

Issue 53 www.wrti.org.uk

Inventique®

The newsletter of Wessex Round Table of Inventors April 2005

— **INNOVENTION 2005 Friday 24 June www.sehea.co.uk** —

MAY DEADLINE LOOMS FOR INNOVATORS

INNOVATIVE COMPANIES and lone inventors have until Friday 13 May to forward their entries for *Innovation 2005*, to be held at the INTECH Centre, Winchester, on Friday 24th June. Selected entries will be invited to exhibit at the show, when winning ideas will be announced and awards presented.

With a £25,000 prize pool, *Innovation 2005* offers inventors and innovators from across the UK a golden opportunity to get their ideas out into the marketplace.

“Past *Innovation* participants have an excellent record for achieving their ambitions,” said Ken Teal of Wessex Innovation Service, organisers of the event.

Now in its 14th year, the show’s record of success is such that the event is usually over-subscribed.

● **Wessex Innovation Service**

Tel: 023 9244 9449

sehea@sehea.co.uk www.sehea.co.uk

Next WRTI meeting TUESDAY 12 April

A special club visit, sponsored by Jenton International, to the ‘Solent Sky’ Hall of Aviation in Southampton at 6.00 for 6.30pm (replaces our regular meeting). Includes a presentation by Squadron Leader Jones.

● www.wrti.org.uk/events
www.spitfireonline.co.uk

Map: www.streetmap.co.uk
(enter the postcode SO14 3FR)

He’s only here for the beer...

PASCALL PROFITS FROM HIS SIMPLE INNOVATION

WRTI’S erstwhile treasurer Brian Pascall has invented a simple-to-fit product guaranteed to reduce costs – and thus increase profits – in pubs, clubs, bars and restaurants.

Brian’s Beer-mag™ is a magnetic device which prevents the build-up of dead yeasts, sugars and similar debris from sticking to the inside of beer-lines and blocking the flow. The system’s magnetic field holds these in suspension, reducing the number of cleans required by 66%.

“Cleaning beer-lines is a major expense for licensees, who may have dozens of lines in a their bars,” said Brian. “I have already gained

clients who, for the £3,000 cost of a Beer-mag installation, are now saving in excess of £35,000 per annum on cleaning costs.”

The Beer-mag™ requires no electrical supply or maintenance, is easy to fit and pays for itself within a few months. The licensee benefits by saving time and money, without compromising the taste or quality of the customer’s pint.

The art of business

Brian, a founder member of WRTI, created a supermarket servicing company with a multi-million-pound turnover and branches across the UK. He also gained a considerable reputation as an artist when he retired to California in the 80’s.

Asked what he put the success of his new business down to, Brian said: “Everybody talks about getting a patent for their ideas – but nobody talks about just getting out there and selling the thing. Luckily, that’s what I’m good at.” ●

● **Fuel Dynamics Ltd. 28 Stafford Road, Southampton. SO15 5EA**

Tel: 023 8090 8193 Fax: 023 8048 0803

info@magnetic-innovations.co.uk

www.magnetic-innovations.co.uk

Kingston club launched

● THE INAUGURAL MEETING of the Kingston Round Table of Inventors will be held on Wednesday 20 April at 6.30pm at the Penhryn Road campus of Kingston University, whose academic staff have a history of company start-ups and business support.

● **Marie Withers, club secretary**

Tel: 020 8547 8605

inventorsclub@kingstoninnovation.org

kingstoninnovation.org/inventorsclub.asp

Wessex Round Table of Inventors meet at 6.30pm on the second Wednesday of each month at Southampton Institute, East Park Terrace SO14 0RP

FOR THE SECOND MONTH running, patent issues are again high on my agenda.

The UK Patent Office – and to an even greater extent the European Patent Office (EPO) – are our first line of defence against the copying of our innovative technology in other countries. To perform this function, the EPO must ensure that patents are novel, inventive and valid, and make well-informed decisions on surrounding issues so that infringers cannot compromise innovative European manufacturers.

But I attended an Opposition Division last month (where arguments were of a technical nature), and our side lost.

I can cope with losing – being poor at sports prepares one for such things – but I walked into that building in awe of the EPO and walked out absolutely stunned: the panel didn't appear to understand the technology being presented to them, let alone our detailed arguments. Nor did they appear interested in letting either side elaborate on arguments so that they could arrive at a well-informed decision. And perhaps more worryingly, one of the two-man panel was the same examiner who allowed the patent we were opposing through in the first place, so it is difficult to see how he could appear to be a truly independent figure.

If the panel did come to the right decision – something I obviously have serious reservations about – it would appear to have been arrived at more by luck than judgement.

We need the EPO more now than ever, but we also need them to make the effort to arrive at well-informed decisions – our livelihoods depend upon them doing so. But after my recent experience, the EPO seems to me more like a paradise for proceduralists.

Sincerely, Richard

● www.european-patent-office.org

RICHARD LITTLE, Acting Chairman

Small science, big fuss

NANOTECHNOLOGY IS SET TO BECOME THE NEXT 'GM SCARE', TO THE DETRIMENT OF TRUE DEBATE

Continued from last month

THE PUBLIC may be ill-served in the debate about nanotechnology by the groups that purport to represent them, *writes Tracey Brown*. It will not even be cast in the stage army role it had in the campaigns against genetic modification. In that 'debate', anti-GM campaigners had to make some effort to generate popular concern through the media before they presented their views as those of the public and used that as their entry ticket to policymaking.

With nanotechnologies, campaign groups have had to make no such effort. They have secured their place as mediators of 'public concerns' in the alphabet soup of official and semi-official science policy bodies from the outset (or 'upstream', as the think tank Demos called it in a recent pamphlet).

Democracy's fifth columnists

Such a desire to influence policy would be fair enough – we are all free to argue a case – but for the fact that the activity is presented as promoting 'public involvement', 'democratising science' and 'reinvigorating democracy'.

It is none of these. Indeed, it is difficult to think of a system that is less democratic and more open to abuse than having the voice of the public represented by pressure groups in consultative committees, commissions and inquiries. It produces neither better science nor better democracy.

Groups, such as Greenpeace, are hardly disinterested vehicles for public opinion. They are unrepresentative, and there are no means for voting them out, which is the bottom line of any democratic representation and the only thing

that forces 'representatives' to expose themselves to critical scrutiny.

As for promoting public involvement, negotiating 'upstream' about new technologies in the name of the public means negotiating in the absence of the public. It turns the debates into a safe game, where the pressure group agenda determines the limits of the debate, and people who have already decided which views count interpret the results.

Public opinion should be free to emerge (or not) from a less-structured airing as new developments come about. The contributions that really allow people to start thinking and talking about nanotechnologies come from the experienced scientists who try to explain the field. If we want the public to be interested in scientific research and its applications, then we need to hear more from them.

We should not simply assume that the public is insurmountably opposed to new science and rush to institutionalise new committees in its name. We should let the scientists explain the science and the public speak for itself. ●

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● Tracey Brown is the director of Sense About Science.

Tel: +44 (0)20 7478 4380

www.senseaboutscience.org

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- Nanotechnology is the creation and control of objects on nanometer scales.
- 1 nanometer = 1 billionth of a meter.
- The term 'nanotechnology' was first coined by Japanese engineer Norio Taniguchi in 1974.
- The Science Museum's free exhibition 'Nanotechnology: small science, big deal' is open to the public. www.sciencemuseum.org.uk

PROTECTING YOUR SHAREHOLDING-2

UNLIKE THE ARTICLES of association (or ‘articles’) of your company, a shareholders’ agreement – first mentioned last month – is a private document between the shareholders and/or directors-shareholders, writes Dr Rosanna Cooper. It sets out the issues that cannot be dealt with in the articles of the company (the shareholders’ agreement is governed by contract, whereas the articles are governed by statute).

One of the main problems tends to be identifying and agreeing on the roles and responsibilities of the directors and/or shareholders.

Another problem tends to be that certain individuals may only be able to devote a proportion of their time to the company – so how would you ensure that sufficient time is devoted to your business? As an inventor/innovator, for instance, you may need to bring in certain expertise (such as legal or financial advisers) and ‘pay’ for them in shares, especially in the early stages of your business.

In reality, if a shareholders’ agreement is not in place, any shareholder with a 51% shareholding can largely control the company, including removing another director.

It is usual practice once the shareholders’ agreement has been signed to revise the articles

ROSANNA COOPER CLARIFIES THE LEGAL POSITION FOR INVENTORS AND ENTREPRENEURS

accordingly, with a special resolution by shareholders holding 75% or more of the voting rights. The shareholders’ agreement may be amended by mutual consent.

Shareholdings

Broadly speaking, a shareholders’ agreement should cover the following:

- **Apportionment of shareholding**
How are shares to be divided between the shareholders?
- **Who is going to own the majority shareholding?**
- **The capitalisation and financing of the company.**
- **Transfer and allocation of shares**
When and how will the decision to allocate new shares be taken?
- **How many shares, if any, should be given up** in lieu of fees for the necessary professional services?
- **What percentage shareholding would be reserved for external investors?** There are certain times when, due to the extent of an

investor’s commitment to your venture both financially and otherwise, the investor would justifiably receive a sizeable shareholding. However, the company must be extremely careful not to give up control to an external investor (RT Coopers can advise you on how to keep control of your company when seeking external investment).

Joint Venture

Broadly speaking, a shareholders’ agreement should cover the following:

- **The objects and scope of the Joint Venture (JV)**
- **The capitalisation and financing of the company.**
- **Provisions for unwinding a deadlock if you have a 50/50 JV (see below).**
- **Termination of the JV.**
- **Any restrictive covenants on the company or participants.** ●

Continued next month

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● Dr Rosanna Cooper is a partner at RT Coopers, a commercial law firm focusing on inventors and business start-ups.

(RTC)
RTCoopers
Solicitors

5 Telfords Yard, 6/8 The Highway,
London E1W 2BS
Tel: 020 7488 2985 Fax: 020 7488 2102
enquiry@rtcoopers.com
www.rtcoopers.com

R&D Grants announced

The South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA) has announced that applications for the DTI Grant for Research and Development – to be known by the acronym GRAND – opened on 4 April 2005.

Grants in the form of funding awards are available for the research or development of innovative products and processes.

Four levels of awards are available, including funding of up to £500,000 of development project costs; up to £75,000 of research projects costs; and – for micro businesses employing fewer than 10 staff – up to £20,000 of project costs.

A Business Link Wessex Innovation & Technology Adviser will evaluate applicants’ ideas and submissions, and advise on

the preparation of the application to maximise the chances of successfully gaining an award (Business Link Wessex enjoys an unparalleled national reputation for gaining funding for its clients).

Telephone 08454 58 85 58 to discuss a potential application with an advisor.

● www.dti.gov.uk/rd
www.businesslinkwessex.co.uk

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE The Beermat Entrepreneur

No half measures

TOASTING THE DEFINITIVE START-UP BUSINESS BOOK

BEGINNING WITH sources of the best entrepreneurial ideas and taking the reader through to a large, flourishing organisation, *The Beermat Entrepreneur* is a rigorous, practical, step-by-step guide to starting and building a business, and is the UK's best-selling business title.

Subtitled *How to turn a good idea into a great business*, topics include:

- Are you an entrepreneur?
- If not, how else can you make a difference to a start-up?
- The first three things you must write down when you are discussing a great business idea.
- Sources of great ideas.
- How to get across the funding minefield.

"This book, for me, says it all," said Professor Sir Christopher Evans OBE, Founder of Merlin Biosciences. "It should become standard reading for all employees, managers and founders of start-up businesses."

Mike Southon helps entrepreneurs through Business Link and The Prince's Trust, and is chairman of Beermat Ecademy – the UK's premier networking group for entrepreneurs and start-ups. He is a visiting lecturer to Cass Business School, London Business School, Ashridge Management College and London South Bank University.

Novelist Chris West worked in PR and marketing on behalf of SMEs and co-founded Vantage

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

www.improb.com

The Annals of Improbable Research record some of the more ludicrous examples of research and also award the *Ig Nobel* prizes to honour people whose achievements 'cannot or should not be reproduced'.

Strategic Consulting, a consultancy for venture capitalists. He has also studied Transactional Analysis and its application to the workplace.

The Beermat Entrepreneur is now available in 12 languages. A new title by Mike Southon and Chris West, *The Boardroom Entrepreneur*, was published last month. ●

***The Beermat Entrepreneur: turn your good idea into a great business*, by Mike Southon and Chris West ISBN 0273659294 Published by Pearson Education £12.99**

● www.mikesouthon.com
● www.beermat.ecademy.com

Laser boost for computers

● AMERICAN PHYSICISTS have developed the first continuous laser from silicon. Haisheng Rong and colleagues at Intel recently demonstrated that silicon can produce very short pulses of laser light. The team has now modified the laser so that no light is absorbed by the silicon, producing a stable, continuous beam. The breakthrough solves a major headache for the future development of computers, which are

rapidly approaching a wall in terms of how quickly they can operate.

Silicon, which forms the basis of nearly every electronic circuit in computers, is normally no good for making lasers. As such, laser sources for telecommunications and optical recording are made from rarer metal compounds such as gallium arsenide. But as computers get faster, researchers know that electricity will not be the best way to move data around the silicon circuits. Instead, they want

light to do the job. The problem is that, until now, nobody has found a way to make silicon emit light.

Rong has solved this problem by using a technique called stimulated Raman scattering: laser light at a particular frequency is absorbed by the silicon crystal, which vibrates and re-emits the light at a lower frequency. This re-emitted light is amplified and produces the continuous laser.

● Source: *The Guardian*, 17 February'05
www.guardian.co.uk/life/dispatch

WRTI PATRON Trevor Baylis OBE ACTING CHAIRMAN Richard Little chairman@wrti.co.uk

ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN Professor Richard Penson deputychairman@wrti.co.uk SECRETARY David Milward secretary@wrti.co.uk

TREASURER Mike Overy treasurer@wrti.co.uk MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY Mike Overy membership@wrti.co.uk

INVENTIQUE EDITOR Frank Landamore editor@wrti.co.uk

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Edited, designed and produced by Frank Landamore, 42 South Way, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1LY on behalf of WRTI.