http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-03-20/quirkys-ben-kaufman-gets-ge-to-share-its-patents

**The Design Issue**

**Quirky's Ben Kaufman Gets GE to Share Its Patents**

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*Ben Kaufman, 27, is founder of New York-based Quirky, a crowd-sourcing invention company—it builds, markets, and sells devices that have been proposed and worked on by its hundreds of thousands of users, or members. Among its best-known products are a flexible power strip and an egg tray that indicates when eggs are about to go bad. On March 19, Quirky announced its newest product, an air-conditioning window unit that interacts with smartphones. It was conceived by a Quirky member who used to work for the U.S. Department of Energy and built in collaboration with General Electric (*[*GE*](http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/snapshot/snapshot.asp?ticker=GE)*). Kaufman is also developing a platform to allow aspiring Quirky inventors to peruse patents from big corporations on its site and use them without getting sued—instead, the corporations get a cut. Imagine, for instance, someone realizing that GE’s turbine design would make a really nice blender.*

<http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-03-20/quirkys-ben-kaufman-gets-ge-to-share-its-patents>

Video of Kaufman describing his Hx and Quirky.



Aros: Made in collaboration with GE, the air-conditioning window unit interacts with smartphones

**What are some of the problems with the way patents are used now?**  
Patents have a rightful place, and they were invented for a reason, and that is to protect inventors and provide a source of inspiration for future inventors, right? And now they’re just sort of used as weapons of corporate warfare. So what we try to do at Quirky is put patents back in their place and use them as a source of inspiration for others vs. just as a reason to sue people.

Pivot Power: The power strip bends to accommodate any size plug

**How do you do that?**  
We have developed this thing called the Inspiration Platform, which allows people to use intellectual property of large corporations for noncompetitive use. There are hundreds of GE patents, for example, that have been put up there. Within a few weeks, we’ll have thousands of other patents from GE and hundreds from large institutions and universities and so on. We’ve basically gotten clearance ahead of time from these companies to allow you to use them.

**Who else besides GE is on board with this?**  
GE is the only one I can announce, but there’s a lot of new people joining very quickly.

**How are you able to persuade them to agree to this? I mean, often these companies guard this intellectual property pretty jealously.**   
By describing the fact that it has no material impact beside a positive one. There’s really no reason not to put your patents up and let people create noncompetitive uses from it. GE wants to protect their engine technology so that Rolls-Royce ([RR/:LN](http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/snapshot/snapshot.asp?ticker=RR/:LN)) doesn’t copy it, right? But they really don’t care if someone makes a ceiling fan with it.

**Are there instances where you guys have nonetheless gotten into lawsuits?**  
Yeah. I mean, we deal in ideas, right? So we have to be well-versed in IP [intellectual property]. We’ve had people copy Quirky’s products, for sure, and we’re happy to defend ourselves when that happens.