

Can't-Lose Proposition

COUPLE'S INVENTION HELPS ENSURE THAT SOCKS DON'T FALL OFF THE ACTIVE FEET OF LITTLE ONES **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

I'VE ALWAYS wondered what happened to my children's socks, missing in action many years ago when they were babies and toddlers. Little ones have a knack for losing socks.

So rather than taking your house apart and finding things like PB&J-coated toys buried under the sofa, here's an alternative to finding those socks when your child's about to leave for college: Squid Socks®—the socks that safely stay on little feet!

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): How did this product come about, and what are your and your husband's roles in this company?

Jessica Miller (JM): As newlyweds in 2014, we kicked off our honeymoon with a trip to London. While there, we visited my husband Gabe's cousin and his wife, along with their sweet baby boy who was 5 months old. During our stay, their son's socks kept falling off and his dad made a frustrating reference as to the need to fix this problem.

Our hamsters immediately started sprinting on their wheels, and that very night we could hardly sleep as we thought of all the different ways we could address this issue. At that time, we didn't yet have children of our own, so we started our research, asking friends, family, neighbors and acquaintances if this was a need not yet addressed in the market. We were surprised how many people gave us a very enthusiastic "Yes!" Since then, through the birth of our son and daughter, we've proven to ourselves that

indeed, those little socks just don't want to say on.

I am the "Alpha Squid," and this is my full-time job. Gabe is the "Beta Squid" who works a day job to support the family while Squid Socks grows. Every day, we spend many hours working side by side to do whatever it takes. We are dependent on each other to make this work. We each have our strengths and weaknesses. Together we are the ultimate Squid Squad.

EGT: How are Squid Socks different from other children's socks that are supposed to stay on little feet?

JM: Squid Socks use patent-pending, 100 percent silicone "squiddy dots" on the inside cuff to hold socks on. We also feature unique squid character designs that are applied with dye sublimation—a printing process using specially formulated inks, intense heat and pressure that dyes the fibers of the fabric.

The dyes in the inks become chemically bonded with the fibers of the fabric. This means the graphics can't be scratched, scraped or washed away. The result is a high-fidelity crisp image that is unlike anything seen in other baby socks. We also developed our own custom sizing to best fit babies' feet.

EGT: Please share your prototyping experience.

JM: At first, we tried to prototype silicone applied by hand, which resulted in a goopy mess! Our early prototypes also had sewn-in images that made them look blocky and low fidelity, like the original Mario Brothers video game.



We knew we finally had the perfect design when our friends raved about the color, crispness and detail of the images. We knew we had the perfect silicone type and application when one night, we did a pull test on both of our kids while they were sitting on our couch.

We both crouched down and repeatedly pulled on their socks ... they stayed on! Gabe and I looked at each other in amazement. We knew we wanted the socks to hold on, but even we were surprised how well they worked.

EGT: How has your patent process progressed?

JM: We have a utility patent on our silicone “squiddy dots” that hold socks on. We hired a professional patent attorney to help us through this process. This professional was surprisingly affordable, much better than many of the intimidating price tags we had heard for this type of help in the past.

With his help and knowledge, it was extremely simple for us. We described our idea to him and provided some images and drawings for the patent application. He took care of the rest!

EGT: Please share your experience with getting the product certified to the regulations of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act.

JM: We submitted samples of our product to a lab and they completed all appropriate testing. We did not have to make any changes to be compliant.

EGT: Are you manufacturing in the United States, or overseas?

JM: Our blank socks come from India and China. Our packaging is made in Oregon. Each character is individually aligned by hand, then dye-sublimated in small batches in Oregon. Collections are then assembled and attached to packaging by hand in Oregon. Fulfillment and shipping are out of Everett, Washington.

EGT: Have you had any problems in product development or in manufacturing?

JM: We have had a series of challenges. We started working on this idea five years ago, and for three years we worked with different manufacturers to try and create the product you see today. There were numerous failures, re-starts and days filled with serious frustration and hair pulling. Finally, we were able to find a manufacturer that could create our product.

While their initial production run was good, their second run was fraught with quality defects. We had to reject the entire lot. They were unwilling to tackle the quality issues, forcing us to look for a new partner.

We found another manufacturer, yet in their first run we found ourselves facing quality issues. Roughly 40 percent of our product had

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“We knew we had the perfect silicone type and application when one night, we did a pull test on both of our kids while they were sitting on our couch.” —JESSICA MILLER



to be rejected due to defects in the dye sublimation printing. Maintaining product of the highest quality is a constant focus for our business.

EGT: Tell us about your “ocean mission.”

JM: We donate 10 percent of our profits to coral reef preservation.

EGT: Are you going to add to your product line?

JM: Yes! Our heads are filled with additional products and line extensions. We love listening to the outpouring of customer ideas; these will be instrumental in where we can take this company.

EGT: What would be your best advice to share with inventors seeking to develop their products?

JM: To truly be successful, you must step back and realize you can drown in opportunity. The easy part is coming up with new ideas and products. The hard part is forcing yourself to throttle back the excitement of those new ideas.

Focus your time and energy and perfect your current offering(s) before jumping into the next.

Learn when and how to say “No.” Time is your most valuable resource, and you cannot do it all. Lead time is always far longer than what someone quotes you, so build in significant cushion to account for this and think ahead a good six months out.

The best ideas are those that solve a pain point for people. When you hear people describe things that frustrate them, those are your best opportunities. In the early product development stage, seek critique and feedback from people who will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. ☞

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Books by **Edie Tolchin** (egt@edietolchin.com) include “Fanny on Fire” (fannyonfire.com) and “Secrets of Successful Inventing.” She has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000. Edie has owned EGT Global Trading since 1997, assisting inventors with product safety issues and China manufacturing.



2 Critical Steps to getting your NEW PRODUCT “out there”

1 GET IT MADE

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

2 GET A WEBSITE!

Contact Ken Robinson – While your order is being manufactured, you need to start working on your WEB PRESENCE! Get people talking about your product on Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+), get good search engine placement (SEO)!

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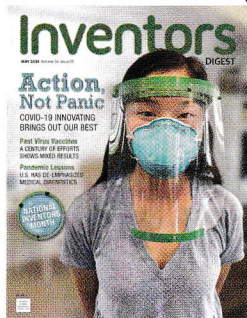


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Charlotte Latin School student Katie Chai, who helped lead face shields project; photo courtesy of Charlotte MEDI

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Inventors

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DIGEST

Action, Not Panic

COVID-19 INNOVATING
BRINGS OUT OUR BEST

Past Virus Vaccines

A CENTURY OF EFFORTS
SHOWS MIXED RESULTS

Pandemic Lessons

IT'S TIME TO STRENGTHEN
U.S. INNOVATION POLICY



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