

She Took Home 3 Gold Medals To Go

HANDHELD CUSTOMIZABLE SEALER A BIG HIT AT NATIONAL INVENTION SHOW **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

I was a judge, a member of a pitch panel, and a Resource Center expert at America's largest invention show this past June in Pittsburgh. I've participated in INPEX (the Invention & New Product Exposition), a truly amazing annual invention convention, for the past 16 years and am always thrilled to meet the hard-working inventors.

Juli Lank certainly enjoyed the show, winning three gold medals for her To-Go Customizable Sealer. Although I didn't meet her at this year's event, nor did I judge the same categories for which she won her medals, I came upon her story in the *Ormond Beach (Fla.) Observer* a few weeks after the show and contacted her for my own interview.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): What is your background, and how did it influence your invention?

Juli Lank (JL): I am a nurse, and I had lost 150 pounds on a very specific food plan (that I also invented, by the way). I use a lot of my own custom dressings and sauces. When I would pack my lunch for work, I needed a lunch box the size of a suitcase to fit all of the plasticware I carried. If I used Ziploc bags for liquids, they would leak. When I got home, I had the pleasure of washing them all out. To maintain my weight loss, I wanted something I could not only take to work but to restaurants as well. I needed a disposable bag that would hold both dry and liquid items—bags I could customize myself.

I was at work one day using a pill-crushing bag. It's a durable bag you can put a pill in, crush it, then put the contents into something soft so patients can swallow the medication. I thought, "These bags are FDA approved, durable and a great size for salad dressing or sauces. I wonder how I could seal them to make them like a condiment packet?" I tried the

little handheld potato chip re-sealing device, and that was a disaster.

I forgot about it for a few months until one day I was flat ironing my hair and I remembered those bags and thought, "I wonder if I can heat-seal that bag closed with this flat iron?" Well, not with these bags. The iron is way too hot and those bags aren't designed for that, so they would stick and melt to the heating plate. But two years later after matching the perfect heat with the perfect bag, the To-Go handheld sealer was finally born! The shape of the sealer was also important to me, since it allowed me to put unsealed bags on a roll so that I could customize the size I wanted.

EGT: How does the product work? Is it used with regular plastic bags?

JL: The patent-pending product will be cordless and rechargeable. You will have the option of purchasing a roll of unsealed bags in different lengths. You roll out your desired-length bag, apply the heat sealer, heat-seal the bag closed, then slide the cutter across the bag. You will have then created a bottom for your current bag and a bottom for the next bag on the roll. You can then fill your bag with any product, liquid or solid, then apply the heat sealer across the top for an impermeable seal. These are specific heat-sealing bags designed to meld together when heated. They are also FDA approved, BPA free, and most are recyclable.

There will be an online store to purchase other custom sealable bags as well. They are waterproof. You can seal your cell phone without using bulky waterproof covers while at the beach. You can still talk and text, but your phone is safe from sand and water. If you seal a slight bit of air in the bag, it will float.

It's great protection at the gym, fishing, hiking or anyplace you don't want it to collect moisture or debris. Then just discard it when you're done. It's great for priceless documents or pictures. A fireproof safe doesn't protect documents from water damage.



Juli Lank needed a disposable, customizable bag that would hold both dry and liquid items.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULI LANK

These bags hold liquids without leaking, ever. I am an inventor, so I am usually broke. I “smuggle” liquor in these bags everywhere I go—planes, cruises, dinner, girls’ night out. Who is not paying \$12 for a cocktail? This chick. Liquor is, by far, the most popular requested reason people want to purchase this product. Apparently, I am not the only “broke chick” out there.

EGT: How did you create your prototype? Did you have many versions?

JL: With a flat iron, a crimping iron, a voltage regulator, a Dremel tool, molding instruments and other materials. I had four different versions before I perfected it. As the applications became more varied, the need to expand its ability to accommodate those purposes became necessary.

That’s why I amended the patent to make the sealers handle separately from the heating element. It needed to be able to accommodate different lengths and heating plates for different bags, for different purposes.

You can fill your bag with any product, liquid or solid, then apply the heat sealer across the top for an impermeable seal.

EGT: Tell us about your experience exhibiting at INPEX.

JL: I won gold in the kitchen category, which was my initial reason for the invention—and that includes household items such as shampoo and conditioner. I also want to take my own hair and bath products on trips without 20 different plastic bottles I won’t clean. The judges liked the fact that it is an economical product as well.

You can buy bulk items such as baby formula or instant coffee and make your own individual packets—even peanut butter and jelly packets. Just microwave them first. It will save people a lot of money.

By the time I got to the show, I had already realized how versatile the product had become and didn’t want the product to be categorized only as a kitchen item. I wanted that to come across in my display. It must have, because the second gold was for Best Crafting Idea. I’ve had a lot of feedback from crafters who sell items via the internet or at shows who would love to purchase this sealer.



"These bags hold liquids without leaking, ever. I am an inventor, so I am usually broke. I 'smuggle' liquor in these bags everywhere I go—planes, cruises, dinner, girls' night out. Who is not paying \$12 for a cocktail? This chick." —JULI LANK

I won the third gold in medical because I wanted to find a way to send one unit of liquid medication home with a child without using scary, pre-filled, expensive syringes at the hospital. I also wanted to be able to pre-sort my father's medications into individual packets, even if someone else helped administer them. I filled them, so I was certain they were the correct doses. Also, I could pre-crush the ones that were too big for him to swallow. If he was going somewhere, he could just take the packets he needed, not the entire medicine cabinet.

INPEX was great. I am somewhat of a novice myself and I not only wanted to get my product out there, I wanted to educate myself on what types of opportunities were moving into the production phase. I gained invaluable information from the show and made a lot of inventor friends.

I was able to pitch to Cuisinart, which has shown some interest in the product. I have also heard from a representative from QVC; I'll have a meeting with representatives from the largest sealing company out there; and I have set up three other meetings with licensing firms. Winning three gold medals was incredible. I would have been happy with one.

EGT: What product safety issues are involved with this product, which comes in contact with food?

JL: I purchase bags made in the United States that have undergone FDA approval.

EGT: Have you encountered any obstacles in developing this product?

JL: Social media and website development are difficult for me. I'm terrible at those things.

EGT: Tell us about your patent process.

JL: I use a patent attorney. He and his associates have been life-savers for me. It can be difficult to try and explain the vision in your head to someone who is going to bring it to life on paper. Beyond their legal knowledge, they are patient and great listeners—two qualities that are imperative for me. If I don't think I am being heard, I am thinking you don't have a job. As litigious as our society has become, I view a patent attorney as a wise investment. I know that isn't something everyone has financial access to, but if you do, that would be my recommendation.

EGT: What are your plans for selling this product?

JL: I only have a prototype. There isn't anyone who doesn't see the To-Go sealer who doesn't want one. That is why I am so anxious to get it manufactured, online and into stores.

EGT: Do you have any other possible additions to your product line?

JL: I have a couple other products coming out soon, and I have a list of about 50 I am anxious to get started on. I'm hoping to fund those projects with this product. I invent things all the time.

My mind never stops. I look at things every day and think, "I can think of a better way to do that." I listen. That is so important. I listen to people all the time. I eavesdrop. I want to hear what people complain about, what inconveniences them. I also pay attention. I watch people living their daily lives and the things they struggle with. I have a couple of medical inventions I would like to bring to market just based on paying attention to people. My husband says, "Someone should just invest in your brain. That's where the money's at."

EGT: Any advice for our readers?

JL: Protect your ideas and get sound advice from legitimate resources. Educate yourself before executing anything. Don't get overwhelmed by the entire process of bringing your concept to development. Take one step at a time. Don't let the fear of failure paralyze you.

This was a daunting journey for me. It is complicated and expensive, but I feared dying and doing nothing with a concept I was passionate about a lot more than I feared failure. I knew the success rate of having an invention actually become a viable, saleable, profitable product was 2 percent. I just always believed my product was within that 2 percent. ☺

Details: startsealing.com

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.



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DIGEST

THE PATENT ATTORNEY

- 5 Tips for Your First Consultation
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Scanner Can Detect Threats to Planes

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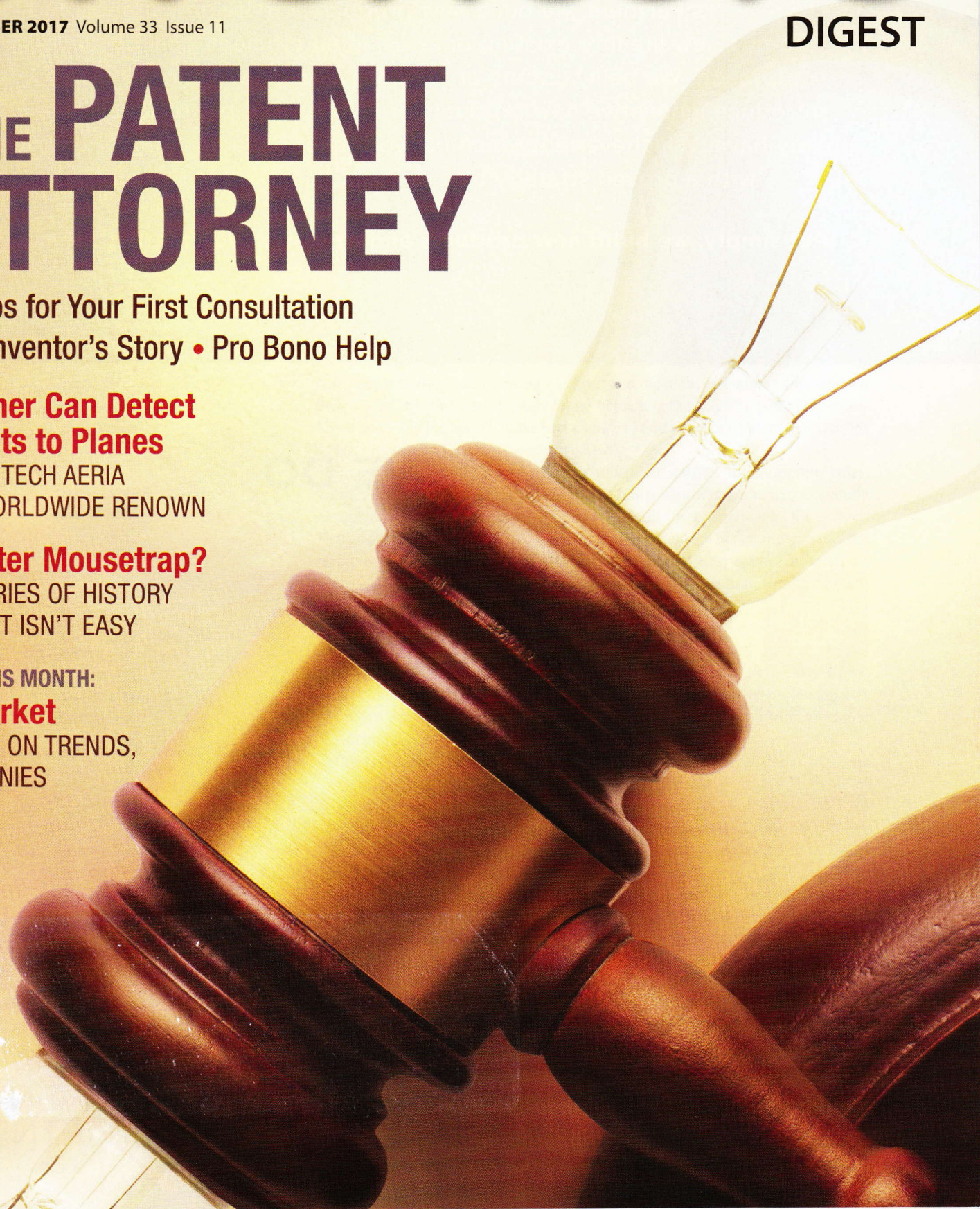
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LATEST ON TRENDS,
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\$5.95

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18



Contents

November 2017 Volume 33 Issue 11

Features

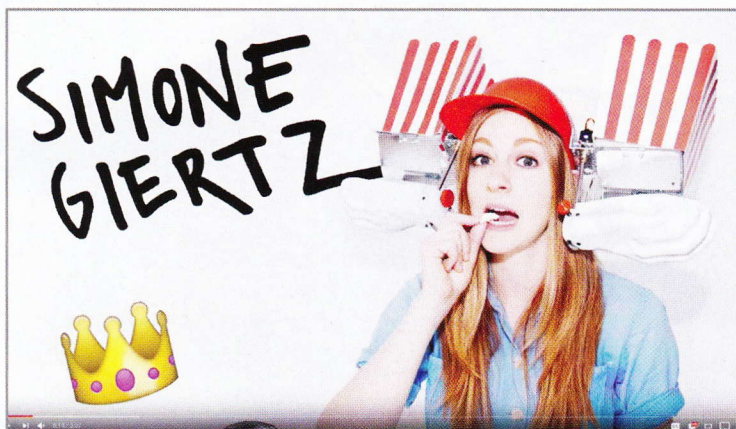
- 20 Fighting Terror In the Air**
IPOEF Innovator Insights:
Scanner for Commercial Airplanes
- 24 The Patent Attorney**
5 Tips for Your First Consultation;
An Inventor's Story; Provisional or
Non-Provisional; Pro Bono Help

American Inventors

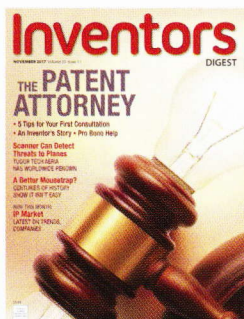
- 14 3 Gold Medals to Go**
Handheld Sealer a Big Hit at Show

Departments

- 6 Bright Ideas**
Spotlight on Innovation
- 8 Time Tested**
A Better Mousetrap? Hmmm
- 10 Lander Zone**
Strike While the Iron is Hot
- 12 Social Hour**
Social Media Helps Mom Launch Line
- 18 IP Market**
Strategy Avoids 'Death Squad'
- 34 Prototyping**
YouTube for Inventors?
- 38 Rau's Research**
The ABCs of PGL
- 40 Eye on Washington**
USPTO, Independent Agency?;
Patent Reform Discussion Needs
Balance; Time to Disband PTAB
- 46 Inventiveness**
Focus on the Fun and Fascinating



34



ON THE COVER
Photo illustration
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14

20

