



WHAT'S HOT IN '09
Product Categories You Should Target

**3 WOMEN,
1 JOURNEY**
A New Feature Following
Women Entrepreneurs

**IN SEARCH OF
INNOVATION**
More Companies Want
Your Inventions

APING NATURE
Turning to Critters for Inspiration

PROTOTYPE THIS
Discovery Channel Puts the Fun in
Functionality

**FIVE QUESTIONS
WITH ...** Wired's Jeff Howe
on crowdsourcing

SPARK

TRIPLE PLAY

FOLLOW A YEAR-LONG JOURNEY OF THREE INVENTOR-ENTREPRENEURS

BY EVA WINGER

Editor's note: This is the first installment of Spark, a regular feature for 2009 that will chronicle the product-development journey of three women inventor-entrepreneurs.


Every month this year we'll follow the ups and downs of Diana York, Madeline Canfield and Julie Austin. Each is at a different point in the product-development cycle. York is at the early stage, Canfield is a little further along, and Austin has a mature product on the market and is looking for expansion opportunities.

West Coast editor-at-large Eva Winger selected the three after an exhaustive search. She's highly qualified to shepherd this series. A former pharmaceutical sales professional, she invented Clinch-Eaze Washbands, a quick, low-cost, no-sew way to adjust pants, skirts and pajamas. A tireless networker — she's a regular on our sister Web site, EdisonNation.com — she formed Parent Innovators, a support group for parent inventors in the Sacramento, Calif., area.

She says the local group helped fill in "missing blanks" in the product-development process. She's particularly thankful for those "who were generous to share mistakes as well as their much deserved successes." Stories from her group of everyday inventors served as inspiration and prompted her to act on her dream.

"I am successfully completing my personal and professional goal of inventing a product," Winger says. "I have applied for a patent, licensed to a large company, I am participating in further product development and waiting now for a mass-market launch."

Although Spark celebrates women inventor-entrepreneurs, the learning lessons and insights will have universal appeal for all innovators. This debut will introduce you to the three inventors. Stay tuned to learn more about where they came from ... and where they're headed. ■



Eva Winger is an editor-at-large for Inventors Digest, an inventor-entrepreneur and a former pharmaceutical sales professional. Visit parentinnovators@edison.com or email info@edison.com.

29 inventorsdigest.com ■ January 2009

• BEGINNER •
SLOW COOKER MATE

Diana York's inventing journey with her Slow Cooker Mate began three years ago, when wandering through a grocery store and wondering why slow cookers only cook a one-pot meal.


"That's not how we eat," says York, an avid home cook. "I always make an entree and two side dishes." Wishing to have multiple ceramic inserts, York's invention was born.

Recently, York received her first functioning prototypes from China, and as of October was testing them for final approval before official production.

Meanwhile York was working on professional photos and developing her Web site.

"Sometimes the process seems insurmountable with so many details and coordination efforts, that I feel like I am moving a mountain," says York. "But then I realized that mountain does not need to be moved in a day, just one spoonful at a time."

With spoon in hand, York is excited to be able to share her personal journey and give *Inventors Digest* readers an inside look at what launching a product is all about. ■



DIANA YORK
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
MIDLOTHIAN, TX
BACKGROUND Certified public accountant

• INTERMEDIATE •
NANOLITE

The World's Smallest Attachable Key Lights


Madeline Canfield wanted an easier way to open her car and home locks in the dark, especially when her hands were full. She developed the Nanolite, a miniature LED attached to keys via a peel-and-press adhesive.

She founded January Innovations Inc. in 2005. Her initial inventory: about 800 homemade prototypes. She has since assembled a team of engineers, designers, public relations representatives and graphic artists. The company now is selling about 100,000 Nanolites a month and was on track to rack up sales of one million units by the end of 2008.

Canfield hired her team to augment her impressive skill set, which ranges from designing sales materials and dealing with Chinese manufacturing contractors, to negotiating contracts, public speaking and selling to potential retail distributors.

"I keep involved in all business aspects even if I only have rudimentary understanding of what my experts tell me," says Canfield, who believes continual education, such as teaching herself InDesign graphic arts software, will propel her to stay ahead of the game.

With her shares under her arm, Canfield is excited to be able to share how she and her offensive line plan to tackle business and drive Nanolite to the end zone. ■



MADELINE CANFIELD
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SCOTTSDALE, AZ
BACKGROUND Special education teacher, art teacher, diagnostician
HTTP://NANOLITESTORE.COM

• ADVANCED •
SWIGGIES

The Wrist Water Bottle By HydroSport

Most would agree that landing business deals with the likes of Marriott, The Home Depot and HGTV, being featured in *Wired*, *Woman's World* and *American Health* magazines, and having your product shown on ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox News are major accomplishments.

However, Julie Austin, inventor of the Swiggies wrist water bottle, is not stopping there. "I have much more to conquer," she says.


Austin came up with the idea for her product after pausing out from dehydration one day while running. Austin worked for several years to develop a working prototype. After missteps with U.S. and foreign manufacturers, she found the right factory in China.

"My goals are to lock in secure more international distributors," says Austin, whose Swiggies are sold in about a dozen countries.

Austin continues to develop other products, including an electrolyte drink mix for athletes. What would be her ultimate sign of success? "If I could walk down the street and see adults and kids wearing Swiggies," she says. "It would make me smile."

Although she's been making a living off the sales of Swiggies for the past two years, success did not "just happen" for Austin.

As with any inventor, she continues to travel down a bumpy road ... and she's giving us the guided tour. ■



JULIE AUSTIN
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
LOS ANGELES, GA
BACKGROUND TV producer, TV/film distributor, publicist
WWW.HYDROSPORT-USA.COM

29 ■ inventorsdigest.com



• INTERMEDIATE •

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The World's Smallest
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★ ★ ★ ★ ★



SCOTTSDALE, AZ

BACKGROUND Special education teacher,
art teacher, diagnostician

HTTP://NANOLITESTORE.COM

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Cover Story - 3 Women, 1 Journey - In Search of Innovation
Katie Nelson - Elizabeth Day - 3 Questions

TRIPLE PLAY
FOLLOW A YEAR-LONG JOURNEY OF THREE INVENTOR-ENTREPRENEURS

BY EVA WINGER

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For beginning and/or struggling inventors

Prototypes & Beyond!

Plastic Prototype Group

Spark - A New Feature Following Women Entrepreneurs

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Slow Cooker Mate

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"Sometimes the process seems insurmountable with so many details and coordination efforts, that I sometimes wonder if it's even worth it. But then I realized that you just need to be moved in a day, just one spoonful at a time."

With spoon in hand, York is excited to be able to share her personal journey and give Inventors Digest readers an inside look at what touching a product is all about.

Intermediate Nanolite: The World's Smallest Attachable Key Lights

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THE MAGAZINE FOR IDEA PEOPLE > DIGEST

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BEN STILLER AS LARRY DALEY

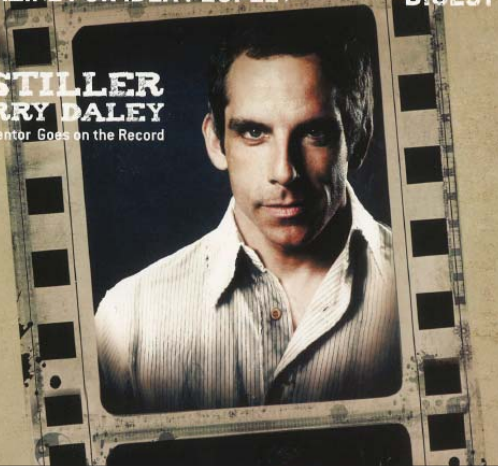
A Successful Inventor Goes on the Record

FAME & (MORE) FORTUNE
Stars Turning into Captains of Industry

GOING ONCE, GOING TWICE, SOLD!
Easy Ways to Sell Your Patent

SHINE THE LIGHT
Akuma Helmets: High-Tech Head Gear

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH...
Ronco's Larry Nusbau



SPARK

PROTOTYPE IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED

BY EVA WINGER

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Diana York started thinking about her Slow Cooker Mate's design in 2005, when she wondered why Crock-Pots only cooked one meal at a time. York envisioned two separate inserts sitting on an elevated cooking rack, creating a tiered system to cook one entrée and two side dishes at once.

Her first prototype tested the basic function of her concept. Could food be cooked double-decker style? York enlisted the help of her husband to cut a metal circle out of the bottom of a baking pan. This served as the base to support inserts. She used metal strips as legs to elevate the scaffolding.

It worked - sort of. "The meatloaf, mashed potatoes and green beans cooked perfectly," she says. "Unfortunately (the food ended up tasting

A key step to developing a successful product is creating a prototype - sometimes many. Hands-on experience with an early-stage invention offers insight to a product's strength and weakness, as well as its potential functionality.

York had to settle with her imperfect samples. She couldn't use these as templates for mass production. But at least they were good for more proof-of-concept testing.

However, York still had the metal rack to contend with. She ultimately decided to eliminate it from the design, opting to make a one-piece ceramic insert that would fit flush inside slow cookers. Watching her budget reserves shrink, York decided to avoid overseas miscommunication and expensive mistakes. She pursued local potters with whom she could work to sketch designs and build prototypes. She felt hopeful...until her next obstacle surfaced.

She learned potters spin clay rather than pressing clay into a mold, which was required for her product. Almost a year had passed since launching her prototype process. York decided to return to making prototypes herself. This time she was armed with Play-Doh, craft dough and a pasta machine to insure uniform thickness.

As luck would have it, the otherwise perfect prototype clay pan dried, shrank and cracked. After weeks of frustration, York had a moment of clarity. She realized she need not create the prototype first, but create a mold

OUTSIDE ADVICE

Scott Keeley, president of Rhode Island-based product-development firm Obvia, weighed in on York's journey.

«About that first prototype:

Good choice in creating the crude, working prototype. We call this a "proof-of-concept" prototype. It's not intended to look good, only to prove that the concept works.

Many clients come to us with product sketches and a list of desires and want us to create a prototype. A list of desires is not an invention, and may not comply with the laws of physics.

«About the misce on the handles:

I think the manufacturer looked at her representation and decided that the inserts with the handles would be difficult to create and would have cost more than the initial \$750.

Many foreign manufacturers do not like to say "no." Instead of communicating with York, they probably decided to avoid her and do what they thought they could do given their budget.

I've learned that what we expect in our own culture is not necessarily expected in another.

««On shopping locally:

Searching for local potters was the right idea. If York was looking for a model, even if it was not made from the intended final material, a potter or even a glass blower could have made a beautiful prototype. Making a visual representation is the most important step. Finding the final materials is relatively easy.

««Final thoughts:

I'm impressed with her fortitude. But there are some things that could have made the process a little easier. To avoid sending a physical prototype, which is unnecessary these days, injecting technology can produce 3D images. These can be viewed by a client or prospective manufacturer in seconds. Once approved, a plastic replica can be produced by various processes through companies like www.quickparts.com.

3D imaging might have cost close to the \$750 York initially spent, but would have been worth the investment because the plastic prototype would have been made exactly to her specifications avoiding any misunderstandings with the manufacturer.

To do it on the cheap, there are some inexpensive and even free software products. Check out www.softwarefree.org/3d.html. Yes, these take some time to learn and some are just for 3D illustrations and do not provide data to generate dimensioned parts. ■

Visit www.Obvia.biz

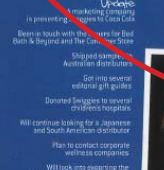
UPDATES



Location: Westfield, Mass.
Product: Slow Cooker Mate
Background: Certified public accountant



Location: Los Angeles, Calif.
Product: The NanoLite
Background: Formerly a teacher, she now works in a distribution platform.



Location: San Diego, Calif.
Product: Akuma Helmets
Background: Formerly a teacher, she now works in a distribution platform.

Location: Westfield, Mass.
Product: Slow Cooker Mate
Background: Certified public accountant
Website: www.slowcookermate.com
Update: Added "Inventors Corner" to the Web site as visitors can learn from our experiences.

Location: Los Angeles, Calif.
Product: The NanoLite
Background: Formerly a teacher, she now works in a distribution platform.
Update: Executed direct sales at a large gift show to increase visibility of NanoLite and check if the price point was too high. Note: Retailers keep asking for a lower retail price, but this show reinforced that consumers think \$3.99 is a great price. NanoLite now available on Amazon.com.
Update: Continue Indesign graphics art class at local college.
Update: Networked at a local manufacturing conference.
Update: Profile in Business Journal.

Location: San Diego, Calif.
Product: Akuma Helmets
Background: Formerly a teacher, she now works in a distribution platform.
Update: Shipped sample, Australia distribution.
Update: Got into several national gift guides.
Update: Donated samples to several children's hospitals.
Update: Plan to conduct corporate wellness companies.
Update: Will continue looking for a Japanese and South American distributor.
Update: Will continue exploring the H-1B option regarding the dilemma.
Update: Research and find more U.S. reps and distributors.

Location: Scottsdale, Ariz.
Product: NanoLite, the world's smallest attachable key light
Web site: <http://nanolitestore.com>
Background: Special education teacher, art teacher, diagnostician
Update: Added "Inventors Corner" to the Web site so visitors can learn from our experiences.
Reviewed business plan's yearly projections: Executed direct sales at a large gift show to increase visibility of NanoLite and check if the price point was too high. Note: Retailers keep asking for a lower retail price, but this show reinforced that consumers think \$3.99 is a great price.
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THE MAGAZINE FOR IDEA PEOPLE > DIGEST

March 2009
Volume 25 Issue 3



HOUSEWARES ON THE HORIZON
Get Ready for Two Big Trade Shows

'HOME DOME'
Teen Turns Trash into Temporary Shelter

NOT YOUR DADDY'S UIA
United Inventors Association Unveils New Certification Program

SHIPPING SWIGGIES
Slow Boat from China or to Dublin by Air?

SPARK

SHIPPING SWIGGIES

SLOW BOAT FROM CHINA OR TO DUBLIN BY AIR?

BY EW WINGER

Vhi, a European health insurance company, wanted to give away Austin's wrist water bottle at the Dublin Marathon and ordered 33,000 units. The clock was ticking.

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Julie Austin has married Swiggies—a sports bottle worn on the wrist—for seven years. Through trial, error and determination, she has grown her invention into a successful business. Yet as her company expands, she continues to encounter obstacles and is always learning something new.

One of her biggest business challenges arrived last March. Vhi, a European health insurance company, wanted to give away Swiggies at the Lifesyle Sports—Atlanta Dublin Marathon. Vhi ordered 32,000 units—five times bigger than the largest order she had scored to date.

“I was thrilled,” she says, “and so was I.” The hitch: Vhi wanted the Swiggies by August, in time for the Oct. 27 race through Ireland’s largest city. That gave Austin four months to swing manufacturing and distribution into action.

Austin has worked as a film and television program distributor and is no stranger to deadlines. She felt prepared for the Dublin marathon project.

However, she was unprepared for a series of miscommunications with her new Chinese manufacturer, which her U.S. distributor had recommended. “Swiggies were originally made in Malaysia,” Austin says. “I switched factories because China was considerably cheaper and I have learned every nook in manufacturing counts.”

Austin e-mailed her new factory and asked if it could meet the deadline. “They e-mailed me that the order was ‘No Problem,’” Austin says. “About three weeks into the process, Austin’s European distributor asked for a sample of the Swiggies to check the color and printing met specifications.”

“First of all, I had to play a discouraging game of dot-to-dot in order to find out who was in charge of my project,” says Austin, “only to find out my Swiggies needed to be flame-resistant treated, which was something they said they could not do.”

The factory offered Austin a refund. Her heart sank, but she remained resolute. “I told them that this order was for the Dublin Marathon,” Austin says, “and to figure it out.”

After five weeks, the Chinese factory acquiesced and started production. However, the delay had a ripple effect. Austin’s shipper said it needed a longer lead time to get the goods by sea to Ireland. The Chinese factory said it would meet the new deadline. Austin was skeptical.

“I already had experienced many miscommunications with this factory,” she says. “I was particularly frustrated by the order to their interpretations.”

Austin’s shipper advised her to transport the Swiggies via air—far faster, yet far more expensive. Shipping by air can cost at least twice as much as by sea.

She paid for the air freight out of her own pocket, losing most of her profits in the process.

The move had an upside. She made the deadline and Vhi ordered another 10,000 units.

“They were happy,” says Austin. “That they will never know how many sleepless nights we had.”

Convinced any factory had to be better than the one she was using, Austin found another Chinese manufacturer only to encounter new headaches.

Somewhat, the molds for the Swiggie bottle caps were misplaced. “They just threw their arms up,” she says, “and would mold new caps. Austin bought caps in the United States and shipped them to China, where the factory assembled them and sent the Swiggies to Ireland.

The summer Olympics were in progress by this time. Authorities had tightened security at the ports, which meant more delays.

“I considered air freight again,” Austin says, “but the bottles were late anyway so I took my chances with shipping.”

OUTSIDE ADVICE

Edie Tachin, owner of EGT Global Trading and author of Sourcing Smart: Keeping it Simple with China Sourcing and Manufacturing, weighed in on Austin's journey.

“About that deadline: I have rarely found four months to be sufficient turn-around time for an initial order with a new factory in China, unless it’s for a stock item.

I always advise my clients to allow at least a six-month delivery when working with a new supplier. You may have ample time to review pre- and mass-production samples, conduct production quality testing (now a must to conform to the Consumer Product Safety Commission’s new requirement for General Conformity Certificates), quality control inspections, shipping arrangements, etc.

Unless you own factories in China, plan ahead. Always allow a cushion for an original delivery quoted from a new factory. If it takes three months, it will invariably turn into at least five to six months.

Manufacturers do not want to turn down business and usually say whatever it takes to placate new buyers.

“About reassurances via E-mail: Be skeptical of the phrase “no problem” from a Chinese factory you’re new to. There has to be a proven track record of at least a few orders before you’ve established trust

and reliability.

“About pre-production: I would have suggested she submitted her prototype to the factory, with a thorough list from her European customer as to the exact production requirements, such as flammability issues, whatever standards (testing) need to be met with, delivery arrangements, etc.

It’s a good idea to have a list from any buyer with comprehensive details. Also, buyer beware. I would feel uncomfortable working with a Chinese factory that didn’t make products similar to my own experience. Although Julie’s factory came from a referral, investors can be more proactive by requesting stock samples of similar items they routinely produce.

“About shipping by air: I agree with Julie’s decision to swallow the air freight charges on the first order from the European buyer. I’ve found that first orders are rarely profitable—you have to expect the unexpected snags, including frequent national holidays, where factories can be closed for up to three weeks, and weather issues such as monsoons and typhoons.

Bottom line: Have patience, ask questions and obtain translations if possible to make sure nothing is overlooked during the process. When in doubt do not proceed without clarifications.

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Connect Edie Tachin at EGT@worldwide.net, visit www.egtglobalsourcing.com

UPDATES

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Product: NanoLite, the world’s smallest attachable key light

Web site: <http://nanolitestore.com>

Background: Special education teacher, art teacher, diagnostician

Update: Finished InDesign Graphic Arts class

Follow-up communication: (e-mail & U.S. mail) with lock manufacturer

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Trays of loose NanoLites for Lock & Key Shop sales arrived from China

Sold NanoLites at a gift/trade show. This reinforced that the retail price was on point and that people were interested in buying multiple units when given a discounted price.

Expanded marketing efforts in areas other than retail:

1. Found source for direct mailing campaign to Lock & Key Shops nationwide.
2. Internet sales increasing:
 - a. Amazon.com inventory restocked
 - b. X-tremegeek.com has ordered 3,000 units and included NanoLite in its catalog (one million catalogs distributed)

Miniaturized company logos to fit NanoLite button area for businesses I want to approach for promotional sales



Madeline Confield (Intermediate)