

The Sweet Spot

Steve Geotsalitis Makes it Easier for Batters to Connect with the Ball

BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN

Sometimes the greatest inventions are the most basic and simplest of ideas. A few years ago, while serving as a consultant at the Resource Center of INPEX, I met inventor Steve Geotsalitis. I quickly discovered that his brain was constantly cranking out new sports and fitness ideas. Geotsalitis' most recent invention, CALL the SHOT™, is a baseball training device. In the following interview, Geotsalitis discusses CALL the SHOT and offers novice inventors tips on bringing new products to market.

(Editor's Note: Interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.)

Founder of Pantelis Innovations, Steve Geotsalitis, invented CALL the SHOT™ to assist athletes with hitting the most efficient and powerful part of the bat.

Edith G. Tolchin: Tell *Inventors Digest* readers about this product and why it is something no one previously thought about.

Steve Geotsalitis: CALL the SHOT is a unique training device to assist athletes with hitting the most efficient and powerful part of the bat—the elusive “sweet spot.” The main objective of CALL the SHOT is to help batters focus on the sweet spot at the moment the bat hits the ball. Additionally, CALL the SHOT helps batters develop better visual acuity and consistency. Bat designs are colorful, which can draw the eye away from the ball as the bat is being swung. Our design objective was to allow the batter to better focus on the sweet spot, as well as to visually “remove” the bat colors. The sleeve has three colored areas: black, green, black. The two black areas cover up most of the bat coloration, and when the bat is swung, all the batter essentially sees is the green sweet-spot area.

This product is geared toward baseball/softball batters age four and up. It comes in three sizes to accommodate all conventional

bats (except big barrels). CALL the SHOT is made of rubber and stretch material that allows it to fit snugly without damaging the bat. It weighs two ounces and does not modify the batter's swing or power. It is cold-water washable and should be air dried.

I developed the idea from watching my son teach my grandson, Steven, from the time he played T-ball through high school baseball. One day, when Steven was about seven years old, he told me that he saw the ball hit the bat at the moment it happened. That kicked my creative mind into gear and started development of this product. There are many other devices on the market to help batters, but most of them either require set up or take up a lot of space and can be cumbersome to use and carry around. Additionally, CALL the SHOT is inexpensive compared to other products. It is patent pending and the name is trademarked.

EGT: Who can benefit from this product?

SG: First are the batters, and second are the coaches, managers and parents. CALL the SHOT can be used in a batting cage, off the batting tee, with a coach or parent pitching, or with a pitching machine. It can also be used on the field. The colorization of the product allows coaches, managers and parents to see the sweet spot contact point better. With the addition of video, it is much easier to show the batter his mistakes and make instant corrections.

EGT: Do you make a living as an inventor? Are you a serial inventor?

SG: More like an obsessed inventor. I live to create and invent products that solve problems. If I'm not waking up in the middle of the night to work on a redesign for an idea, sending follow-up emails or directing my team, I'm not working hard enough. I've had over 30 years of idea innovation, creative drive and the passion to succeed.

I was an Air Force staff sergeant (E5) trained in the medical services in the Vietnam era. I worked in the printing industry for years. In my free time I managed to obtain a fifth-degree black belt in Chinese Kenpo Karate, as well as a first-degree black belt in Shaolin Kung Fu. My absolute favorite vocation was being a nationally certified massage therapist specializing in sports injuries and chronic disorders and disabilities. Inventing has been my passion through all of this.

EGT: What gave you the desire to become an inventor?

SG: I inherited the creativeness from my dad, who was a tinkerer. The main thing that sticks in my head is a product he created in the mid 1950s, when he started using the relatively new Styrofoam beads. He created a process to compress and shape them into circular tubs—ice buckets with detached lids. He was making prototypes and giving them away, and I was amazed with the machines that made the buckets and how the whole

process worked. A friend of his ran with the idea, and my dad never got a cent. When I started this company, I made a point that the same thing would not happen again. I have a team to help me and protect what we do. My company's first name, Pantelis Innovations, is his name, Peter, in Greek.

EGT: What other products have you invented, and explain why you've decided for now not to develop those ideas.

SG: We have about seven other ideas in various stages of design and development. Another product for personal training is ready to go, but instead of going to market with it, we want to sell the patent and product outright. As a small company, it's really difficult to move forward with multiple products. The overhead, liability insurance and the resources (monetarily and otherwise) are a drain on people and the bank. We prefer to slow our entries into the marketplace and make sure that the product will function as designed and tested, rather than have an aftermarket correction or adjustment.

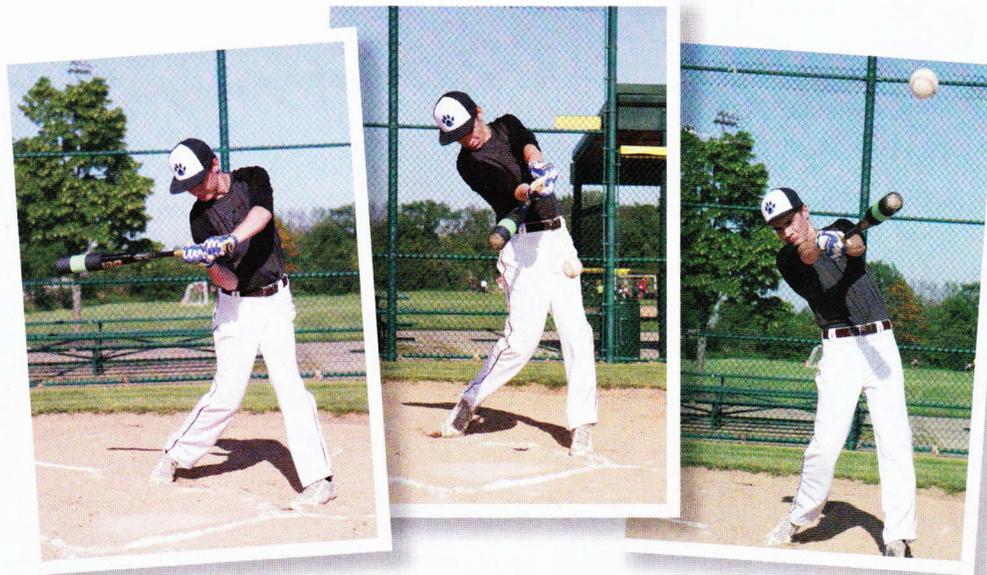
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EGT: What is the process of product development for a sewn textile invention geared toward children? Were there government regulations? What was the first step?

SG: The key to developing a product is losing sleep. Your creative juices have no time frame, so you need to run while thoughts are in your mind. Document them well. The process for CALL the SHOT started with a web search on the USPTO site to find out if there was a product like it already on the market. The next step was to research the market size and talk with local coaches and parents to find out if there were a need and interest. From there, I researched bat sizes, bat resonance, hand sting and the general composition of bats.

Having a good mental image of what I needed to do, I then did rough hand drawings of the idea, including measurements and descriptions. The hardest part was figuring out the best materials to construct the product. I requested material samples from many companies, did durability tests and made rough samples from each. Once I figured out which of the samples worked best for CALL the SHOT, I moved to colorization and bonding methods for the two types of materials chosen.

Once I received the material, the next generation of product samples was made. Then we began in-house and field tests, followed by another round of tweaking and the next round of test samples. CALL the SHOT went through six revisions to reach the final result.



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My next step was to take my rough revised drawings, measurements and material information to a CAD designer for complete professional drawings. When we had a viable product, field tests with young players to collegiate players confirmed its effectiveness. The next step was finding a manufacturer to produce it, then marketing it.

Luckily Pantelis Innovations was exhibiting the product at INPEX, where we were trying to gain exposure. We heard about EGT Global Trading at the Resource Center and later began working with the company to learn about product safety, manufacturing and the subsequent importing aspects of product development.

EGT: What other steps were involved?

SG: The next step was developing the packaging. Since Call the SHOT will be used by adults as well as children, there is a requirement to address children’s packaging and product marking regulations. I was introduced to packaging designer Josh Wallace, who listened to my explanation, read the information and CAD drawings sent to him, and came up with six different ideas for packaging, as well as several ideas for a product logo. We chose one and made revisions until we had a package that was representative of what we needed. The packaging required child warnings, ventilation holes, QR codes for retailers, instructions and proper labeling—much more than I figured was necessary.

EGT: What came after you had your prototypes and packaging mockups?

SG: My next step was to find and secure an overseas manufacturer, which is a monumental task for anyone with no contacts or experience negotiating overseas. With guidance from my consultant, I chose a reputable factory with a 15-year track record and submitted the project scope, design, drawings and pictures.

Workers quickly made samples for me to approve or modify, and provided a quote sheet for each model and quantity breakdown.

EGT: What did you do after you received the quotes?

SG: I placed an order, which was more involved than I expected. I was instructed to make a wire transfer of 30 percent of the total order value to get the manufacturing started, with the balance to be paid after the testing was completed and the products were ready to be shipped. During that time, a Consumer Product Safety Commission’s accredited lab thoroughly tested samples. Included were burn, material separation, shredding and toxicity tests. It was very detailed but necessary to receive approval for use of the product in the United States.

EGT: Did your product pass product safety testing that is required for all products used by children 12 and under?

SG: The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act tests were in-depth, detailed and involved, but CALL the SHOT passed with flying colors. Had it not passed, CALL the SHOT would have required a redesign.

EGT: After the factory was given the green light to proceed with mass production and you approved the samples, what steps did you take to make sure the factory didn’t slip in any poor quality or defective pieces?

SG: Prior to the products being shipped, an additional test for quality control had to be conducted by an independent company. I contacted KRT Audit Corporation to do the visual and physical inspection. The company was very thorough and provided detailed documents and pictures of their inspection of the products. It included what carton number the individual samples were taken from, pictures of drop testing the cartons,

loose threads, stretch testing of seams and much more. Once I was able to review the extensive report, we gave the factory in China the go ahead to ship.

EGT: The product is now in the United States. How do you plan to sell it?

SG: We are receiving online orders through our existing website and recently hired a web designer who is hard at work with a total overhaul of the site. The advantage of using independent representatives is that they have the burden of income taxes and health insurance. They have no direct connection to our company, which decreases the liability and overhead. We are using their contacts to get into big box stores and other distributorships that we can't get into ourselves.

EGT: What lessons have you learned in this new career path as an importer? Would you say that product development, manufacturing and importing are easier than or more difficult than you'd imagined?

SG: The process, from development through importing and distribution, was definitely more difficult than I thought it would be. My suggestion for all inventors is not to go through the process without help. Talk to multiple sources and don't necessarily go with the first one. A little extra time and research make life simpler in the long run. Without great people, I might have even given up. I am very fortunate to have an excellent support team.

I've also been extremely fortunate that my wife, Marcia, has been beside me every step of the way. She is a business guru and MBA graduate, who knows the ins and outs of business and contracts. Her knowledge and expertise have been my beacon of light through all this fog.

EGT: What is your sales plan for CALL the SHOT ?

SG: Our plan is to get the independent reps moving, get the new website up and running, and continue to update our Facebook page so that people can get information and place orders.

EGT: Do you have any final pearls of wisdom for our readers?

SG: My first three suggestions are research, research and research. From there, get a support team that has your back at all times. If they don't respond quickly to any and all of your questions and concerns, then you are not at the top of their list and you should move on. Last, make sure that everyone you speak to signs a non-disclosure agreement. ☞

For information, visit www.calltheshot.biz.

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