

The Latest Inventions - Four Examples

Contributed by Steve Gillman
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You may have heard the story that in 1899 the head of the U.S. Patent Office urged President McKinley to close the office because "everything that could be invented has been invented." Even President Reagan told the story in a speech. It is actually an urban myth, believed only because it has been repeated so often. But it does suggest the question: "How many things can still be invented?"

{bot_wrgoogle}An infinite number is the correct answer in my mind. Anyone equipped with a few creative thinking techniques could come up with a dozen new types of chairs in a couple hours. They may be inventions only on paper, but multiply this times the number of possible items that can be reinvented and if only a small percentage of them are marketable... Well, you get the idea.

Then there are the things that have never yet existed. More than just innovations or improvement of existing things, these are entirely new inventions. For example, I recently received a gift from an inventor called the "Winner's Bank 200," which filled a need that has been here for a while. The size of a pack of cigarettes, it is a lockable bank that you put your winnings in as you gamble at your local casino.

Ideally, you slip a twenty-dollar bill into it whenever you win a little. By the end of the night you may have \$200 in it, allowing you to leave ahead. Oh, did I mention that you leave the key at home, so it is impossible for you to give your winnings back to the casino? Now, that's a great idea. Here are some more of the latest inventions.

A New Self Healing Plastic

A person's skin heals itself, but plastics don't - until now. Researchers Nancy Sottos and Scott White and colleagues at the University of Illinois developed a plastic that has capillaries filled with a liquid healing agent. If you scratch it or crack this plastic, it heals itself in minutes, and it can do this up to seven times in the same spot. There will likely be many applications for this invention.

Printed Computer Chips

At the Seiko Epson Corporation in Japan, Masahiro Furusawa and colleagues have created a printer that prints silicon chips instead of etching them. So far, it appears that it may be much less wasteful than the usual procedure, which throws away more than 98 percent of the silicon in the process of etching. It makes one wonder what else can be "printed."

Strain-Reducing Shock Absorbing Backpacks

Typical day packs and backpacks cause back strain in part because they bounce up and down as we walk. To solve this problem, Lawrence Rome and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania and the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole Massachusetts, have created a new suspension system. Normally, a five-pound load of books in a student's pack can pull on the shoulders with as much as fifteen-pounds of pressure when a person is running. Their new system cuts that in half, using pulleys and bungee cords. One version of the new backpack even uses that motion to create more than seven watts of electricity - enough to recharge an average cell phone.

These are just a few examples of the latest inventions. There are a million things waiting to be invented. To generate new and innovative ideas, one can look at needs that aren't filled, ways to improve things, and new ways to use existing technologies - and those are just three of a hundred ways to imagine new inventions.

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