

## Bear Tracks

Build-a-Bear Workshops are getting a high-tech makeover. “We wanted it to be more of an experience,” says Maxine Clark, who founded Build-A-Bear Workshops some ten years ago. She got the idea for a store “where children could create their own huggable characters” after going shopping “with a young friend for collectible stuffed animals.” The idea was simply to offer “a hands-on space for children to choose a plush bear, bunny or other animal and give it a personality and a name.”

After 10 years, Maxine decided it was time for a digital infusion: “Customers can now visit eight technology stations intended to increase hands-on engagement,” including a ‘love me’ touchscreen,

where a child can choose a heart for his or her stuffed animal. Other new options include a customized sound chip and scents like chocolate chip or cotton candy that can be embedded in the stuffed animal.”

The fresh focus on its stores marks a new direction for Build-A-Bear. “We had a period of product advertising, but now we are back emphasizing our brand,” says Maxine. “Smartphones and tablets have changed the way children play, so we wanted the stores to stay fun and relevant.” The retailer opened its first store re-design in St. Louis, and plans to open more nationwide.

[Source: Elizabeth Olson, *The New York Times*, 9/27/12]

## Scratch-Scratch

At Sharpie, innovation is a function of the sound its markers make. The technical term for this is “scratch-scratch,” explains Lisa King, vp of insights and innovation at Newell Rubbermaid, makers of Sharpie. “It’s part of the experience of using that marker,” says Lisa. “The sound of your product can be as distinctive as the look.”

That bit of insight is not lost on Ted Owen, vp of global package design for Estée Lauder’s Clinique brand. Ted and his team “sweated” over the “soft, crisp click” when the cap on Clinique’s High Impact Extreme Volume mascara “is twisted shut.” The sound is intended to reassure “users that the package is closed and the liquid mascara won’t dry out.”

Snapple also invested in the “pop” of the caps on its drinks when twisted open, “a cue that it is fresh.” The “iconic pop” is so compelling that Snapple was able to remove plastic safety seals, saving both packaging costs and landfill waste.

General Electric, meanwhile, has composed a “soundtrack” of alerts for its appliances, with music “meant to appeal to the target consumer.” A budget brand features grunge-rock, while a higher-end model offers “light piano music.”

[Source: Ellen Byron, *The Wall Street Journal*, 10/24/12]



## Momentum Machines

A “burger-making robot named Patty” promises to make “tastier burgers faster, and for less money.” A start-up called Momentum Machines is developing the robot, which “can assemble a cooked burger and bag it in less than 30 seconds.”

Patty stands about five feet tall, and “cooks burgers and toasts buns on a conveyor belt, then slides them into compartments so that an automatic slicer can cut fresh vegetables and layer them on the burgers. Another conveyor belt passes the burger into the bag.”

Helen Zelman of Lemnos Labs, the hardware incubator behind Patty, thinks the result transcends mere efficiency. “Right now you’re limited by what a 16- or 18-year-old fry cook can do... Robots can perform more complex tasks.”

The potential, says Helen is to make “Five Guys burgers at McDonald’s prices or even higher-quality burgers at Five Guys prices.” Patty is just one of about ten Lemnos-backed machines. “Rather than back the creators of new websites and mobile apps,” Lemnos “exclusively nurtures hardware companies.”

The niche is made possible by rapidly dropping prices “for sophisticated electronics,” as well as “design software and machines that allow entrepreneurs to create quick prototypes.” Lemnos co-founder Jeremy Conrad aims to “revive the spirit that gave rise to such hardware giants as Hewlett-Packard,” and give mechanical engineers a chance to do what they love, rather than settle for jobs writing code.

[Source: Ashlee Vance, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 11/19/12]

## Eco Bottles

Julie Corbett looked at the paper pulp tray cradling her new iPhone and saw a better kind of bottle. Julie had exactly zero background in product design, but noticed that “the material was sturdy, the shape was elegant and the feel was natural.”

It occurred to her that a “molded pulp shell” might be designed to “snap around a plastic pouch to hold liquid,” using “much less plastic than conventional bottles. When it was empty, consumers could break the pieces apart to separate the plastic and pulp for recycling.”

The eco.bottle, as it is called, is the first “recycled paper bottle on store shelves,” and its “design didn’t require any unusual materials or new technologies. The iPhone packaging provided part of the solution, and the rest “of the concept came from plastic milk bags widely sold in Canada.” As Julie points out: “You have to believe a lot of innovation is about breathing life into traditional businesses.”

Today, more than two million eco.bottles have been produced “for brands including Seventh Generation laundry detergent, and Julie says she expects the company to be able to initially produce about nine million a year when it opens a new plant near San Francisco in 2013.” Seventh Generation says “it saw a 19 percent sales increase after switching” to eco.bottles.

[Source: Diane Brady, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 10/29/12]

## Digital Tartan

Burberry “is banking on technology to lure back customers.” The fashion house’s “huge new store on London’s Regent Street, near the tourist hub of Piccadilly, has a 22-foot-high screen, beaming images of the latest collections, with sound pumped out through 500 speakers... Garments are fitted with interactive screens and RFID tags, which mean that customers can flash clothes in front of interactive screens to see how a handbag detail or raincoat lining is made.”

Burberry CEO Angela Ahrendts says the technology is needed “to keep pace with a generation of shoppers who download images of coveted items rather than tearing pictures out of a magazine.” Her “most controversial plan” is a concept known as Customer 360, which invites customers to allow Burberry’s to track their purchase behavior and create a “digital profile” for use by tablet-wielding in-store staff.

Burberry’s also contemplated — and then abandoned — “using RFID tags to ‘read’ which Burberry clothes customers are wearing when they walk into a store.” The idea was determined to be “creepy.” But Angela thinks a high-tech approach is necessary if Burberry is to attract “new generations of well-off luxury-lovers.” Trendstop analyst Jaana Jatyri thinks the plan is on target. “Luxury consumers are now very savvy and quick to make purchasing decisions,” she says.

[Source: *The Economist*, 9/22/12]



## Living Proof

An unlikely collaboration between MIT and Jennifer Aniston is promising innovation in hair-care products. Based in Cambridge, Mass., Living Proof formed a partnership with MIT chemical engineer Robert Langer, who otherwise spends his time working on cures for cancer and diabetes.

“I like to see if we can use science to solve problems,” says Robert, who in 2005 was recruited by Polaris Venture Partners, a venture capital firm, to form the company. Jon Flint of Polaris says he got the idea for Living Proof after reading about the lack of innovation in the beauty category, and finding that most hair and skin products “were simple reformulations of the same ingredients.”

It took Robert and his team about 18 months to identify “a molecule called OFPMA that is an especially effective barrier to moisture, the chief cause of frizzy hair.” Another molecule, PBAE, was developed using “synthetic chemistry and robotics” and gives “hair more body.”

Originally, Living Proof thought the science alone would be sufficient to differentiate the brand, but eventually recognized some star power was needed. Living proof CEO Jill Beraud, a former PepsiCo and Victoria’s Secret CMO, reached out to Jennifer Aniston’s management.

“We believe that beauty and brains are the best formula,” says Jill. “She represents everything we represent as a brand.” Jennifer was intrigued: “You want to be part of something that’s exciting and authentic,” she says, adding: “You can’t get more interesting than these scientists.”

[Source: Elizabeth Holmes and Ron Winslow, *The Wall Street Journal*, 10/11/12]

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