

A New Kind of Well Heeled

BUSINESSWOMAN'S PRODUCT REDUCES DREADED 'SLIP FACTOR'

BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN

'LL ADMIT IT: I've had a shoe fetish since I was a little girl, when I made shoe and fashion accessories for my dolls. I later studied fashion design but only involving garments, because my school did not offer shoe design courses many years ago.

I always begged my mother for pumps. She would always decline my request because she wisely knew that they frequently slip off little girls' feet, causing many skinned knees. But nowadays, pump styles for women now can have added safety, comfort and style features thanks to Michelle Johnson, inventor of Kickstands™.

Born and raised in Minnesota, Johnson attended a private liberal arts college and has worked as a Minneapolis-based corporate consultant for more than 15 years. "I believe there's nothing more powerful in this world than a confident woman who's comfortable in her own skin—and in her fashion," she says.

Kickstands are reversible high heel straps that also add fashion to footwear.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Where did the idea for Kickstands come from?

Michelle Johnson (MJ): Kickstands was born from my personal struggle of loving heels but battling the "slip factor" while presenting in boardrooms and racing to make connections at airports across North America. I've logged over a million airline miles, and throughout my travels, the heel slip was a frequent source of frustration.

But I wasn't willing to give up on pumps, either. Like many women, I love to hate them, but I can't live without them. And so, after searching unsuccessfully for a solution, I decided to create one myself. Five years and countless prototypes later, I had developed Kickstands: reversible high heel straps that add fashion to footwear while preventing the dreaded heel slip. From the office, to the theater, to the airport and all

points in-between, Kickstands are changing the rules of engagement for footwear.

I love that I can change up my look within seconds, just by adding Kickstands to a basic pair of pumps. I typically pack just one pair of black pumps during my travels, along with several pair of Kickstands to produce multiple different looks during the course of the week. Kickstands add instant glamour to any outfit, and our website offers a variety of patterns and styles—from bright florals to vintage-inspired dots. Every pair of Kickstands is reversible, featuring a stylish pattern on one side and a solid color on the opposite, for maximum versatility. The durable elastic conforms to virtually any heel, making it appear more like a part of the shoe itself rather than a separate add-on accessory.

My goal in developing this product was to create one important accessory to give women the strength and confidence to tackle whatever life throws at us—and along the way, to provide a little extra balance in an unstable world so women can effortlessly find their stride. This proves to all that "the bold and fearless never miss a step."

EGT: How are Kickstands different from other shoe accessories?

MJ: Kickstands are a first-of-its-kind product, adding both style and stability to virtually any high heel and giving women the confidence boost they need to put their best foot forward.

Kickstands are much more than a footwear accessory. This is about empowering women everywhere to feel more confident in their stride and to be comfortable knowing we don't have to compromise comfort for great fashion.

In recent years, women have begun to abandon high heels, opting instead for wedges or flats that provide more comfort and stability. I wasn't ready to say goodbye to the pumps I love, because for me and many other women, wearing pumps gives us the strength and confidence we need to feel both





"I wasn't ready to say goodbye to the pumps I love ... wearing pumps gives us the strength and confidence we need to feel both powerful and feminine at the same time."

—MICHELLE JOHNSON, INVENTOR OF KICKSTANDS

powerful and feminine at the same time. That's where Kickstands comes in. With Kickstands, it's "high heels, low maintenance."

EGT: What are Kickstands made from? How are they packaged?

MJ: Kickstands are made from durable, high-quality elastic and rubber, are packaged in premium, soft-touch boxes with peekaboo pattern windows, and are shipped to customers from my home state of Minnesota. The minimal, portable design goes from purse to pumps in seconds.

EGT: Have you ever invented anything before?

MJ: I'm never short on ideas, but to date Kickstands is the only invention I have brought to market.

EGT: Where is the product manufactured?

MJ: Kickstands are made in the United States, using products and services from Minnesota and California. We have explored the possibility of manufacturing overseas but remain committed to domestic manufacturing so long as it continues to meet our production needs and quality expectations.

EGT: Please tell us about your experience with safety standards and regulations for Kickstands, since they are worn by the consumer. As a China sourcing professional, I'd be concerned about potential safety issues if the straps come loose.

MJ: Kickstands are strong and durable and designed for sustained, long-term use. However, as with every product, the potential for breakage exists. Our testing indicates the occurrence is rare, and safety issues for consumers are extremely limited. They are less problematic than a shoelace coming untied.

EGT: Please share your patent experience.

MJ: A visit with a patent attorney was first on my list when exploring the possibility of bringing this idea to market. I partnered with law firms in Minneapolis for patent/IP and trademark services. We have filed applications for both utility and design patents and have secured several trademarks.



EGT: What about product development?

MJ: Developing a product can be tricky for even the most experienced inventors, but it's often overwhelming for beginners. I encountered new challenges and issues at every turn. That said, I have also found that entrepreneurs and small business owners are among the most generous with their time and expertise, and so many people helped me navigate the ins and outs of the process involved in getting to market. I hope to have an opportunity to pay it forward someday.

EGT: Where are you selling now?

MJ: Kickstands are available at kickstands.com. We are currently exploring partnerships and distribution at major retailers. Wholesale pricing is also available for boutique owners who wish to carry Kickstands in their stores.

EGT: What is the retail pricing?

MJ: Kickstands retail for \$24. There are 13 styles across two collections—"Classic Collection" and "Limited Edition Collection"—and each pair features a reversible design with a solid color on one side and a complementary pattern on the other.

EGT: Any other inventions you might be adding?

MJ: Designer carry pouches are currently in development and will be available later this year. The Kickstands brand is all about adding style and comfort at every step, and my focus for future products will remain true to this commitment. Other foot-related solutions and accessories are possibilities for the future. Stay tuned!

EGT: Can you share any wisdom for novice inventors?

MJ: I cannot stress enough the importance of relying on experts in the areas of brand development, social media, web development, legal and related fields. If you're going to do something like this, you have to do it right. That takes deep pockets, a lot of patience, and nerves of steel. ☛

Details: info@kickstands.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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1 GET IT MADE

Contact Edie Tolchin – "The Sourcing Lady" (SM) for sourcing, China manufacturing, product safety issues, packaging assistance, quality control, production testing, final shipment inspections, freight arrangements, import services and delivery to your door!

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2 GET A WEBSITE!

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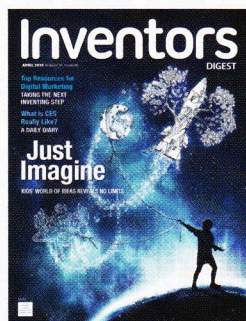
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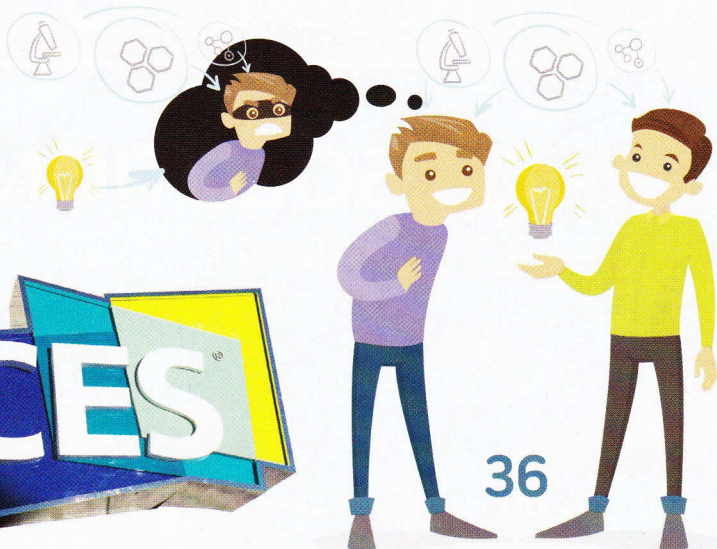
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