

# Inventors Council

OF MID-MICHIGAN

PO Box 232, Lennon Michigan 48449

Web Site: [INVENTORSCOUNCIL.ORG](http://INVENTORSCOUNCIL.ORG)

The Inventors Council is an independent, non-profit 501 C-3 corporation formed to help inventors pursue their dreams of bringing new and innovative products to market. Our goal is to help fellow inventors succeed in the most efficient and least costly manner possible by providing education and business networking.

Founded by Robert (Bob) Ross in 1995

We meet monthly at Walli's Restaurant, 1341 South Center Road Burton, Michigan. Just Two blocks south of I-69, Exit 139

VOLUME FOURTEEN

NEXT MEETING THURSDAY, June 10, 2010, 7:00PM

NUMBER SIX

## David Dowling of Yukon Seat Grip is our speaker tonight

### June 2010 Meeting

Our speaker tonight will be David Dowling. David is the founder and inventor of Yukon Seat Grip. It is a rubberized square washer that secures the bolt and keeps a toilet seat in place.

Going from real estate developer to inventor was quite a leap for David, but he did it and will be sharing his story with our inventors tonight.

The meeting will begin at 7:00pm in the upper level of Walli's Restaurant on Center Road in Burton.

### May 2010 Meeting

Rhonda Gelstein of VROMMERS gave us a great presentation about the creation of VDOMERS. She talked about challenges she faced and is still facing. Her story was one of promoting, selling, and developing her product line. We all learned a lot from Rhonda's story.

**New: "Single Step"** This will be an agenda item at each meeting. It will be called "Single Step" and will be asking the audience what step did you take to move forward this month. We will be asking for one item only. The longest journey begins with a single step and we want to encourage our inventors to take at least one step toward completing their invention.

It could be a sketch, working on a mock-up, doing a marketing search, attending a seminar, or networking with someone about an issue for your invention.

Be ready to stand up and tell the other members about your "Single Step" this month.

## Ideas vs. Inventions (Reprint from an Ed Zimmer article)

One of the major impediments to the success of independent inventors is a total lack of understanding of the difference between an *idea* and an *invention*. An idea is just a problem statement. An invention is a solution to that problem. Ideas aren't patentable -- only inventions are.

Assume, for example, that artificial Christmas trees didn't exist, and you've come up with the idea that an artificial Christmas tree might sell. People wouldn't have to go shopping for a new tree each year, they wouldn't have to keep it watered, or clean up fallen needles, and they wouldn't have the problems of disposing of it. And it would save trees, and relieve landfill clogging, etc., etc.

You feel this is a great idea, and you're afraid someone will steal it. So you go rushing off to a patent attorney (if you're lucky enough to miss the ubiquitous "Inventions Wanted" ads).

However, the attorney will inform you that you can't patent the *idea* of an artificial Christmas tree. You have to "reduce it to practice". What (and all) you can patent is an implementation of one, i.e., a design and construction that you work out.

So you go back and play around with different designs (in real or on paper) and finally come up with something that looks and feels pretty good to you. You rush back to the attorney, he does a patent search, and tells you it's "patentable". You tell him to go ahead, he gets a patent application filed, and you breathe a sigh of relief. Now you're "protected", and your fortune's made.

Friend -- you have a surprise coming! It's almost certain you've blown the time and money you've invested. You've let paranoia get in the way of common sense. In your fear of someone "stealing" your idea (and thereby losing you your golden opportunity), you've taken actions (and adopted a mind set) that virtually guarantees your loss of that opportunity. Yes, you've minimized some legal risk -- but at the cost of maximizing your business risk. That's a bad trade-off.

A better approach? Simply recognize the difference between an invention and an idea -- *and quit trying to protect ideas*.

In the case of your artificial Christmas tree, it's not your idea that may be saleable (or licensable) -- it's your implementation of that idea. You need to come up with a "winning" design. Unless you're extraordinarily skilled (or lucky), you need outside input to have any chance of doing so.

How do you find that input? Simply get out and talk to potential customers about the idea -- and listen to what they have to say.

But won't people steal my idea and go develop their own? Yes, there's a risk. But there's also a risk you'll get killed driving to work tomorrow. Let's look at that risk in the harsh light of reality.



## MARKETING

Hints from the Fog  
by Mike Ball, President



# Ideas vs. Inventions

(Reprint from an Ed Zimmer article)(cont.)

First, most people won't share your enthusiasm for your idea -- even if it's a good one. People mentally resist change -- they cling to the status quo. The overwhelming majority of people exposed to your idea will reject it out-of-hand. "It would ruin the spirit of Christmas", "I certainly wouldn't have one in my house", etc. The fact is your problem is more likely to be finding *anyone* who'll take your idea seriously enough to offer the input you need.

Second, the few people who may pick up on it and think it's a good idea are too busy to develop it themselves. There's a great deal of work required to go from an idea to a good design. They have their own priorities they're working on. Even if they think it's a promising idea, and want to be involved, why would they go charging off to do it themselves, or hire it done, when they have you chomping at the bit to do it for free? To save a 5% royalty? Get serious!

Let's look at what you lost in your first approach (of rushing off to the patent attorney), and what you gain in this approach.

In your first approach, after your attorney told you you needed a design, you went home and designed something. You probably recognized that its "realism" was important. So you played around with materials for the trunk and branches and bristles, and came up with something that looked pretty "real". And that's what you patented.

In the second approach, (hopefully) some of your contacts will talk with you. One of the first things you'll hear is, "This is a big, bulky item. How would you ship it? How would a store stock it? In fact, how would the user store it during the off-season?"

Oops! Maybe it has to be collapsible. Back to the drawing board, and you work out a design in which the branches are removable, and the user has to do a little assembly. And you may work out some methods for making the assembly a little easier and a little more fool-proof. And you may have to change some of your materials, e.g., use a springier material in your bristles so they'll pop back into shape after being crushed in the box. Now that you've got an answer to that problem, back to your contacts. Even with a verbal description. They're not interested in how you did it -- only with the end result. The next question you'll likely hear is, "Is it safe? Will it burn if there's an electrical short? How about a glass ornament that the sun shines through?"

Wow! If I make this thing inflammable, I've really got something! Back to the drawing board, some material changes, back to the contacts.

You get the idea. After you've cycled through your contacts (i.e., anyone who'll seriously listen), and satisfied their criticisms, or as many as you're able, that's the time you may want to talk with a patent attorney. And what do you want to talk to him about patenting? The features that provide the user benefits -- the removable branches, the springy bristles, the inflammability, etc.

Keep in mind that through this whole process, you haven't had to disclose how you did anything -- only the end result. For example, the "idea" of removable branches is not patentable. How you made them removable -- without compromising ease of assembly, sturdiness, etc., -- may be patentable.

Now which of these two approaches is more likely to result in a saleable (or licensable) product? You be the judge.

## Invention Review Panel

For objective evaluation and priceless feedback, share your invention ideas with an educated group of inventors, business owners, engineers and authors!

Our Panel will sign a non-disclosure agreement to guarantee your ideas are kept secret while we provide you with the input needed to make decisions, no matter what stage of the invention process you're at!

There is a \$25.00 cost for a review. The Panel meets at 6:00 pm before each meeting. Call Panel Chairman Marty Sovis at 810-659-6741 for an appointment.

Review Panel Members  
Marty Sovis Rick Mason  
Jim White Mike Wiley

**Bob Ross 1919 - 2004**  
*Inventors Education Column*

## Inventors Event Notices

**Invention & Idea Show 2010 -  
Minnesota Inventors Congress**  
Redwood Area Community Center,  
Redwood Falls, MN  
June 11-12, 2010

Test market your products. Sell  
your products from your booth.  
See web site:

[www.minnesotainventorscongress.org](http://www.minnesotainventorscongress.org)

## Patents and Trademarks 101

Saturday July 24, 2010  
Detroit Public Library  
Main Library, Friends Auditorium  
5201 Woodward Avenue  
Call (313) 481-1391 to reserve a seat  
[Bst@detroitpubliclibrary.org](mailto:Bst@detroitpubliclibrary.org)

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