreme conditions.

If a solution already exists, a military contract can transform its business. If it does not exist, the military would invent it.

So, the next time you munch on Chicken McNuggets or Cheetos, give some respect to military innovation. ☺



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The Invisible Architect:

Belgacem Haba and the Hidden Glue of Modern Tech

BY MISHA GHOSH

Most inventions arrive with theatrical flair: sleek titanium handsets, foldable screens, or gadgets begging for unboxing videos. Dr. Belgacem Haba, by contrast, has spent four decades innovating at a scale requiring an electron microscope just to confirm he clocked in.

His domain is the unseen anatomy of electronics. He engineers the microscopic packaging and conduits that allow silicon chips to communicate, stack neatly, and stay cool under load. If your smartphone slips into your pocket, your console doesn't sound like a departing turboprop, or AI clusters process petabytes without melting floorboards, you owe a quiet debt to Haba.

With over 650 issued U.S. patents and a global tally exceeding 3,000 patent records, Haba ranks among the most prolific inventors alive. Yet treating his career like an arcade high score misses the point. Patent counts track output, not the patience required to stare at a crowded microscopic layout and decide there is still room for a skyscraper.

His journey began far from Silicon Valley. Born in 1957 in El Meghaier, Algeria, Haba grew up in a desert town without electricity, an ironic prelude for someone destined to wire modern electronics. After studying physics in Algiers, he earned two master's degrees and a doctorate in materials science at Stanford.

Stints followed at IBM and NEC in Tokyo during Japan's consumer hardware boom.

Back in California, Haba led teams at Adeia and Rambus, co-founded SiliconPipe (acquired by Samsung), and engineered for Google's data centers.

Silicon chips are fragile, scorching hot, and helpless on their own. Haba pioneered chip-scale packaging, shrinking bulky casings to the chip footprint and cementing a cardinal rule: A lab prototype matters only if factory lines can churn it out reliably by the billions. When horizontal room ran out, he stacked chips in 3D to slash latency, knowing electrons hate long commutes.

Today, with AI driving processors to thermal limits, Haba is developing ultra-dense interconnects and advanced cooling. Off the clock, he mentors youth through the co-founded Haba Institute and Numidia Institute of Technology in Algeria.

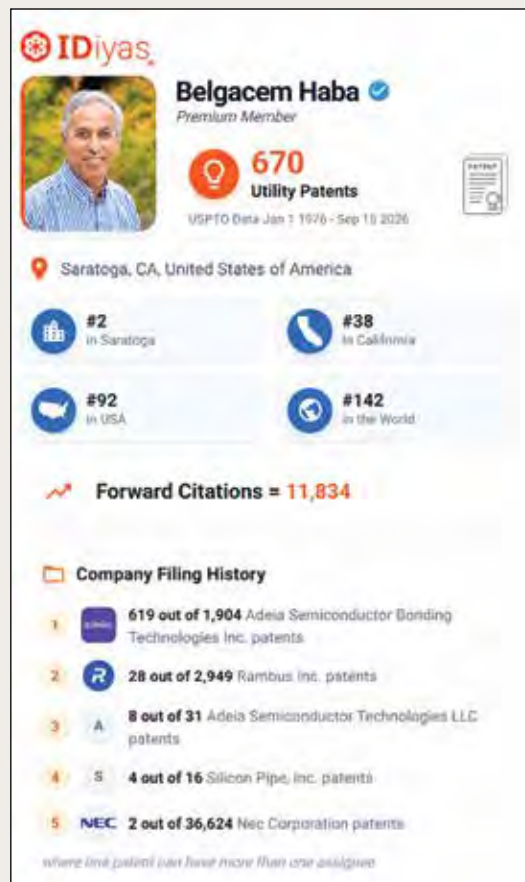
We celebrate shiny screens, but our digital world rests on the quiet physics underneath. Haba is still perfecting those microscopic joints, pausing only to catch a game of soccer.



Belgacem Haba, senior fellow at Adela Corp., has 650 U.S. patents and more than 3,000 patent records globally.



Misha Ghosh is the founder of IDiyas and an inventor with 103 U.S. utility patents, empowering innovators across corporate, academic, and independent sectors through deep IP analytics. Contact: misha.ghosh@idiyas.com.



Building Trust Before the Sale

Small, seemingly minor considerations can lead to big customer buying decisions **BY ELIZABETH BREEDLOVE**

Most buying decisions begin long before someone clicks “Add to Cart.” Often, potential customers first spend time quietly gathering information, perhaps without fully realizing it.

Maybe they visit your Facebook page after seeing an advertisement, look through your Instagram posts after hearing about your product from a friend, or search your name before deciding whether your business is worth contacting.

They are likely making small judgments that have little to do with your product’s actual quality. Is this business legitimate? Is it still operating? Does it seem professional? Have other people had positive experiences there? Does the person behind this invention know what he or she is talking about?

Sometimes, even the smallest signals provide the answers a customer wants: a recent post, a thoughtful response to a comment, a consistent profile photo, a customer testimonial. All contribute to a person’s overall impression of your business.

Individually, these details may seem insignificant, but together they can influence whether someone feels comfortable taking the next step.

Build a quality presence

Imagine someone mentions a product that sounds interesting, or you see an advertisement while scrolling through social media. Before making a purchase, you will likely look up the company and do a bit of research.

Your potential customers do the same.

Often, they end up on your social media profiles because they want to get a feel for the business. An active profile with recent posts suggests the company is currently operating and engaged with its audience; a page that has not been updated in several years may create uncertainty, even if the business is doing well.

That said, maintaining a reasonable and consistent presence is usually more important than publishing a large volume of posts. A business that shares useful content twice a week for six months sends a stronger signal than one that posts every day for two weeks and then disappears.

Be engaged, accessible

One of the simplest forms of social proof is thoughtful engagement with customers.

A post with comments and conversations underneath it can tell visitors there is a real person behind the account and a real audience interested in what the business has to say.

Even modest engagement can be meaningful. Not every inventor needs thousands of followers or hundreds of comments to appear credible. What matters more is that the account does not feel abandoned.

When someone asks a question in a comment and receives a helpful response, future visitors notice. When a business thanks customers for feedback or responds politely to concerns, it demonstrates something about how the company treats people.



Is your site current and active? Do you appear professional, knowledgeable, responsive, with good feedback?

These interactions become visible examples of customer service before a potential customer ever makes contact. Over time, these conversations can become part of the evidence a prospective customer uses to decide whether to trust your company.

Value others' experiences

Your information about how the product works, its benefits and the amount of time and effort that went into developing it is important. But potential customers also want to know what happens after someone else makes a purchase.

Testimonials, reviews and customer photos can help answer that question.

There is a reason people often look for reviews before trying a new restaurant, hiring a contractor or purchasing an unfamiliar product. Other customers provide an outside perspective that the business owner cannot offer.

Consumers can recognize overly polished endorsements and generic praise. A real customer comment, presented honestly, often carries more weight than a carefully produced advertisement filled with broad claims.

Maximize photo impact

Visual content also influences trust, sometimes before a visitor reads a single word. Fortunately,

smartphones have made it easier than ever to capture useful images, and authentic photos can often feel more approachable than heavily staged ones.

The key is to think about what your photos communicate: Are visitors able to see the product clearly? Can they understand its size, purpose or use? Do the images help answer questions a potential customer might have?

If your business involves you personally as the inventor or founder, look for opportunities to occasionally highlight yourself.

People generally prefer doing business with other people rather than anonymous organizations, especially when purchasing from a smaller company. A photo from a trade show, workshop, product demonstration or industry event can remind customers there is a real person actively working to bring the business forward.

Show your expertise

Trust is also built by what you are willing to share without immediately asking for something in return.

Establish yourself as someone trustworthy by discussing the problem behind your product, sharing useful information about your industry, or answering common questions. This type of content can be especially effective



because it gives potential customers a chance to observe your expertise before they are asked to make a purchase.

The goal is to become a useful source of information for the people you hope to serve.

Over time, familiarity develops. A person may see several of your posts before ever visiting your website. He or she may begin to recognize your name and associate your business with a particular area of knowledge so that when it's time to buy the product, your company is no longer completely unfamiliar.

Be the sum of pluses

There is rarely one social media post that suddenly convinces a skeptical customer to trust an unfamiliar business. More often, confidence develops through a collection of small observations. 📱



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.

NOW STARRING: IP

Audrey Meadows Had the Last Laugh

This month marks the 71st anniversary of the TV network debut of “The Honeymooners,” the iconic sitcom starring Jackie Gleason. During its 39-episode run on CBS that began on October 1, 1955, Gleason was paid a reported \$65,000-\$70,000 per episode for his lead role of Ralph Kramden.

Audrey Meadows, who played his wife, had a weekly salary of \$2,000, a figure confirmed by Showbiz Cheat Sheet. The huge disparity in pay is not surprising, given Gleason's status as an established star and that women's salaries were often dwarfed by those of their male counterparts.

But over the following years, decades and now even generations, the woman who played supporting actor Alice Kramden had the last laugh—all because of intellectual property savvy she explained in a charming, almost innocent way.

In a 1990 interview on “Later” with Bob Costas, the host asked her if she had gotten residuals from the show, although this was virtually never considered by entertainers at that time.

“Yes,” she said.

“Did all of the performers?”

“No,” she said, with a mischievous laugh. By all accounts, none of the others did.

She explained that she had two brothers who were both lawyers in New York, one of whom was a lawyer for the actors' union. She was halfway through shooting the 39 episodes before signing her contract.

“By just waiting and holding out, I'd dream up things.

And I called my brother

at night and I'd say, ‘Just thought of something I wanted in my contract.’

“And he said, ‘You can't put anything in there now.’ And I said, ‘I certainly can ... I live by girls' rules and I want it [the residuals clause] in there.’” So she went to Gleason on her “girls' rules” premise and had the clause added.

Many sources have indicated the residuals idea came from Meadows' brother, not her. Regardless, she reportedly made millions of dollars in residuals and reruns from the show until her death in 1996, and her family is doubtless still enjoying them as well. —Reid Creager





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Small Eats, Big Chill on the Go

Portable cooler offers advantages, features beyond other similar products **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

fitFridge comes with a Transportation Security Administration-approved ice gel pack, a leak-proof container for dressings, sauces or nuts and seeds.

A portable chiller just for snacks? I'm in! If, for example, you're taking a stroll or running errands, you may not want to take along a bulky cooler or one of those square, insulated lunchboxes. If you like to travel light but, like me, don't prefer to pay premium prices at the convenience store, fitFridge is an attractive, compact, lightweight, easily portable cooler that fits—for example—a few string cheeses, a bunch of cut veggies, or even some chocolate candies.

Inventor Cyndi Nadeau of Bethany, Connecticut, shares her story.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Please tell us about your background and whether you've invented anything before.

Cyndi Nadeau (CN): I am married. I have one daughter and one grown stepdaughter. I invented one previous product.

EGT: What materials are used to make fitFridge?

CN: EVA (ethylene vinyl acetate) with aluminum insulation.

EGT: What are the special features? Why and how is it different from all other similar, smaller cooler bags?

CN: fitFridge was originally designed for small, healthy snacks. It is small and compact but also sleek and modern-looking. It can also be used to keep medications chilled on the go (insulin, GLP-1s and peptides).

fitFridge comes with a Transportation Security Administration-approved ice gel pack, a leak-proof container for dressings, sauces or nuts and seeds. You can also find a nutrition tracker to track to your macros.

It also has two pockets and dual straps to hold snacks and the ice gel pack. It is thoughtfully designed and attractive.

EGT: How was the prototyping process? How long did it take until you reached production quality?

CN: I attempted several variations of the interior of the container, as well as different sizes and shapes of containers, and designed until I felt I found the best design to hold the greatest number of snacks. I also tested many ice gel



“I attempted several variations of the interior of the container, as well as different sizes and shapes of containers, and designed until I felt I found the best design to hold the greatest number of snacks.” —CYNDI NADEAU



packs to be able to choose one that fit appropriately in the case and lasted a long time. The process took about 17 months.

EGT: What type of market research have you done for this category of product?

CN: My last product was also an original design but only held one snack, so fitFridge is really an extension of that original product. I knew there was a market based on the first product's market performance.

EGT: Are you manufacturing in the United States, or overseas? Please share your experiences.

CN: I am manufacturing overseas. I tried to find a U.S. manufacturer, but most are not interested in startup productions for entrepreneurs and also have very high minimum-order quantities.

EGT: Because this is a food-grade invention, is Food and Drug Administration certification or government testing required?

CN: Neither was required.

EGT: You've been featured on Grommet. How was that experience?

CN: I launched my previous product, as well as fitFridge, on Grommet. Grommet is very supportive of product launches because they are built for inventors trying to break into the market. I had a very strong launch!

EGT: How are you handling PR?

CN: By establishing brand trust through consistency in social media posts, tone, and marketing materials. fitFridge has good reviews on the website. I am currently searching for influencers. I just launched on March 12, 2026, so it is a work in progress.

EGT: Have you had any product development or production problems?

CN: I sourced this product myself by finding manufacturers through Alibaba. I ordered a lot of samples to test and test again during the prototype phase.

When it came time for the initial order, I had to coordinate between three manufacturers. And, of course, there were minor issues such as not having a preferred color available. There were a lot of early mornings and late nights!

EGT: Any words of support for novice inventors?

CN: Please find as much support from other inventors as you can! I tried to go it alone with the last product, and that was a mistake. This can be a lonely space, so you need like-minded people to speak with but also to offer advice, and with whom to bounce off ideas.

Also, most of us are good at a couple of things, so we need help with the things that are not our “specialty” (i.e., marketing, accounting, pitching your product, contract negotiations, etc.). There are many inventor groups to get involved in, either via social media or virtual meetings, as well as local, in-person groups. 🍷

*Details: myfitfridge.com
Cyndi@myfitfridge.com*



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



Fetching Ideas

Inside a \$158-billion industry's crazy/cool playground where pet inventors go to get discovered **BY ALYSON DUTCH**

Trade shows are a delightful assault on the senses, a convention center chock full of thousands of exuberant entrepreneurs putting their best foot forward—and in the case of SuperZoo, their best paw forward.

It's loud. It's colorful. It's interesting. It's like a Middle Eastern souk of pet-lusciousness smack dab in the middle of a 112-degrees-at-9-p.m. summertime Las Vegas.

SuperZoo 2026 was my first visit to this pet paradise, and the fact that pets are allowed inside is reason enough to go. For lovers of all things four-legged, it's relaxing to have animals to fawn over while wandering through a sea of organic, single-sourced, sardine-flavored pet foods, hooves, horns and freeze-dried critters-turned-treats, Hermès-fancy accessories, and wondrous technologies that spit out treats as

owners train remotely from across the room—or the world.

Proud pet owners sashayed about with wildly gussied-up pups: a standard poodle painted in pink leopard print with a tutu, Croc's dog shoes and pink goggles; an uber-coiffed Shih Tzu whose glamorous tresses whooshed behind him as he trotted along the vibrant Mandalay Bay paisley carpet, impossible to miss.

I met a rabbit in a pram.

I got to snuggle baby kittens up for adoption by a local rescue (thanks to pet care giant Hartz, celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, for that irresistible flypaper at its booth). I was suckered in.

And who would give up the chance to have an 8-week-old calico burrow its little whiskered, purring face into your neck for a glorious 10 minutes?

Big boys are watching

At the entrance and in the middle of the show floor, you'll always find the big boys with the big booths. But it's on the edges where you find the little gems—hopeful inventors and entrepreneurs who've spent their last dime to be there, who've designed something fabulous to attract just the right buyer.

This year, SuperZoo gave those inventors some incredible resources. On stage, investment bankers, venture capitalists and accelerators spoke about the kinds of ideas that earn their attention and money.

Mars, Inc., the \$65-plus-billion global company with more than 130 brands across pet care, snacking and food and nutrition, showcased its Leap Ventures Studio accelerator, which brilliantly incubates promising brands while building out its own pipeline of next big hits. Investors from other corners of pet-industry money—TAW Ventures, Digitalis Ventures and 1731 MGMT, which specializes in point-of-care diagnostic pet products (yup, it's a thing)—spoke about what they're looking for.



Paw Fancy, indeed: Its Legacy Leash™ and the Era™ Collar are matched in oil-finished Italian Heritage Leather with coordinating EVO™ hardware, retailing for \$249. This standard poodle shown off by an owner was not so standard. But some of the most memorable moments involved simple people with simple, helpful products and simple dreams.



It's on the edges of the show floor where you find the little gems—hopeful inventors and entrepreneurs who've spent their last dime to be there, who've designed something fabulous to attract just the right buyer.

Exhibits such as Barks got a little wild. So did some of the pet food products. Whether you mapped it out or not, photo ops were endless.

Listening to them, you understood why the little guys on the edges of the floor keep grinding: Someone is always watching for the next great idea.

And there were plenty of those ideas, tucked between the over-abundance of organic pet foods—which was pretty mind-numbing.

A few brands broke through to me purely on the strength of their packaging. Chief among them was a New Zealand brand hatched by two female entrepreneurs: Their "Woof" and "Purr" freeze-dried treat pouches featured crisp photography of fresh chicken filets with sprigs of rosemary, carrots and kale, and an exotic fish called Wild Bushtail

paired with juicy blueberries, baby bok choy and yams, all on a stunning white background. The look took my breath away.

I wanted to taste what was in there myself.

Solving larger problems

Somewhere around Hour 2, I started noticing and counting how many booths featured Golden Retrievers. I literally bumped into a wondrously warm family of brothers from Birmingham, Alabama. I met their dad, their mom and their in-laws.

The Gaines Family Farmstead brand stole my heart on the spot. This passionate family



of pet purveyors are making wholesome food while quietly solving a real problem: turning waste streams into rewards for pups. They told me about silver and bighead carp, an invasive species that has spread rapidly through U.S. waterways—particularly the Mississippi River basin, where its voracious appetite for plankton is outcompeting native fish and disrupting the entire aquatic food web.

They told me about the 300-350-million-day-old male chicks culled every year by the U.S. egg industry because only hens can lay eggs. And guess what this resourceful brand does with the carp and the baby boy chicks? Freeze-dries them and sells them as whole-food, high-protein, whole-food dog treats.

It's brilliant, inspiring, and it's making a difference in the world.

Then there are the big boys who got big by thinking small and personal. Barks—you probably know it as BarkBox—has a founder story that really wound up my wow engine.

CEO Matt Meeker built the subscription box into the world's most perfect consumer research machine. Every month, subscribers say “aye” or “nay,” and the company designs roughly 100 new products a month, manufacturing the winners and quietly retiring the ones that fall flat.

It's the cleanest research and development ecosystem I've seen in action. They've smartly collaborated with top human brands to make pet versions of Crocs, tiny-breed Crocs pet beds, and—after breaking down years of resistance—actual Girl Scout pet cookies.

Emboldened by all that research on what pet owners actually want, Meeker then launched BarkAir, an airline built so you never again have to put your beloved baby into the freezing, unregulated luggage hold of a plane just to bring him or her to Thanksgiving.

To prove his point, he climbed into a pet carrier and went through the entire baggage-handling ordeal himself, on camera. It's one

Dr. Dolores Tyneway Robi's Holistic Vet Blend is a line of nutritional premixes and supplements. She is Cornell educated, with training spanning acupuncture, canine rehab therapy, chiropractic, Tuina, Chinese herbal medicine, small-animal surgery and homeopathy. Charlie's Backyard pet gear blends function and fashion.



Among the show's fun success stories was Pet Strip Club, a pet breath freshener tongue-melt.

Credentialed, creatives

There was the former creative director of Ralph Lauren, whose then-boyfriend (now husband) had his hand go through her dog's poop bag one too many times. So together, they created MetroPaws, possibly the prettiest poop bag imaginable.

And, yes, she quit her day job.

There was Paw Fancy, a collar-and-leash line so very Upper East Side it reminded me of Hermès Italian leather with Chloé-esque gold loops and clasps.

of the most compelling things I've seen. And it's no wonder he's pulled in serious talent from Disney, Best Buy and Target to run his sales operation.

So many stories—honestly, enough to keep every inventor on track to get their concepts to market.

When I passed a booth that read “K-Beauty for Dogs,” I nearly tripped. What an ingenious idea, marrying Korean beauty technology with pet care!

The brand name, StuckSoap, wasn't quite as sharp as the packaging or the concept, but the elegant entrepreneur behind it—who looked like she had stepped off a modeling runway herself—made a believer out of me. My dogs liked the shampoo samples.

A few more stood out:

Furry Muse, dreamed up by a former TikTok marketing maven who clearly understands exactly what, how and why things sell on that Gen-Z-rich platform.

Pet Strip Club, a genuinely hilarious pet breath freshener tongue-melt, packaged in a flip-top cigarette box like a deck of playing cards.

And one of the most impressive vets I've ever met, Dr. Dolores Tyneway Robi, whose Holistic Vet Blend draws on an almost unbelievable range of credentials—Cornell educated, with training spanning acupuncture, canine rehab therapy, chiropractic, Tuina, Chinese herbal medicine, small-animal

surgery and homeopathy. Her line of nutritional premixes and supplements is designed for the millions of pet parents who cook for their animals at home with love, but without realizing their good intentions aren't always nutritionally complete.

Pair of aces

Two stories stayed with me longer than the rest.

The first belongs to Ava of Ava's Pet Palace, who developed her line of pet treats (wrapped in the most delightful pink packaging) all by herself, at age 8. Today it's on shelves at Erewhon Markets, every Mariano's, Fresh Thyme, the Obama Presidential Center (yes, really!), and independent pet retailers nationwide, with earlier runs through 139 Target stores and more than 1,000 PetSmart locations.

Her direct-to-consumer sales grew 60 percent year-over-year in 2025, with a 57 percent-plus customer return rate. This African American teen-preneur is ready for the big time; honestly, she needs someone like 1731 MGMT to boost her already remarkable line. Behind her is a family that bet on her completely, including a father who left a career as a nuclear engineer because running a pet product venture with his daughter turned out to be more fulfilling.

The last one I'll kvell about is a little frosted, pretty, truffle-style treat called Pearl & Paw Stuffed Treats—a premium, giftable alternative to the standard dry dog biscuit. It's the creation of Buky Ogunleye, a four-time entrepreneur and an enterprising immigrant from Nigeria who tried her hand at everything from accounting tech to beauty before this, which I'm betting will really click.

The mini frosted cakes come packaged in peekaboo clear plastic boxes with gold printing and shiny ribbon. When you look closer at what's actually inside, that's when it gets fun: sardine-stuffed, duck-stuffed, real food dressed up like something you'd find on an epicurean canapé stand at teatime.



MetroPaws: The prettiest poop bag imaginable for the prettiest pooches?



Then there are the big boys who got big by thinking small and personal.

I hope taking this walk through the show with me gives you the oomph you need to keep doing what you're doing. There are millions of inventors just like the ones I met—hustling, grinding, failing, and tenaciously moving toward their dreams. And succeeding. You can, too. 🐾

Self-Publishing Success!

Sharing first-time lessons and successes working with a product development company and artist **BY APRIL MITCHELL**

As I finalize and review my first self-published game after having about a dozen or so available for retail from licensing, I reflect on my journey and look ahead. I hope what I share helps you in whatever path you choose for your product in progress.

Often, we think we want control and the final say about our product—until we are actually presented with it and everything falls on our shoulders as inventor and entrepreneur. We may think after licensing a product “I would have done this or that, or I could have done better,” but the reality is that every decision, every small detail becomes a huge factor when you are getting a product ready for the market.

For my upcoming card game Guacnado (releasing in the fourth quarter of 2026) that I am self-publishing, I had to consider the following: material, artwork, box size, value and perceived value of a product, how to sell it, where to sell it, marketing, and do I sell it under my current business name or start another business solely for publishing games?

Then I had to learn about all the testing information for different countries and the information that needed to go on the back of the box, including barcodes and QR codes as well. I am learning a lot, to say the least, which is a big reason I decided to self-publish.

One of my biggest lessons was the importance of getting several price quotes for my product. I contacted a few factories for this.

I also learned that factories will give you and quote you exactly what you ask. The problem with this is that you may not know exactly

what you need or want, or the options available, the first time you are manufacturing. In doing this, I received several quotes and even had one factory make a sample of what I wanted. I thought it turned out pretty well.

Crucial value insight

Excited about the outcome, I then spoke with GW Development. This is not a factory but a product development company—helping inventors/companies take their ideas from prototype to production, optimizing the product and packaging for cost and retail value, and connecting them with the best manufacturing partner.

When I met with the company to discuss my product and pricing, I got many different options and viewpoints with where I was headed with my product. I showed the sample from another factory without sharing who made it.

GW Development talked with me about value and perceived value of a product, and that given how I had my game at that time, I would not be able to sell it for how much I wanted—that customers would not see the value, simply because of the current box size and the games that currently sell and compete for the shelving space at that price. We discussed box size options and how to create a little something “extra” in my card game.

This is when the Taco card in my game became a Taco made of punchboard. It was larger than the card, which helped raise the value and added to the table presence of the game.

After our discussion, this company sent me a few different box size options for me to go through

and evaluate. Then we met to discuss them and their benefits. Before this, I had no idea there were so many options of how boxes opened and where they opened, the differences in size, etc.

Choosing a better-quality box and a simple change to my game components raised the value of the game and the price people would be willing to pay for it.

Designer's touch essential

I had the pleasure of working with a fantastic art designer, Michelle Spivak, for my game. I was very excited with how everything turned out, but with the change of box size and the Taco some edits were now needed.

GW Development also gave feedback on how to make the artwork pop a bit more on the cover of the box. It made a list of suggested changes to the box design; Michelle made the suggested changes, as well as updating the design based on the new box size and changes to the Taco.

These changes helped will allow the game to “jump” out a bit more on the store shelves (see photo of both game boxes). When choosing an artist, be sure to choose someone who is willing to work with you on things and make the changes needed if they may come up.

When taking a project all the way from conception to selling to consumers, we become the project manager and art director. For me, it was nice to have someone else share thoughts and feedback on various items such as box size and style, game components and art setup. Not only did these little changes make a big difference, but having a larger box helped not have things feel crowded.

Saving time and money

The next time I take another product to the market, I will start with working with a product development team.

This will save me time and money in the long run by not having to redo things on the project as often. It will allow me to present my product and get feedback and direction for possible ways to go at the start.



It was nice to have someone else share thoughts and feedback on various items such as box size and style, game components and art setup.

From there, I'd hire the artist (most likely would have one in mind already) to work on things after receiving the correct size files needed and will be guided from there, yet still make all final decisions.

This time, I will know and understand all possibilities for the product from the beginning—including box size components and pricing. This works well because the development team works with several factories and can find the best options, materials and pricing

After inventing her card game, the inventor had to consider factors including material, artwork, box size, value and perceived value of a product, how to sell it, where to sell it, marketing, and whether to sell it under her current business name or start another business solely for publishing games.



instead of being pigeon-holed into what one factory has to offer.

I didn't know what I didn't know when I started my self-publishing journey. Could I have sold my first smaller box of Guacnado? Sure, but the new box and changes take things up a notch, and I feel like it's in a whole new value category than before.

The finished product is now polished and market ready. I truly have enjoyed this journey and opportunity, and am grateful for all I've learned along the way.

I also had a lot of support and help from game publisher friends. These people are experienced with so many things, and kindly shared their knowledge and expertise.

Working straight with a factory can be a great fit for some people, especially if they have someone working as a project manager giving options and feedback. For me, I found working with a product development team helped me turn a good product into a great product.

A big shout-out to GW Development for all its help bringing Guacnado to life! I will sell the game on Amazon and will also be trying to get it into stores.

If you would like to follow my journey, please follow me on Instagram (@aprilmitchell_meant2invent) so you can see more behind the scenes of the game—including how I learned to take photos of the game, see the first prototype and more—as well as learn when it is available for purchase. 📸

For more information about the game:
4ascreations.com



April Mitchell of 4A's Creations, LLC is an inventor in the toys, games, party and housewares industries. She is a two-time patented inventor, product licensing expert and coach who in 2024 won the TAGIE Award for Game Inventor of the Year.

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Common Invention Questions Answered

BY BEN GREENBERG, FOUNDER OF INVENTIONS UNLIMITED
InventionUnlimited.com • Ben@InventionUnlimited.com

1 How should an inventor decide which features belong in Version 1 and which should wait?

Start with the features necessary to solve the customer's primary problem. Everything else should have to earn its way into Version 1. Ask whether the customer would still buy the product without that feature. If the answer is yes, it can probably wait. Every extra feature increases development cost and risk. Version 1 doesn't need to fulfill every future vision for the product. It needs to solve the core problem well enough that customers want it.

2 When should an inventor stop redesigning and commit to a final design?

This should happen when changes stop solving meaningful problems and start becoming personal preferences. Inventors can redesign forever, because there is always something that could be different. Eventually, improvements become marginal while costs and delays keep growing. Set measurable requirements early; focus on the performance, cost, usability, safety and manufacturability. When the product consistently meets those requirements, freeze the design. Perfection can become just another form of procrastination.

3 How much testing is enough before putting a new product in customers' hands?

There's enough testing when you fully understand the most likely ways the product can fail. Test normal use, misuse, drops, temperature, repeated cycles, wear and any environment realistically exposed to by the customer. You cannot test every possible situation, but you should never let customers become your first real test program. Finding a failure during development costs money. Finding that same failure after thousands of units have shipped can cost your reputation.

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Available for purchase at Amazon (<https://tinyurl.com/334ntc3w>), Barnes & Noble, and edietolchin.com.



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). 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.



(ad designed by
joshwallace.com)

BRIGHT IDEAS

PixelMug X1 Series

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AND GAME CONSOLE

pixelmug.com

PixelMug is a multi-functional coffee mug for utility and entertainment. Swap between pixel art, games, reminders, weather, timers and more by choosing what you want in the app, with new features continuously added through future updates.

Display pixel art, animated GIFs, retro game characters, pets, memes, moods or your own creations in seconds. The 6.21-inch display is bright and framed with a pixel-grid design.

Upload any photo or image, and the app will automatically convert it into a pixelated design suitable for your mug. Complete with charging dock and charging cable, PixelMug is scheduled to be shipped to crowdfunding backers this month. It will retail for \$149.



Sytren RM1

TRANSPARENT ART/CD PLAYER

yitren.com

The design-awarded RM1 lets you play and display your CDs in an artful way, the latter via wall mount or desktop.

Dual-layer clear acrylic and metal pillars reveal the spinning disc, optical pickup and inner mechanics. (Custom colors are available for the acrylic.) As the CD turns, light moves through the frame.

RM1 connects through Bluetooth 5.0 or 3.5mm AUX through its N200 speaker. It combines a 40-second anti-shock buffer for CDs and up to 120 seconds for MP3 discs.

A warm-yellow 2-by-8 LED matrix and linear progress bar create a visual rhythm around every track. The complete package, which will retail for \$298, is to be sent to crowdfunding backers this month.

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PACKABLE KAYAK
pontosoutdoor.com

Pontos is a lightweight kayak that packs down to the size of a small tent.

The kayak takes the skin-on-frame concept to create a boat meant to handle like a hard-shell kayak with excellent tracking. The cockpit opening is 30 feet front to back and 23 feet side-to-side; the kayak weighs 7 lbs. with 250-lb. capacity.

A lightweight carbon fiber frame that can be disassembled into 18-inch sections connected with elastic cord gives the boat its structure. An inflatable seat connects to the frame.

The shell is made of TPU nylon that pulls tight over the frame, then zips along the top to complete setup. Pontos was available to Kickstarter backers for \$575. Its future retail price is not available.



**“The imitator dooms himself to
hopeless mediocrity.”**

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON



LunchOn

LUNCH BOX THAT
HEATS AND COOLS
lunchon.tech

Controlled by your phone, LunchOn is a modular smart lunchbox that chills to -2 degrees C and heats to 80 degrees C.

Dishwasher-safe, LunchOn has a 100-watt power bank with a 25,000mAh module that controls everything. Just pick a mode in the app.

A row of brushless fans pulls heat off the sinks to facilitate fast, even temperature changes.

Three food-grade tiers click together into one box. Add dividers, drop in a sauce bowl, or leave a tier home.

Still in the crowdfunding stage, LunchOn does not have a future retail price listed.

What I Wish I Knew Then

3 crucial mental approaches might prevent you from giving up on your invention or business too soon **BY ROSE MARIE ISKOWITZ**

Every inventor eventually has a day when he or she considers quitting. In 2010, I was a young, eager inventor who developed a baby product. Although it wasn't the Snuggie, I had some traction.

I manufactured it overseas with the help of an *Inventors Digest* veteran, Edie Tolchin, and was even selling small quantities to Babies R' Us. (For those of you too young to remember, that was the premier baby product retailer in the early 2000s.)

I wish someone had told me that the hardest part of inventing isn't creating the product, marketing or even sales.

It's learning how to pivot when everything seems to be falling apart.

My hasty decision

Sales on my product were moderate, and I was chugging along when I was blindsided.

It was nearly Christmas and my distributor told me the company was filing for bankruptcy and closing shop.

I had one week to retrieve my inventory, which was in the distributor's warehouse in California. I was in New Jersey. I checked with some freight carriers, and it was a small fortune to get it shipped back to me; that didn't include warehousing it when it arrived.

I froze.

I was defeated.

I had no mentors, no entrepreneurial friends waiting in the wings to give me brilliant advice, and this was long before social media as we know it today. I didn't know what else to do and completely lost faith in myself, so I gave up. I sold the merchandise to a liquidator for

pennies on the dollar and walked away from the whole thing.

I walked away from everything.

I walked away with nothing after months of working with attorneys, filing provisional patent applications and trademarks.

I gave up after months of marketing, creating packaging, manufacturing overseas, developing packaging, doing specialty safety testing and setting up at a national trade show.

Months of work, tens of thousands of dollars.

This problem, or the one you might be facing, felt insurmountable—like it's bigger than you are. You feel like you're in over your head.

Perhaps this story is unique to me. But just in case you're crushed the way I was, here's what I wish someone would have told me.

Calm approaches to disaster

Shrink the problem and separate yourself from it.

It feels huge. It was your dream, and you've been building it for a long time. You've scanned your brain for an obvious solution but since you don't have unlimited cash, one isn't making itself readily available.

Shrink it down to what it is. In this case, it was inventory. I needed a place to put it and needed access to it. That's the starting point.

What is the next small action you can take, even if it's just a phone call, email or online search? One step might be enough to introduce you to an option you hadn't previously considered.

The critical point here is about the problem. It's not a decision about who you are and your capabilities. Business setbacks, even disasters, happen. Don't make it about you, and don't make it bigger than it actually is.



I walked away from everything. Months of work, tens of thousands of dollars.

Get curious and open-minded.

Can you rent a truck yourself and bring it back? Can you ask the distributor to work with you while you research solutions? Can you sell some of the inventory at a discounted price to move it faster? Is there someone who can mentor you through this dilemma?

The most important thing to do is keep going. When it feels impossible to keep going, get curious. Ask questions and try to approach the problem from different angles.

The problem comes when we look at every scenario defensively, making it say something about us personally. When we separate ourselves and keep an open mind, we can look at the situation more objectively.

We often drastically underestimate the value of asking ourselves some simple questions. As long as we are willing to do so with an open mind, you'd be amazed at the answers your brain will serve up.

Improve your mental game.

It's a requirement if you want to be in this world.

It's so easy to look at a huge problem as the end of the road for your business. I did. But you don't have to.

Yes, it's a setback. Yes, it stinks to epic proportions. It might even be embarrassing, but this is where you have to remind yourself that you can handle it.

Being an inventor and entrepreneur means you are going down a road not many people can. There's a reason for that. It's laden with uncertainty, it's risky and it's unforgiving.

With entrepreneurship comes the responsibility of toughening up, swallowing your pride and figuring it out. You won't have the ability to figure it out if you're too busy catastrophizing that the world is ending.

Allow yourself to feel disappointment but don't wallow in it. Now it's time to remind yourself of your path, why you started on this journey and what it means to you.

Take a step away from the situation and regroup. Do not make any rash decisions. Your brain needs time to process and separate your emotions from the circumstances.

Being an entrepreneur will show you more about yourself than you ever imagined. It gives you the chance to grow in ways you hadn't planned for and learn lessons you didn't know you needed to know.

Having a plan in your back pocket for how to handle a big setback can be the difference between pushing through and folding like a house of cards.

In fact, just preparing yourself that there will be setbacks might save you from making a very bad decision. When you're an inventor, setbacks are part of the journey. 📦



Rose Marie Iskowitz is an inventor, entrepreneur and founder who has taken products from idea to patent, manufacturing, retail and licensing. Her work focuses on creating practical tools—from consumer products to educational programs—that help people solve problems and reach their potential. Her newest project: risecognitiveblueprint.com

When Ugly is Beautiful

Your first prototype should not be built to win contests, but to prove the concept and answer questions **BY BEN GREENBERG**

Why do inventors waste money trying to make Version 1 of their prototype look like a finished product?

Your first prototype should probably be ugly.

A prototype is not supposed to prove how good your product can look. It is supposed to prove the concept and answer questions. Does the idea work? Is it the right size? Will people actually use it? What needs to change?

Most important: Is this idea worth more investment?

Beauty in the demonstration

I recently worked with an inventor who provided a great example of this process.

He had an idea for a kitchen product designed to solve a simple problem. While cooking, where do you put your spatulas, spoons, pot lids and other utensils?

Most of us either lay them on the counter-top, balance them somewhere near the stove, or dirty another plate just to have a place to put them. His solution was a compact organizer

that could hold multiple cooking utensils, pot lids, spices and other items while keeping everything accessible during cooking.

The product eventually became what he calls Stove Mate, a compact system designed to organize cooking tools while reducing countertop clutter.

Stove Mate didn't begin as the polished product. It started with some rough renderings created with AI and a prototype made from wood.

It wasn't beautiful. It wasn't manufactured from the correct production materials. It certainly wasn't ready to sit on a retail shelf.

But it did something far more important. It allowed the inventor to physically experience his idea.

He could determine how large it should be, where utensils should hang, how lids might be supported and whether the overall concept actually made sense in a kitchen.

Then he did something else I encourage inventors to do as early as possible. He put it in front of other people.

The sleek and polished Stove Mate—a compact system designed to organize cooking tools—began with some rough renderings created with AI and a prototype made from wood.



He showed it to neighbors. He brought it to cookouts. He watched how people reacted to it and whether they understood the problem it was trying to solve.

And people were interested.

That ugly wooden prototype had accomplished its mission. It wasn't there to sell the product. It was there to validate the idea.

Answering more questions

With that initial validation, he moved on to his second prototype.

This time, he wanted something closer to his original vision, so he decided to fabricate it from metal. There was only one problem: He had never welded before.

So he bought a spot welder, found some scrap metal, made a trip to the local hardware store and started building.

Were the welds beautiful? No.

Was the prototype perfectly square and stable? No.

Did it still look like something built in a garage? Absolutely.

Again, that wasn't the point.

This prototype answered a completely different set of questions.

He could now evaluate the thickness of the metal, the proportions of the frame, its stability, the positioning of different components, how the product felt at a size much closer to the intended design.

He adjusted dimensions. He changed bar thicknesses. He experimented with different configurations. And with each change, the idea became a little less theoretical and a little more like a real product.

The engineering phase

Eventually, after receiving continued positive feedback from friends and family, he decided it was time to take the next step. He brought the product to an engineering firm, Inventions Unlimited.

The company's job wasn't to throw away everything he had done and start over. Quite the opposite.

Those ugly prototypes had already provided valuable information.



I generally recommend starting with the simplest thing capable of answering your biggest questions. Sketch it on paper. Cut it out of cardboard. Build it from foam board, wood, clay, PVC pipe, duct tape, or whatever.

The company took what he had learned and translated it into CAD, refined the mechanisms, improved the appearance, considered manufacturing methods, and designed something that could eventually be produced repeatedly instead of fabricated one at a time in a garage.

The resulting design incorporated adjustable pot-lid hooks, utensil storage, a removable drip tray and an adjustable shelf.

The engineering process also began addressing things that aren't necessarily important for a first prototype but become critical as a product matures: materials, tolerances, structural stability, assembly, manufacturing processes, production cost.

Each prototype had served a different purpose.

Start with basic utensils

Don't build Version 3 first. This is where many first-time inventors get into trouble. They have an idea and immediately want a beautiful 3D model, custom electronics, machined aluminum parts, professional paint and a prototype that looks ready for a trade show.

Sometimes, that's appropriate. Most of the time, it's premature.

I generally recommend starting with the simplest thing capable of answering your biggest questions.

Sketch it on paper. Cut it out of cardboard. Build it from foam board, wood, clay, PVC pipe, duct tape, or whatever materials you understand and can get your hands on.

Your first prototype doesn't need to impress anyone. It needs to teach you something.

From there, you can develop a "looks-like" prototype focused primarily on size, shape, ergonomics and aesthetics. Separately, you may develop a works-like prototype focused on providing the mechanisms and functionality.

Eventually, those lessons can come together in a more refined pre-production prototype. At that stage, processes such as CNC machining, 3D printing, welding, molding, custom electronics or other fabrication methods

may be appropriate as you move closer to manufacturing.

The final Stove Mate design, for example, is intended to use a combination of metal fabrication and molded components rather than simply copying the construction methods used for those early prototypes.

That's an important distinction.

The inventor behind Stove Mate wasn't a product designer or welder when he started. He simply had a problem he wanted to solve and worked through it, one version at a time. That's what prototyping is.

So, if you're staring at a rough piece of cardboard, crooked wood, exposed wires, ugly welds, or a 3D print held together with screws and hot glue, don't be embarrassed.

Ask yourself:

What did this ugly prototype teach me that I didn't know yesterday? 🧐



Ben Greenberg is an engineer, inventor, product development expert and author of *The Inventor's Playbook*. As the founder of Inventions Unlimited, LLC, he helps inventors transform early-stage ideas into functional, manufacturable products.

Ben has helped develop more than 250 products across consumer goods, medical devices, industrial systems, aerospace and emerging technologies.

FOND FAREWELLS

Bob Mackie, the "Designer to the Stars" who created dramatic and sometimes kooky ensembles for celebrities including Carol Burnett, Cher and Elton John, died September 14. He was 87.

Mackie won nine Emmy Awards, a Tony Award and was nominated for three Oscars—including one for Barbra Streisand's "Funny Lady," in which she wore a sheer batwing gown. He was inducted into the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' Hall of Fame in 2002.

Mackie was the costume designer for "The Carol Burnett Show" during its 11-year run. Perhaps his most creative work was for a skit when Burnett, playing Scarlett O'Hara in "Gone With the Wind" and called Starlet O'Hara, wore her green curtain dress on its rods.

Bob Mackie Design Group holds many registered trademarks.

Marshall Nathan, inventor of the semiconductor laser, died August 23. He was 93.

A Harvard Ph.D. graduate, he was working at IBM's Yorktown Heights Research Center in New York when he and colleagues made the first demonstration of a semiconductor laser in November 1962. The laser led to fiber-optic communications, CDs, barcode scanners and many other technologies. The invention has reportedly generated more than \$8 billion in annual revenue.

Nathan later was centennial chair professor in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the University of Minnesota. He mentored students in physics, electrical engineering and materials science.





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We Turn Real Ideas Into Real Products

Beware Copyright Trolls

What you should know as infringement claims rise over images businesses use online **BY ANDREA L. ARNDT**

As image-search technology grows more sophisticated, AI tools can find possible copyright violations faster and cheaper.

This means businesses—including independent inventors marketing their own products—face a rising wave of infringement claims over images used in their online marketing.

Some of these actions reflect legitimate copyright enforcement; others have earned the label “copyright trolling,” a term critics use for firms accused of leveraging technicalities and settlement pressure rather than genuine harm. Understanding both the legal exposure and the legitimate interests behind it is essential for any business active online.

Background on protection

Copyright protection extends under Title 17 of the United States Code, Section 102(a), to original works fixed in a tangible medium, including photographs and graphics.

Common law rights apply to a narrower band of works, primarily those not yet fixed. So, before an owner can sue for infringement in federal court, the work generally must be registered with the U.S. Copyright Office per Section 411(a).

Once registered, the owner holds the exclusive right to reproduce and distribute the work. Using an image without permission, regardless of where it was found online or whether the source is credited, can constitute infringement.

Demand letter campaigns

Copyright enforcement increasingly follows a familiar pattern: A business uses a stock or scraped image in an advertisement, blog post or social

media update. Then, automated image-recognition tools, now widely available and inexpensive, locate the use and match it to a registered work.

What happens next depends on who is enforcing the right.

Photographers and other creators have a legitimate interest, one the copyright system is designed to protect, in being compensated when their work is used without permission. Many enforcement firms pursue fair licensing fees on their behalf in good faith, which is the outcome the copyright system is meant to produce.

Critics reserve the “copyright troll” label for a different approach: acquiring rights to obscure images specifically to pursue mass claims, then sending demand letters calculated to maximize pressure rather than reflect actual harm.

These letters typically recite relevant law, attach time-stamped screenshots, and cite case law that can make the claim appear stronger than it is before demanding settlement under threat of litigation and statutory damages.

Expensive consequences

The underlying legal exposure is real, regardless of the sender’s motives. A copyright owner may seek actual damages and the infringer’s profits, which can be substantial if the use was widespread.

More commonly, the statutory damages framework permits courts to award between \$750 and \$30,000 per work based on what the court deems just, rising to as much as \$150,000 per work if the infringement is willful. Typically, reckless disregard or actual knowledge of infringement satisfies the willfulness threshold in most jurisdictions.



Critics note that statutory damages can be sought without proof of actual harm, which is part of why the threat alone can be so effective.

Responding to a claim

Businesses receiving a demand letter should respond carefully rather than reflexively, keeping a non-confrontational tone and avoiding any admission of culpability. Before responding, it helps to review internal records confirming how, when and where the image was used—if at all.

Available defenses—including fair use, innocent infringement, a valid license or deficiencies in the copyright’s registration or the sender’s standing—should be asserted even where use is confirmed because they can eliminate or substantially reduce liability.

Risk mitigation strategies

The most effective safeguard is avoiding infringement altogether.

Businesses should create original images (an increasingly realistic option given low-cost AI tools), or license images from a verified rights holder rather than copying material found online. Regular audits of existing marketing materials can catch inadvertent uses before they become claims. Documenting the source, date and location of every image used provides a ready defense if a dispute arises.

The same generative AI tools reshaping copyright enforcement can also help here, producing original marketing images and automating the record-keeping needed to track image use across platforms.

Trolls acquire rights to obscure images specifically to pursue mass claims, then send demand letters calculated to maximize pressure.

Need for awareness grows

Copyright enforcement against businesses for online image use is likely to keep growing as detection tools improve, and the line between legitimate enforcement and opportunistic trolling will not always be clear from a single letter.

Businesses can manage this uncertainty by using original or properly licensed images, maintaining clear records of use, and responding to any claim with a measured, well-documented position rather than an immediate settlement. As AI reshapes both image creation and image enforcement, that process is likely to matter more, not less.

Indiana University Maurer School of Law student Carson A. Arnold contributed to this report. 📧



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A Revealing Fold

Record patent validity challenger sells itself after practice of having anonymous co-petitioners is threatened **BY LOUIS CARBONNEAU**

The most prolific filer of patent validity challenges in American history—an organization built for that single purpose, funded by hundreds of technology companies to do that one thing—sold itself in August month to a docketing software vendor.

It did so 13 days after the United States Patent and Trademark Office proposed the rule that would have stripped away the anonymity its entire model depended on.

They say nobody rings a bell at the top of a market. Somebody just did, and I do not think many people heard it.

Uh, not a software buy

On August 4, Anaqua, an IP software business owned by private equity firm Nordic Capital, announced that it acquired Unified Patents. Terms were not disclosed. The release uses “proactively” twice and promises to help companies “move from reacting to risk to proactively managing it.”

Strip out the adjectives.

Anaqua’s founders took their second payday in seven years. And its data went to a company whose customers include, by its own sponsor’s count, nearly half of the top 100 U.S. patent filers—which is to say, the other side.

Let me be blunt: This is not a software acquisition. This is a market leader closing its own position, and the rest of us should read the ticket.

Unified Patents was founded in 2012 by Kevin Jakel (formerly chief of IP litigation at Intuit) with Brian Hinman of InterDigital, who later moved on. Shawn Ambwani arrived in 2013 as chief operating officer and has been called a co-founder since at least 2019.

Jakel and Ambwani built it, ran it, and have now cashed out of it twice.

The model was genuinely clever, and I have said so for years even while disagreeing with what it did. Companies join a technology “zone”—Cloud, Content, Mobile, Cybersecurity, about a dozen in all—and pay between \$50,000 and \$490,000 a year. Unified then hunts patents in that zone and challenges the ones it deems weak, or that are being asserted.

Think of it as a neighborhood watch that never tells the neighbors when it is going out, never lets them pick the target, and never, ever pays the burglar—that last part being real, and worth crediting.

That architecture was not built for elegance. It was built to take full advantage of a Patent Trial and Appeal Board whose kill rate once

ran north of 75 percent ... and to skirt Title 35, Section 315 of U.S. Code.

The plain-English version of 315 is, you get one shot. If the party genuinely behind a patent challenge has already been sued, or has already lost one of these, it is barred from swinging again.

Which meant the entire commercial proposition rested on a single sentence: Unified, and Unified alone, is the real party in interest. The zones, the ring-fenced fees, the no-notice rule—all of it is scaffolding around that sentence.

The party of the first part

Unified fought tooth and nail to keep that Potter-esque cloak of invisibility. During more than a decade and over 300 proceedings, it won every Real-Party-In-Interest (RPI) challenge brought against it. The United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit turned away Fall Line, Barkan Wireless and, as recently as June 2025, Dolby.

But that record carries an asterisk nobody has paid enough attention.

In *Unified Patents, LLC v. MemoryWeb, LLC*, the PTAB finally did what no panel had done: It took a full evidentiary record, held a hearing on the real-party question alone, and answered it.

On March 8, 2023, it found that Apple and Samsung should have been named. Unified had “a strong financial incentive to serve its members’ needs—expressed or not.”

And then the phrase that should have made every headline in this industry: Unified had “crafted its membership agreements and its communication protocols with an eye to avoid naming members as RPIs,” a “willful blindness strategy.”

That is a polite judicial term for covering your ears and humming.

Eleven weeks later, former USPTO Director Kathi Vidal vacated it—not because the panel got the facts wrong, but because nothing in that case turned on the question. The finding was erased for being unnecessary rather than untrue.

Apparently, the one time anyone looked closely, they found precisely what patent owners had been alleging for a decade—and the record was then expunged on a technicality.

Meanwhile, the courthouse doors had quietly closed from both sides. If the PTAB decides the question, you cannot appeal it. If the board declines to decide it, you have no standing to complain. For six years there was simply no way in.

Late last year, USPTO Director John Squires restored the older, stricter rule: Everyone standing behind a petition must be named before the case starts.

Squires removes the furniture

Then John Squires arrived, and the doors began opening ... from the inside. Watch the sequence, because the sequence is the story.

In September 2025, Squires stripped precedential status from the very decision Vidal had used to make the MemoryWeb finding disappear.

The shield was gone. A month later, he restored the older, stricter rule: Everyone standing behind a petition must be named before the case starts, and correcting your answer later resets your filing date—a polite way of saying your petition is dead.

Patently-O noted that this “impacts membership-based petitioners like Unified Patents and RPX.” It did not need to say more.

By February 2026, the USPTO had welded the last escape hatch shut and begun requiring anonymous reexamination filers to certify they were not the party that had already lost an *inter partes* review (IPR).

Then came the capstone. On July 22, 2026, the USPTO proposed a rule requiring every third-party reexamination request to identify everyone standing behind it. You may still hide from the patent owner but you may no longer hide from the office.

And for the test of who counts, the USPTO pointed to the case law asking at whose behest and for whose benefit a challenge was filed. In other words, look at the business model.

Thirteen days later, Unified Patents sold itself.



The devil you knew

Now, set the commercial numbers beside the legal ones. They tell the same story in a different language.

When IPR institution collapsed, the challenges did not evaporate—as written here last month—they rerouted into *ex parte* reexamination. Unified saw it coming and moved early, and by the first half of 2025 was the largest reexam requester in the country.

A year later it had slipped to third, behind ... Samsung and Apple.

Unified called the trend brilliantly, and then the operating companies walked in and took the room it had found.

And the USPTO is now closing that room, too. Reexam requests hit an all-time quarterly

high of 336 in the second quarter of 2026 while IPR petitions hit an all-time low of 57. Institution against non-practicing entities (patents owned by those who have patents but largely in name only)—precisely what Unified exists to challenge—ran at 24.6 percent against 40.5 percent for everyone else.

Those numbers come from Unified's own Patent Dispute Report, published July 9—four weeks before the sale.

Read that again. Unified published a meticulous, well-sourced autopsy of its own core product, then sold the company.

Where I come from, physicians are usually discouraged from performing their own post-mortem and billing for the funeral.

There is a further tell in the paperwork. Anaqua justifies the deal on “escalating IP litigation risk.” But Unified's own July report shows district court patent filings down 18.4 percent year over year.

Here I want to challenge my own premise, because intellectual honesty matters more than a tidy thesis. There is a perfectly boring explanation available.

WestView Capital Partners took what its own portfolio page calls a majority position in December 2019. That is a 6 ½-year hold, and private equity firms do not fall in love; they date on a timetable and always leave before dessert.

EVERYTHING MUST GO

Three transactions reported in three weeks. Taken together, they say more about where patent value is heading than any survey I could commission.

First, Dolby paid \$37 million for 680 VVC patent assets from Florida Atlantic University and OP Solutions on August 11. Set that against a total 2025 brokered patent market of roughly \$158 million (Richardson Oliver), and one university portfolio just moved something close to a quarter of the market in a single afternoon.

So much for the notion that university patents cannot be monetized without an act of Congress.

Second, Circle bought nearly 1,000 IBM blockchain patents on July 27—680 patent families, price

undisclosed—making a stablecoin issuer the largest blockchain patent holder in the United States. IBM spent a decade filing blockchain patents and roughly the same decade failing to build a blockchain business.

Third, OpenAI quietly bought Rain's chip patents. The press caught up with this in August. The assignment records tell a better story—four recordations from Rain Neuromorphics to OpenAI OpCo, every one executed October 21, 2025.

Net/net: Patents are being bought again, at real prices, by operating companies with balance sheets. Just not always from the people who thought they owned the future.

Membership grew from “over 250” at entry to “more than 300” at exit, about eight net members a year, which is not a story anyone takes to market twice. Sponsors sell. It happens on schedule.

But that explanation proves the point rather than rebutting it. A sponsor sells when it concludes the asset will not be worth more later. WestView did not sell because the clock struck 12. It sold because it read the same report the rest of us did.

Which brings me to the part nobody has written about, and which I suspect will matter more than the transaction itself.

Anaqua sells patent analytics and management software to large patent owners. Unified invalidates patents on behalf of defendants. Those customer bases are not merely different; in a meaningful number of cases, they are opposite sides of the same dispute.

MLex appears to be the only outlet that asked, and got the answer you would expect: Unified will continue to make independent decisions, and so on.

Unified’s independence was never a matter of virtue. It was a matter of architecture. No member funding, no member notice, no member control.

The bottom line

For 13 years, one organization bet that the cheapest way to deal with a “questionable” patent was to kill it administratively, without ever saying who was really asking.

It was a good bet for most of those years. It is not a good bet now, and the people who made it have said so in the only language that cannot be spun: They sold.

I wrote last November that it was time to say RIP to IPR. I confess I expected the obituary to come from Congress or the federal circuit, or eventually the Supreme Court.

Instead, it was written by an investment committee in Boston, signed by a founder taking his second exit, and filed under “Operations” on the company blog.

Somebody finally rang the bell. The only question left is how many people were still at the table when it went off. 📺



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.

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Champions, All

55 young inventors honored by the National STEM Festival, from 47 U.S. states, run the gamut of innovative genius

A solar-powered vertical farm that grows food anywhere, in any climate. Augmented Reality glasses that track brain tumors in real time. A snake robot that saves lives in the first hours after a disaster.

These impressive inventions didn't originate with heavily credentialed, multi-degreed geniuses in cutting-edge laboratories or prestigious universities. They did not require lucrative funding.

They were conceived by everyday middle and high school students who aim higher than some of us ever will.

They are among the third annual 2026 national STEM champions, announced earlier this year by the National STEM Festival. The 55 winners, who represented 47 U.S. states and four territories, received an expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., with their guardians to showcase their innovations to leaders in business, government and academia.

Their work includes working prototypes, patent-pending inventions and advanced research focused on urgent needs in industry, health care and government. These included AI-powered surgical systems, energy transition and cancer diagnostics.

More than 60 percent of the winners are female—the latest encouraging sign of diversity in STEM innovation. The pitch videos by each girl and boy revealed their creativity,

knowledge and desire to help make the world a better place. Among this year's champions:

- **Antariksha Sharma**, reporting that Alzheimer's disease is the fifth-leading cause of death in America, discussed building a colometric lateral flow assay to detect nerve degeneration.



- **Darren Lau** excitedly talked about his AR glasses, noting that with 300,000 brain tumors annually diagnosed worldwide, "I knew I had to find a solution to this issue."



- **Evan Morris** talked about Neurotune, his open-source frequency tuner costing under \$1,000 that quickly identifies "best candidate pulse rates for non-invasive and therapeutic brain stimulation."



To see pitch videos: nationalstemfestival.com/champions-us/2026 📺

GO FOR IT

Applications for the U.S. edition of next year's STEM competition open on January 11, 2027.

The event, to be held October 19-24 next year in Washington, D.C.,

will feature pillars manufacturing, making and building; technology and intelligent systems; health and human potential, and planet, energy and food.

Details: festivnationalstemal.com/applications



Follow the Money

When looking for grant opportunities, inventors should consider state and local foundations.



One such organization is Michigan-based **Impact100 Oakland County**, which awards grants to nonprofits in the community in subjects including arts and culture; education; family; health and wellness; and environment, recreation and restoration.

Applicants may apply for grant funding of around \$100,000 in a focus area that supports their mission, programs or services.

More information: impact100oaklandcounty.org/grants/



What IS That?

Picture it. “Golden Girls” Chia Pets—and you don’t even have to go to Sicily for them. Dorothy (Bea Arthur) is highlighted on the chia.com website, but all the girls are available. Blanche was *a/ways* available.



ID Flashback

October 2022: Tommy Hilfiger has said the Rolling Stones logo is “as important as any fashion logo in the world”—and it’s one with serious IP protections. Our epic October 2022 cover was conceived with the approval of story subject John Pasche, who co-designed the logo with Mick Jagger in 1970 and talked with us

about it. Pasche sold his copyright in 1982, leaving untold millions on the table, but bought a house and seems to live comfortably. inventorsdigest.com/issues

Get Busy!

It’s not too late to celebrate America’s 250th anniversary by visiting The Smithsonian and its final seven permanent exhibitions and galleries at the Air and Space Museum. The new exhibitions: At Home in Space, Flight and the Arts Center, Textron How Things Fly, RTX Living in the Space Age Hall, Jay I. Kislak World War II in the Air, Modern Military Aviation, and National Science Foundation Discovering Our Universe. airandspace.si.edu

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

1 As mentioned on Page 5 of this issue, singer Neil Young has seven patents. They are all related to model trains—a passion shared by which iconic rock star?

- A) Billy Idol B) Brandon Flowers
C) Joan Jett D) Rod Stewart

2 Which Halloween candy favorite got its U.S. trademark first: Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups, or Hershey’s Krackel?

3 **True or false:** Benjamin Franklin discovered electricity with a kite.

4 Not known for inventing, mega-retailer Walmart has how many granted patents (per 2026 data by Insights)?

- A) 28 B) 716
C) 3,308 D) 8,857

5 **True or false:** Thomas Edison was nearly bankrupt when he died in 1931.



ANSWERS: 1.D. He has a 1,500-square-foot model train city. 2. Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups, 1971; Hershey’s Krackel, 1969. 3. False. Franklin merely proposed that lightning was electrical and conducted experiments to test the theory. 4. C. 5. False. His net worth was \$12 million, equal to about \$170 million today.

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