

Trends in STEM

The Invention of the Post-it® Note

While it is common practice for companies to apply for intellectual property protections when marketing a product, those able to use an Intellectual Property Triangulation® strategy — the earning combination of a design patent, a utility patent and a trademark — ensure maximum protection.

Aspects of this strategy were used by 3M when marketing the Post-it® Note. Co-invented by National Inventors Hall of Fame® (NIHF) Inductees **Art Fry** and **Spencer Silver**, the Post-it Note would go on to become commonly used in offices around the world.

Below is an excerpt from our white paper, “The Power of Intellectual Property Triangulation,” that begins with the story of how these two Inductees worked together to invent the Post-it Note.

Sticking with a good idea

In 1968, National Inventors Hall of Fame® (NIHF) Inductee Spencer Silver made a discovery that led to one of the most successful office supply products in history. At first, however, his findings did not appear promising.

As a senior scientist working for 3M, Silver was tasked with developing new, stronger adhesives. However, the sticky “microspheres” he invented were neither very strong nor permanent. Instead, these **indestructible acrylic spheres** were “strong enough to hold papers together but weak enough to allow the papers to be pulled apart again without being torn.” Additionally, the adhesive’s properties allowed it to be reused without leaving behind any type of residue.

While Silver’s reusable adhesive was undoubtedly unique, many within 3M doubted it could be used to create a viable product. “I’d spun my wheels a long time trying to find a product I could put my adhesive on,” Silver said in an interview with NIHF. “There was a bunch of them, but none of them were really that big or big enough to pursue, other than in a trivial way.”

Five years later, in 1973, a change in management within 3M allowed Silver to prototype a reusable bulletin board. However, the buildup of dirt and dust on the board itself made this idea **unfeasible**.

Everything changed in 1974, when NIHF Inductee Art Fry, a new product development researcher at 3M, was singing



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one night at church and wondered if he could make a
the page after remaining immediately in the background as
a presentation he heard Silver give about his new
microsphere adhesives. “So I made the bookmarks,” Fry
said in an interview with NIHF. “Well, it turned out that they
weren’t just bookmarks — they were really handy for self-
attaching notes, labels and tapes.”

Fry’s realization that Silver’s adhesive microspheres were perfect for creating temporary notes would prove revolutionary. Within 3M, their team began writing messages to one another using prototype notes and collectively **realized** that they were on to something big. Though not everyone in the company saw value in the idea, Fry and his team continued to advocate for their product and in 1977, the removable notes were released in four cities under the name “Press n’ Peel.”

At first, the reception was lukewarm, but thanks to a **massive marketing effort** that placed the notes directly into the hands of consumers, paired with a rebranding campaign that produced the now iconic “Post-it Note”

name, on April 6, 1980, Post-It Notes launched across the United States.

This time, the success was immediate thanks to the product's ease of use and **ability to promote itself**. "It was always a self-advertising product because customers would put the notes on documents they sent to others, arousing the recipient's curiosity," Fry said. "They would look at it, peel it off and play with it, and then go out and buy a pad for themselves."

Download our free white paper today

To learn more about the creation of the Post-it Note, and how 3M used aspects of Intellectual Property Triangulation to transform the product into one of the most successful office supply products in history, we invite you to read our free white paper, "**The Power of Intellectual Property Triangulation**."

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