

The Wad Becomes a Was

WOMAN'S INVENTION SOLVES THE FRUSTRATION OF TANGLED BEDSHEETS IN THE WASHER/DRYER **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

EVER WONDER how your socks and other small items disappear into your washer's (or dryer's) dark abyss? Why is it you only have the singleton of what used to be a pair of those bright, green knee socks?

Wad-Free® is an ingenious solution to losing items during laundry days when you wash (and dry) your sheets, from Denver-based inventor/entrepreneur Cyndi Bray.

Cyndi Bray's Wad-Free attaches to the four corners of both the flat and fitted sheet before you put them in the washing machine, preventing the usual twisted mess.



Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Is your background related to inventing?

Cyndi Bray (CB): My background is in no way related to engineering, product development, manufacturing, or consumer product sales! I have an MBA and ran my own advertising and graphic design firm for almost 20 years, but for the last several years I was a full-time mom and a volunteer in the cancer community.

My invention came about because I was sick and tired of dealing with the inevitable bedsheet wad that would form in my new washer and dryer set. While these laundry tangles had always been what I call "a fact of laundry™," the problem was so much worse in the new machines.

Since there was no solution on the market for a problem that virtually everyone has, I tasked myself with creating one.

After I figured out the physics behind why bedsheet wads were forming in the first place, I taught myself how to do my own CAD drawings to design a solution. I tested dozens of prototypes on friends, family and strangers until I came up with a design that was well liked, manufacturable and marketable.

I learned about injection molding and found a U.S. manufacturer just a few miles from my house. I had a custom plastic compounded when there was nothing on the market that met my needs. I did my own logo, packaging, website and videos, and I did it all—by myself—in 14 months from concept to my June 2020 pandemic launch!

EGT: What are the unique features of Wad-Free? How does it stop bunching of sheets with other laundered items?

“After I figured out the physics behind why bedsheet wads were forming in the first place, I taught myself how to do my own CAD drawings to design a solution.”—CYNDI BRAY



CB: Wad-Free® for Bed Sheets™ prevents sheets from tangling, twisting and balling up in both the washing machine and dryer. It attaches to the four corners of both the flat and fitted sheet before you put them in the washing machine, where the load won't go off balance and everything comes out cleaner.

Then it transfers to the dryer, where everything dries fast and fluffy. It also drastically reduces smaller items getting trapped soggy inside the sheets.

EGT: Can you transfer the sheets with Wad-Free directly into the dryer?

CB: Wad-Free is for both the washing machine and the dryer. Instead of running the dryer cycle several times for the sheets to evenly dry, Wad-Free allows you to dry in one cycle, and with fewer wrinkles to boot!

Customers routinely report drying times of 50-75% faster using Wad-Free! The materials are compounded to be tolerant of all laundry conditions.

EGT: Of what is Wad-Free made?

CB: Wad-Free is made of two plastics tolerant of the laundry process: polypropylene, and a custom-compounded TPE, both sourced in the U.S.A.

EGT: How many prototypes did it take before you got to the version you are selling today?

CB: I probably went through 30 prototypes before I landed on the final version. The first few prototypes, I made at home. After I had my first set of CAD drawings, I had 3D prototypes made at the library. Once I was confident in the design, I had my final prototypes made.

EGT: How are you selling Wad-Free?

CB: Wad-Free is available at my website. I also sell on Amazon, the Walmart Marketplace, and The Grommet. Soon it will be in select Ace Hardware stores.

EGT: Where are you manufacturing? Has the manufacturing process been difficult?

CB: Wad-Free is made entirely in the U.S.A. with U.S.-sourced materials. My packaging and inserts are also made in the U.S.A.

Manufacturing is full of challenges. There are lots of ways things can go wrong, and only one way they go right. COVID has added a whole layer of complexity with supply chain delays, labor challenges, manufacturing delays, and lots of price increases.

EGT: I understand you were featured on “Shark Tank.” How long did it take for you to get on the show? Did you get a deal?

CB: I applied for “Shark Tank” in January 2020, before my product even launched. I was disappointed at the time that I wasn't selected for Season 12 but am grateful now that I had a year of sales under my belt before I pitched to the Sharks.

I had two Sharks fighting over me: Lori Greiner and Kevin O'Leary. It was all a whirlwind, and I ended up accepting Kevin's deal. (*Editor's note:* The final deal was \$200,000 with a 5 percent stake for O'Leary, plus a royalty of \$1.50 per unit sold until \$1 million is paid off.)

Pitching on “Shark Tank” was a dream come true. As a long-time fan of the show, I credit it with giving me the courage to launch Wad-Free. I felt honored and grateful to be able to thank each of the Sharks personally for changing my life.

EGT: Is Wad-Free patented? Please share that experience.

CB: My utility patent for Wad-Free issued just a few days after I taped “Shark Tank.” Having created a brand-new product category, my patent protection means I own the category I created.

I had been told to expect years of delays and back-and-forth with the USPTO’s patent office, but that was not my experience. My patent issued swiftly on the first try, without any office actions. Everyone at the USPTO was extremely helpful.

EGT: Will you be adding to your product line?

CB: Yes! Since bedsheets are not the only things that wad, the next product in the Wad-Free line will be Wad-Free® for Blankets and Duvet Covers. It will be designed to handle those larger, thicker, heavier items. It hopefully will launch sometime in 2022.

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

CB: In a word, COVID. The pandemic has

affected everything from manufacturing to materials’ availability to labor to pricing.

EGT: Any advice for novice inventors?

CB: I didn’t have a background related to inventing, manufacturing or selling a product—much less one that creates a brand new product category! What I did have was a passion for solving a ubiquitous, wasteful and annoying problem.

I don’t know exactly what the process of creating a brand-new product category is like in ordinary times, but doing it by myself during a global pandemic was much like doing it with one hand tied behind my back. Throughout the process, I read, researched, listened, learned, tested and pivoted. 📖

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Contents

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22



Features

28 **The Sell Sheet That Works**

Jack Lander's Tool
And its Specific Guidelines

34 **'Personalized Vitamins'**

Supplement Program
Based on DNA Characteristics

Inventor Spotlight

22 **Breaths of Fresher Air** COVID-inspired Health Tech

24 **The Wad Becomes a Was** Solving Laundry Sheet Tangles



Departments

6 **Your USPTO** News, Upcoming Events

10 **Editor's Note** What's Your Story?

11 **Everybody's Talking** Conversation Pieces

12 **Bright Ideas** Innovation That Shines

14 **Time Tested** Jump-Start My Heart

18 **Social Hour** Maxing Out Instagram Reels

20 **Inventing 101** Outsourcing Each Task

27 **Meant to Invent** Persistent Pitching Experience

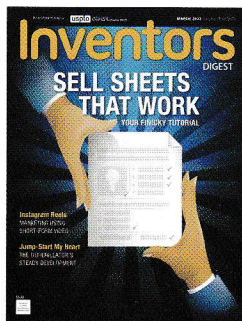
38 **Prototyping** Showtime Logistics

40 **IP Market** Predictions for 2022

44 **Eye on Washington** 'The Billion-Dollar Code' Should Resonate With Inventors

46 **Inventiveness** Focus on the Fun and Fascinating

24



ON THE COVER
Illustration by
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34

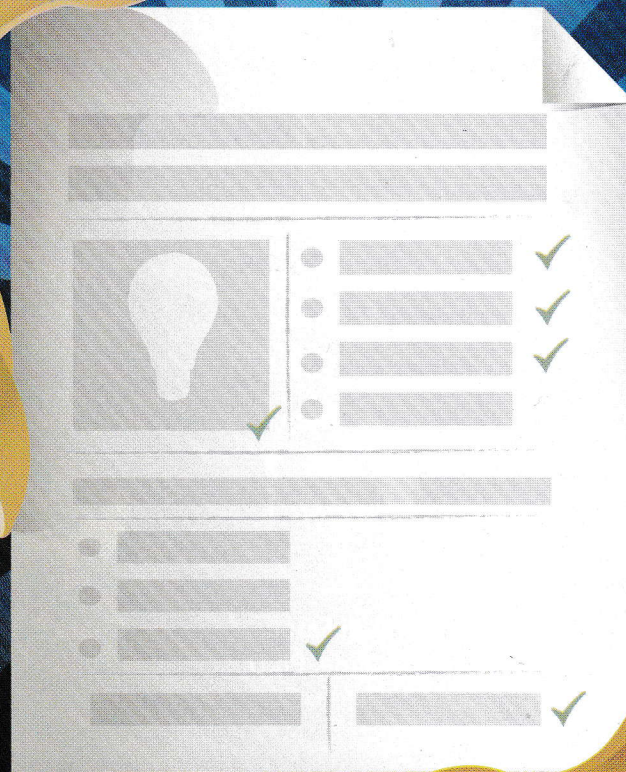


Inventors

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