

INVENTING FOR THE BOOMING PERSONAL CARE INDUSTRY Part 2

The Journey to a 'Shower in Your Pocket'

ARMY PHYSICIAN'S EPIC WIPES
A MISSION OF PERFECTIONISM

BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN

Last month we interviewed Army veteran and father of two Bill Massey, whose Restroom Kit® was a hit at June's INPEX, America's largest invention trade show. This month we spoke with Dr. Aeneas Janze, inventor of Epic Wipes—towel-sized wet wipes called “a shower in your pocket.” His Kickstarter campaign raised \$35,000 in June, more than tripling his \$10,000 goal with more than 800 backers.

Inventions like the Pee Pocket (*Inventors Digest*, January 2016), last month's Restroom Kit and Epic Wipes underscore how the personal care industry is flourishing.

Edith G Tolchin: Please tell how your background and family tie in with your invention.

Aeneas Janze: I am an active-duty Army physician. Rose and I are parents to a year-old boy, Sebastian. I came up with the idea of these wipes while deployed in Afghanistan in 2011. Many combat outposts don't have showers and even in the largest forward-operating bases, showers are frequently down for maintenance. Wet wipe showers are commonplace; however, “bathing” with standard-sized wet wipes is not very effective. Poor hygiene results in poor health, which has a real cost in terms of battle readiness. I set out to make something better.

EGT: Where did the name come from? Is it patented?

AJ: Epic Wipes are towel-sized wet wipes, large enough to clean your whole body but small enough to fit in your pocket. In the beginning, we were going to call them “Guerilla Wipes.” Then came “Epic Wipes,” which was the name for about a year. Then I came up with the worst idea imaginable, to name them “Towl.” Thankfully I came to my senses and we went back to Epic Wipes. James Haugland, a writer and our current collaborator, started riffing one day on this idea of “Epic life? Epic Wipes.” He envisioned



Dr. Aeneas Janze focused on intricate details in every aspect of Epic Wipes, which were used at the Mud Factor 5K obstacle run in Sacramento, California, this March (left).



people leading these very active, adventurous, epic lifestyles and getting sweaty and dirty as a consequence. That became the real starting point for the branding. We have a copyright on all the packaging design work, and a provisional patent.

EGT: Have you done market research on the personal care/personal hygiene industry?

AJ: Plenty, in the wipe industry! I think I must have bought every wipe that Amazon carries. I wanted to see what kinds of textures and formulas felt good against my skin and which ones didn't. I probably spent time on certain details that some people will never notice, but when something's your baby you really want it to be perfect. This went into every element of the design, from selecting the formula ingredients to getting the texture of the wipe just right, to all the elements of the packaging design. I spent more than six months working on the formula, for example. Getting the concentration of soap just right was also tricky. Too much soap, and it left a film. Too little, and it didn't clean well.

Getting the design to look masculine was one of the hardest parts, but I think we actually managed. That's why it took us three years to arrive at the current product. When you take a wipe out of its package, you can immediately tell that a lot of work went into it.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AENEAS JANZE

EGT: What is the product made from, and where is it manufactured? Are you looking to license Epic Wipes, or run the business by yourself?

AJ: Epic Wipes are made from 100 percent bamboo viscose, which is fully biodegradable. Even in landfill conditions, our wipes will be gone within 45 days. This was important to us. We also used all non-toxic ingredients so that people could feel good about slathering these wipes all over their bodies day after day if they needed to.

The wipes are manufactured in China. We spent months trying to find a U.S. manufacturer, but it's difficult finding a manufacturer anywhere in the world to make a wipe as large as ours. Most of the places we contacted in the United States said that they'd have to purchase special machinery to do it and wanted us to foot the bill. Since this whole project was funded on my military income alone, that wasn't possible. It took us quite a while to find our current Chinese manufacturer. We've only been with them for the past year, but they do an amazing job.

In terms of running the business, we'd like to give it a go ourselves. We think this product answers a huge need that has thus far gone unrecognized. Luckily, we're the first ones to make a pocketable wipe that can substitute for a shower. If we make a big enough splash in the beginning, there's no telling how far this product can go.

Are we completely opposed to licensing? Not at all, and I'm sure some day we will. But for now, we're having fun and still have more ideas for spin-off wipe products that we think would be just as popular as the original, if not more.

EGT: Tell us about your Kick-starter campaign.

AJ: It launched May 24 and ended June 23. It was wildly successful. We feel that a write-up by gizmag.com three weeks into the campaign was really helpful. Then USA Today wrote about us, New York magazine, and a dozen other smaller media outlets. A couple days later, we received a lot of UK press. In less than 72 hours we'd gone from being a complete unknown to having this global audience. We've seen articles written about us in Thai, Chinese, Hebrew, Albanian, Turkish, Czech, Slovak and Spanish.

EGT: Have you had any obstacles in developing your product?

AJ: Tons. Money issues, mostly. You have to be extremely strategic on how you spend your money if you're not well off. If you make a mistake, it sometimes takes months to recover.

EGT: Any advice for the novice inventor?

AJ: A good idea is a necessary first step, but it's the execution that really matters. There have been many attempts at the big wet wipe idea in the past, and they've all failed. For one, they didn't make them pocket-sized. Many were bundled as two or three wipes per pack. We actually tried that initially (three). But the hole to pull the wipes out was too small for such a big wipe, and it kept ripping. Resealing the sticker was a pain. Wipes would dry out. Also, who wanted to carry around this half-pound package of wipes that could fit nowhere but your backpack or your glove box?

We were thinking of ways to make the packaging a little more user friendly when another collaborator, Kriszanne Napalan, said: "If we individually wrap these wipes, there won't be any more sticker problems. Plus, one wipe will be so much easier to carry around. And they should be small enough to fit in your pocket." It was by far the most insightful thing anyone had said since the project's inception. But we had already completed the packaging design based on a three-wipes-per-pack concept, so it meant starting over again. Having individually wrapped wipes also meant that we needed to design a box to put them in, which delayed our launch by over a year. But without that insight, I think the product would have been a dud. So putting your ego aside and listening to your collaborators is a big part of this. ☺

Details: epicwipes.com



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