

# Getting the **Funk Off**

SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR, MARKETER COMBINE TO INVENT TEETH TOUCH-UPS ON THE GO **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

**S**AY YOU'RE on the run or in your car, heading out for a hot date, and you forget your toothbrush. Or maybe you're a big fan of red wine—but not the stains it often leaves on your teeth.

Here's a pocket-sized product with many uses. FunkkOFF!, which quickly refreshes your teeth, was created by Joelle Flynn of Dana Point, California, and Sonia Hounsell of Rye, New York.

**Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Whose idea—and who's the red wine drinker?**

**Joelle Flynn (JF):** In 2010, I was living near Napa and would go wine tasting every weekend. I love my red wine but love my white teeth more!

I hated that red wine stained my white teeth a "Funkky™" shade of purple. So, I would carry around a bulky, full tube of toothpaste and a toothbrush in my little purse to remove the purple "Funkk™" off my teeth in between wine tastings. There had to be an easier way.

One time in the bathroom, I pulled out my lipstick to refresh my lips, looked at it, and thought, "Why isn't there something compact, reusable and easy to use like my lipstick—but to refresh my teeth?"

The 2-in-1 toothbrush-plus-toothpaste tool is reusable about 30 times.

I didn't find any product on the market, so I began inventing one.

**EGT: I understand you have known Sonia since seventh grade. Where were you living at the time?**

**JF:** Yes! We met on the playground in a small school in Potomac, Maryland. We spent many years together on the field through high school as teammates, whether for lacrosse, soccer or softball.

**EGT: Before FunkkOFF!, what were (are) both of your "day jobs"?**

**JF:** I am a serial entrepreneur at heart, so my "day job" changed with time, changing industries.

I started working at 14 1/2 and paid my way through college. At 22, I became the youngest stockbroker managing over \$350 million in assets. From there, I started and sold a fintech (financial technology company), flipped houses and started a nonprofit. You know, serial entrepreneur stuff.

Sonia has had a decades-long successful career as a consumer-packaged goods brand marketer in large Fortune 100 companies like Mondelez and Bayer, leading and



launching iconic brands and products including Dentyne, Trident, Stride and Coppertone. Her experience also includes roles at McKinsey Consulting as a brand strategy expert and starting her own marketing consulting company.

**EGT: Who created your first prototypes? At what point did you approach Sonia for assistance in product development?**

**JF:** I did many years ago—2010, to be exact. After that great day of wine tasting in Napa, I went home to start my initial designs of the invention of FunkkOFF! TeethRefreshers® and created the very first prototype by ripping off the round toothbrush head from my electric toothbrush and taping it onto my Chapstick tube!

The tube looks like lipstick, but on the inside it contains 100 percent natural and vegan tooth gel. It's reusable about 30 times.

Throughout eight years, I worked on the product designs, features and prototyping, and filed eight U.S. patents on my designs and three U.S. trademarks on the FunkkOFF! and TeethRefreshers names, and the smile logo.

I reached a point where I knew I needed an experienced and trusted partner to turn my designs, inventions, patents and trademarks into a sellable consumer product and lifestyle brand.

I never launched a consumer product before and needed a lot of help but knew exactly whom to call: Sonia Hounsell!

In 2019, Sonia and I formed FunkkOFF! Inc. to collaborate to get our new FunkkOFF! TeethRefreshers to market and build a fun, FunkkOFF! lifestyle brand around it. Sonia and I started working together on refining the product designs, usability, and the look and feel of our brand and the product.

In July 2021, we finally had our beautifully designed product ready for the marketplace and launched.

**EGT: What type of government safety certifications did you need to be permitted to sell a product in the dental care industry?**

**JF:** Through the years, we have obtained FDA



Medical I grade clearance, as we're a medical device because our product is a toothbrush.

**EGT: When did you begin to sell FunkkOFF!? Where? (Online, retail, Amazon?)**

**JF:** We started selling on our website and quickly launched on Amazon to support the strong demand. Once the buzz got around about our unique new invention, we started selling at retailers like SHEN Beauty and Uncommon Goods, and are also now available through fabfitfun.com.

Retailers quickly embraced FunkkOFF!. We are now located in about 130 locations in 45 states in places like dental offices, spas, pharmacies, grocery, airports, boutiques and more. Anywhere there is a counter, we're there—and growing fast!

**EGT: You appeared on "Shark Tank." Did you need a minimum of sales before trying out?**

**JF:** The buzz about FunkkOFF! spread to the producers. They invited us to apply. The process was long and arduous but very exciting and well worth the effort.

Business partners Joelle Flynn (left) and Sonia Hounsell got a deal on "Shark Tank" and praise from all five Sharks.



**“I pulled out my lipstick to refresh my lips, looked at it, and thought, ‘Why isn’t there something compact, reusable and easy to use like my lipstick—but to refresh my teeth?’”** —JOELLE FLYNN

“Shark Tank” was a great experience for us! It levels the playing field between our indie brands and large conglomerates like Colgate and Crest. Our domestic and international exposure has been an exceptional blessing in being able to scale and expand into channels that would take us years to conquer.

**EGT: Did you get a deal, and if so, with which Shark?**

**JF:** Yes, we did! It’s worth watching the nail-biting episode (2023, Season 14, Episode 14) to find out who wanted to join our team. The best part was after we walked out of the Tank with our deal, as we didn’t know what the Sharks said until it premiered.

There is no better endorsement from “Shark Tank” than to have all five Sharks verbally praise how great our product is.

**EGT: Has “Shark Tank” arranged your PR? How helpful has that been so far?**

**JF:** ABC, “Shark Tank,” and all the connections we have made there have been wonderful, supporting us along our journey.

**EGT: How has that experience affected your sales?**

**JF:** We had a five-times multiple in sales over last year, so we are ecstatic with our sales to date since airing in 2023.

**EGT: Please tell us about your “giving back” experiences. Who are the two recipient organizations?**

**JF:** Thank you for asking. We support two organizations: [girlsontherun.org](http://girlsontherun.org), which empowers young girls to find their limitless potential, and

[smilesforeveryone.org](http://smilesforeveryone.org), which provides free dental care to those in need across the world.

**EGT: Do you plan on any add-ons or new products?**

**JF:** Oh, Edie, we do! We are working on many enhancements to our multi-patented FunkkOFF! TeethRefreshers to make it the best on-the-go oral care experience for everyone. In addition, we have other oral and personal care products that “get the FunkkOFF! on-the-go.”

**EGT: What advice would you offer a novice inventor seeking to create a new product in a similar category as yours—perhaps something you’ve learned you might “share to prepare?”**

**JF:** To the novice inventor: Go for it!

For all inventors, the first step is a proper patent search.

There is no use in committing funds, resources and your precious time to only find out in future years that someone already thought about your idea.

From there, ask for help! LinkedIn is a valuable network to tap into to ask questions, advice, support and more.

Finally, Sonia recommends, “Stick with it!” It’s a long road from an idea through execution to launch to success. But it is truly rewarding to see consumers using the product you launched to solve a real, everyday problem. 📦

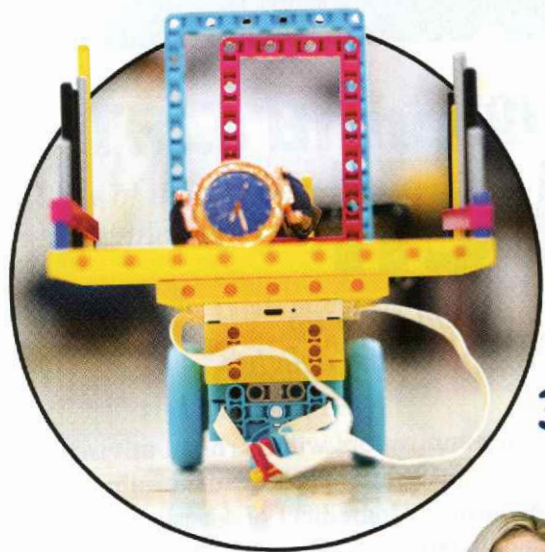
Details: [funkkoff.com](http://funkkoff.com)

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



# Contents

November 2024 Volume 40 Issue 11



34



ON THE COVER  
Photo by  
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20

## Feature

### 24 **Impact Partners**

IPWatchdog's Gene and Renée Quinn:  
Silver Anniversary for a Gold Standard

## Inventor Spotlight

### 20 **Getting the Funk Off**

Women's Teeth Touch-ups On the Go

## Departments

### 4 **Your USPTO**

Thanksgiving Innovation, Served Well

### 8 **Editor's Note**

Small Innovations in a Disaster

### 9 **Everybody's Talking**

Will Government Break Up Google?

### 10 **Bright Ideas**

Innovation That Shines

### 12 **Time Tested**

Hurricane Helper

### 16 **Lander Zone**

Don't Be That Guy

### 18 **Social Hour**

Storytelling: Take Good Measure

### 30 **Think Marketing**

Watch Your Language

### 33 **Meant to Invent**

What's in Your Control?

### 34 **Prototyping**

Code Mode in the DR

### 36 **Guest Insight**

2-Part Patent Reform

### 38 **Patent Pending**

Finding a Good Patent Attorney

### 40 **IP Market**

Too Much Information?

### 41 **Inventing 101**

The ABCs of NDAs

### 42 **Eye On Washington**

Federal Circuit's Worthiness;  
A Key Leadership Imperative

### 46 **Inventiveness**

Focus on the Fun and Fascinating

## They Said **What?**

- 4 "The kitchen is the perfect place to practice inventivity."
- 9 "Will the U.S. Department of Justice turn the world's bread-and-butter search engine into so much Alphabet soup?"
- 31 "Is it clever to name your chair store the Shack of Sit?"

12



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