

In the Midst of a Revolution comes Innovation and Opportunity — Are “You” Seizing the Moment?

By Holly Gage

The advent of Metal Clay is dramatically changing the landscape of metal work and jewelry making. Changes are coming fast and furious — we are truly witnessing a revolution. This burst of creative energy has given birth to a world of opportunity. New tools and supplies are abounded and businesses are thriving in a recessionary economy.

During this dynamic presentation, Holly will discuss how metal clay innovators, pioneers and inventors take a mere idea and travel an uncertain road of trial and error, success and failure to invent new products and tools. The veteran, as well as the newcomer to metal clay, will learn just what it takes to see an opportunity and “seize the moment”.

Following are the interviews with some of the people that are taking advantage of the opportunities they have made available for themselves. The stories are personal and intimate describing medium sized businesses as well as individual artists. They speak of the intricacies of developing their products and very generously share it with rest of the Metal Clay community.

Linda Kaye-Moses

The Linda Kaye-Moses Doming Plates

Plumdinger Studio

<http://paradisecityarts.com/artpage/mixedmedia/lindakayemoses.html>

Phone: 413.442.6535

The LKM Doming Plates can be ordered from:

Whole Lotta Whimsy <http://www.wholelottawhimsy.com>

Rio Grande <http://www.riogrande.com>

Profile: Linda Kaye-Moses has been working full-time as a professional jeweler since 1978. Her work has been exhibited nationally in galleries and at juried craft shows.

1. What is your product and what is its function?

The Linda Kaye-Moses Doming Plates. The line of LKM Doming Plates, currently six styles, are brightly colored urethane forms with different shaped ‘domes’ or three dimensional shapes, as follows: Low Dome Round, High Dome Round, Narrow Oval, Cone, Cushion Square and Cushion Rectangle. Each plate has a series of the shape in graduated sizes. These tools are designed to be used as armatures to support drying metal clay hollow forms. Each plate is also color specific for ease of access on a workbench. She assumed that she needed them, so others working with metal clay would need them, too!

There are a number of designs for additional Doming Plates still waiting production. That should happen sometime this year.

2. What made you design this product? Did you see a particular need for yourself or others?

Throughout the years that metal clay has been available, metal clay artisans have searched for armatures that would offer dimensional support for the clay while it dried, helping to produce hollow forms, or at least forms with hollow elements. The armatures of the past have been haphazardly scavenged from a variety of sources including, but not limited to: eggs, ping-pong balls, plastic Easter eggs, light bulbs, etc. Linda felt that the time spent searching for the right armature could be better spent making work. She wanted to create forms that would allow artist to produce their work without time wasted searching for armatures.

3. Have you ever invented something before?

Linda has never invented anything before and all though her jewelry is inventive; creating jewelry is a different sort of creative act than designing tools.

4. What resources did you find helpful in developing this item? Please list company names or people and how they helped you.

Tevel at Allcraft was very helpful. Tevel is always interested in accommodating jewelry artists and new ideas for tools and equipment, so she suggested that Linda consult with Chris Ploof about manufacturing the tools. Chris is a jewelry artisan and a distributor of jewelry making tools and equipment.

Chris and Linda spoke and they reached a working arrangement that was mutually satisfying and, almost immediately began to design and produce the Doming Plates. Chris and his production staff were easy to work with. Linda sent designs in to them and they translate her 2-dimensional concepts into the 3-D products.

Linda had also contacted the people she knew at Rio Grande and contacted Tonya at Whole Lotta Whimsy. The process was much simpler for her and more personal, since she has been in the industry for a number of years. Networking really helped along with her work in the metal clay field.

5.How did you go about making a prototype?

Chris' factory made all the prototypes, sending them to Linda for final approval. Once she approved them, they went into production.

6.How did you go about testing?

After deciding that a particular form should be designed and made, tests were performed to see if the form actually supports the metal clay as it dries, releases easily from the form, and if the form was durable. All of forms had performed perfectly.

When they released four of the forms at the PMC conference in 2008, the forms were given to a few master metal clay artists, Maggie Bergman, Jeannette Ladenwirth, and Angela Baduel-Crispin to test. Patrik Kusek also performed testing after the conference. Everyone loved the forms, and offered feedback, so production began. Maggie Bergman is also experimenting with new uses for LKM Doming Plates, but has yet to submit her report.

7.Did you have success immediately or were there some failures? Please explain.

No failures. No moving parts, nothing to break, so no breakdowns.

8.How did you develop your marketing strategy?

Linda remarked the Metal Clay field marketing was pretty straightforward. She contacted several distributors, Whole Lotta Whimsy and Rio Grande among them. Between these two, we're pretty much selling out of each run.

- Where did you launch the product? As mentioned above, they launched at the conference in 2008.

- Did you send out Press Releases? None that she can recall. Metal clay artists began to use the Doming Plates and editors noticed. (She was just guessing about that process.)

- Where did you advertise? Nowhere

- Did you find anyone in particular that was supportive or helpful in the industry, in terms of marketing?

She has been very lucky to capture the attention of the editors of several magazines. The Doming Plates have received accolades from a number of sources, Lapidary Journal/Jewelry Artist, Art Jewelry, Metal Clay Artist Magazine, Adornment, and the MJSA online newsletter.

Though no one person was involved, the mechanism of the Yahoo Metal Clay online forum facilitated getting the information out to the metal clay community about the Doming Plates. Linda announced the availability and that created a lot of buzz.

Lorraine Davis was very generously and did a Presentation on metal clay tools at the MCWC last summer, and included the doming plates in her presentation.

Additionally, Angela Baduel-Crispin, used her prototype of the Cone Doming Plate to create a ring that has earned her a Second Place in the 2010 Saul Bell Design Awards competition in the Precious Metal Clay category, which will bring attention to the doming plates as well.

9.Was the product received well by the consumer?

Yes. Linda feels the use of the Doming Plates is obvious, nothing tricky or complicated, just an idea that suited a need. The colors are bright and easy to find on the workbench as well.

Once people see them or are made aware of the dome plate, they sell themselves. Linda believes there was a need and this has been borne out by the sales volume.

10.How long did it take to get the product to market from the initial conception of the idea?

6 months to the prototype and 8 months to the shelf.

11.Was there any problems/revisions needed to the product once it was released?

The only difference between the prototypes shown at the conference in 2008 and the final product is that the Doming Plates final surface is smooth and colorful.

12. What percentage of your business is this product?

Very small percentage of her "business" comes from these Doming Plates. She is a studio jeweler, working full time in that capacity.

13. Do you see your product having a long life span? Why or Why not?

The population of metal clay artists is constantly expanding and the need for well-made, essential tools is a constant. Linda believes that the Doming Plates are well designed and produced to be an indispensable tool, able to fit the need for construction of hollow forms and useful in other construction as well. It should have a life span in the metal clay arena as color shapers, tissue blades and thickness guides. All these tools are generic, that is, they can be used in a variety of ways to facilitate work with metal clay, and the LKM Doming Plates fit that description as well.

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Eric and Speedy Peacock The SpeedFire® Cone System

Metal Clay Supply

Metal Clay Guru

800.388.2001 or 903.586.2531

<http://www.MetalClaySupply.com>

<http://www.MetalClayGuru.com>

Profile: Metal Clay Supply provides a large variety of metal clay products to artists of all skill levels. They have been providing products in the metal clay industry since 2001. Metal Clay Supply is a division of a group of family businesses that began in 1896. The fourth and fifth generations of the family now run the businesses. They strive to provide good service and high quality products as well as invest time in innovating new and tools for the Metal Clay Community

1. What is your product and what is its function?

The SpeedFire® Cone System for Metal Clay, with an international patent pending.

It has proven to be an ideal firing method for the recently released Art Clay Copper allowing a hands free firing time of just 20 minutes without the risk of melting a piece and cumbersome task of holding a torch on the copper clay piece for 5 or more minutes. It can fire a larger of piece at one time than cannot be done with a torch.

2. What made you design this product?

The Peacock's wondered how they could develop a firing method without the hazards of melting in a cost effective way. The industry revolves around the firing process and the SpeedFire® Cone allows more people to enter the industry at a lower cost entry level. In addition, they wanted to come up with a product that produces quick predictable results. This has become a great first firing solution, but people who own kilns use it for a second firing solution regularly.

3. Did you see a particular need for yourself or others?

The Peacock's wanted to combine a quick and hands free product without the high cost of the kiln, and the speed that torch firing brought to the table.

4. Have you ever invented something before? Yes, the Peacock's strive to create new and innovative products to make the creative process easier and more fun. They also offer a variety of products by metal clay artists including Hattie Sanderson, Tim McCreight, Sherri Haab, Mary Ann Devos, Pam East, CeCe Wire, Celie Fago, Irina Miech, Jackie Truty, Jeanette Landenwitch, Carol Babineau, Katie Baum and more.

5. How did you go about making a prototype?

There was no product like this on the market. Speedy came up with the prototype, and Jo Peacock his partner modified it. Fire-proof fiber sheets sewed with stainless steel wire was fashioned into a cone to concentrate the heat. It was tested and it worked.

They approached a company who experts in cast fiber products to make the fireproof cone. They provided them with the specifications and the company made the molds. There were several modifications along the way such as changing the cone angles and height to really concentrate the head.

6. How did you go about testing?

Since they are certified MC artisans, in house testing was performed. They created silver pieces and put them on top and fired using torch firing instructions. The SpeedFire System has a pyrometer, so unlike a torch you can control the heat.

7. Did you have success immediately or were there some failures? Please explain.

There was immediate success with the final product because they redesigned it along the way. The only failures were in initially testing it, the pieces were getting too hot and that is when they equipped it with the pyrometer. The pyrometer solved the problem.

8. How did you develop your marketing strategy?

- Did you send out Press Releases?

Eric Peacock handles the marketing. E-mail blasts with opt in options and post cards to customers went out.

- Where did you advertise?

Ads appeared in Art Jewelry Magazine, Lapidary Journal Magazine, Glass Art Magazine, and Bead Magazines.

- Did you find anyone in particular that was supportive or helpful in the industry in terms of marketing?

Art jewelry did a review and their own testing. They also received feedback from metal clay artist, Hattie Sanderson, and use written quotes from positive feedback from their customers.

9. Did you find anyone in particular that was supportive or helpful in the industry in terms of marketing?

Art Jewelry's Jill Erickson was very supportive. Sherry Haab and Hattie Sanderson were very supportive in testing, while Sherry mentions the SpeedFire® Cone by name in her books.

10. Was the product received well by the consumer?

It was received very well by consumer and this is evidence by the competitors that now sell the SpeedFire® Cone System. They decided not to be exclusive because they will reach customers they might not ever see. So a bigger mission was to get it into the industry. Art Clay World, Rio Grande, and Whole Lotta Whimsy carry the SpeedFire® Cone. With the innovation of this product, a lot of people came into using metal clay because of the cost and ease of use. The Peacocks though it less selfish to grow the industry as a whole than be exclusive carriers of the product.

11. How long did it take to get the product to market from the initial conception of the idea?

It took 14 months from first concept, to product, and then onto the market

12. Was there any problems/revisions needed to the product once it was released?

None, the advantage of not putting anything out on the market that is half-baked.

13. What percentage of your business is this product?

This is unknown, because they have over 1200 products, but they do sell more of these than kilns.

14. Do you see your product having a long life span? Why or Why not?

They do see a long-term use of the SpeedFire® Cone System. They do not just use it and then grow to use a kiln; they keep it as another good firing option. No returns on the product are reported to date.

The speed fire mini developed from this product and it can't be over-fired and cannot burn the object. This is a great example of how one thing leads to another.

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Anthony Squillacci, Jr., President

The Riveting System

Metal Clay/Crafted Findings

www.metalclayfindings.com

www.craftedfindings.com

Phone: 401-305-3999

Toll Free: 888-999-6404

Profile: Anthony Squillacci is a toolmaker by trade, working with the family business, which started in 1966 making tools for metal forming. Anthony's job was to look for different markets for those tools. He found Metal Clay and saw a nature match for their business when he saw Doris King at a conference giving a demonstration on depletion gilding. This is a process done to sterling silver to remove the alloy from the metal leaving fine silver, allowing the fine silver to be embedding and fired in place.

Anthony saw a problem that needed to be solved and the idea for Metal Clay Findings was born. The company makes embeddable findings focusing on the most important part, the mechanic connection.

1. What is your product and what is its function?

The Riveting System was added to their line at the end of April 2010. One side of the tool pierces a hole, while the other side rolls a semi tubular rivet, which has a solid end and a tubular end, which flares over. This new tool allows the artist to avoid drilling, attracting people that don't like power tools and traditional hammer and pin riveting techniques.

2. What made you design this product? Did you see a particular need for yourself or others?

Anthony saw that artist in the Metal Clay community needed more tools to get the job done. He noticed that many people didn't use power tools and wanted to come up with an easier, cleaner, more direct way of riveting.

3. **Have you ever invented something before?** Yes, Anthony's family has been engineering tools since 1966. They pride themselves in their engineering ability, and understanding the mechanics and function a tool needs to perform, and building quality tools that will last a lifetime.
 4. **What resources did you find helpful in developing this item? Please list company names or people and how they helped you.**
Anthony's first concern was how would their findings and products be received by artists that like to do hand crafted work, would they accept the "manufactured" findings? Tim McCreight helped him through this concern and Tim introduced Anthony to Chris Darway who understood Metal Clay from a metal smith perspective. He showed off some of the new products at a conference and Chris used them for demonstrations in his classes.
 5. **How did you go about making a prototype?**
The idea for the Rivet System came about by studying the needs of artists and how is the present technique is now being done. What challenges are people dealing with, and by looking at the problem from an industrial perspective? The company needs to create a balance between industry processes and craftsman needs. After the need for the Riveting System was understood, they using drafting software, and brainstorming sessions to engineer the tool.
 6. **How did you go about testing?**
In general on most products consumer tests from artists in the field and internal testing is performed. They put the Riveting System on the market before key artisan tests were performed because they were confident of the function due to their strong engineer skills.
 7. **Did you have success immediately or were there some failures?**
The Riveting System was only on the market one week at the time of this interview – to early to report.
 8. **How did you develop your marketing strategy?**
An instructional YouTube video is embedded on their website. They also sponsored classes at Bead and Button. How to information makes their items better sellers.
 - **Did you send out Press Releases?**
Anthony sent out product reviews and PR to industry magazines. The person writing the article will test the products. They typically will not print a product review for items that do not perform well.
 - **Where did you advertise?**
Full-page ads in Bead and Button and Art Jewelry magazine.
 - **Did you find anyone in particular that was supportive or helpful in the industry in terms of marketing?**
Sherri Habb made sample jewelry which is displayed on their website.
 9. **Where did you launch the product?**
The Riveting System appeared on their website and in Bead and Button ad.
 10. **How long did it take to get the product to market from the initial conception of the idea?**
2 – 3 months
 11. **Was there any problems/revisions needed to the product once it was released?**
A customer suggested modifying the tool to pierce a ring blank, so he is off to do that.
 12. **What percentage of your business is this product?**
The metal clay findings side of their business represents 15% of their total business and growing.
 13. **Do you see your product having a long life span? Why or Why not?**
All products are designed to be around for life. The long history of doing riveting by hand suggests longevity of the product.
- Comments: Metal Clay has become a gateway into new product ideas and varied markets. The creativity of the artist community has been inspiring to Anthony. He attends shows and sees first hand how artists are using his existing products in new ways.
- Now many of the items made are being used in different mediums like polymer and lampworking. The idea of working with Metal Clay consumers has turned a business that's core customer was big manufacturers into working with the individual artisans as well. This change has brought new energy and excitement to the whole business.

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Hattie Sanderson
HattieS Patties®

Hattie Sanderson Art Studio
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Hattie@atcyber.net

Profile: Hattie Sanderson is an artist and instructor specializing in metal clay since 1990. Hattie is the creator of HattieS® brand products including instructional DVD's and many more products that enhance the metal clay creation experience. Before metal clay she had a career in graphics, taught 7 – 8 years fiber, polymer clay and simple metalsmithing. She found out about metal clay by read about it in a magazine. She then purchased Tim McCrieight's book and started working on her own.

1. What is your product and what is its function?

The product Hattie created that stands out most has to be HattieS Patties®. Not only have they had a big impact on the industry over the years, but also they changed the course of her life and work.

Have you ever invented something before?

HattieS Patties® are the original ring sizing inserts that control the shrinkage of silver metal clay rings during firing. It is the first product that she ever created.

2. What made you design this product? Did you see a particular need for yourself or others?

It was in early 2001 that Hattie began designing this product out of her own frustrations with ring making. It was very difficult to get consistent sizing due to many variables such as clay thickness, width, inclusions, etc. It was never her intention to be inventing a new product. She just wanted her rings to end up the right size after she had put so much design work into them. She worked on the concept off and on for about a year until she came up with a consistent product.

3.

What resources did you find helpful in developing this item? Please list company names or people and how they helped you.

Hattie used her background in graphic design and metalsmithing as her resource to come up with various ideas and prototypes. At that time, metal clay artists were very spread out and there was no Internet networking resources like there are today. So, she was pretty much on my own.

4. How did you go about making a prototype?

The first prototype was made by wrapping polymer clay around a mandrel and baking it to make a mold. She then filled the mold with plaster of paris. This worked somewhat, but it was very difficult to get out of the mold and the plaster shrunk during firing. However, it was a start and she kept testing various products and recipes until she came up with the idea of using a casting investment based recipe that would hold its size and shape during firing and then dissolve easily in water post firing.

5. How did you go about testing?

Testing consisted of firing the test recipes and keeping good notes of the results post firing. Once she felt like she had a pretty good product, she started using the patties with various ring designs to see if she could get consistent results.

6. Did you have success immediately or were there some failures? Please explain.

After about a year, she was making this ring-sizing product on an as needed basis for my rings. The product had no name. She thought that this product was working well enough for her that she would offer it to her students as an option to try. This is when the product took off. Hattie came up with the name HattieS Patties®. She sold the patties to her students and by word of mouth. Before she knew it, she had become a small time factory cranking out patties and filling mail order requests.

7. How did you develop your marketing strategy?

She had no marketing strategy. What was that? This product was taking on a life of its own (and taking over her life!)

Where did you launch the product?

The 2004 PMC Conference was coming up soon and she very sheepishly put in a request to give a presentation on how to get consistent ring sizing results with this product she had come up with. She was very fortunate to get a spot during the conference to speak.

- Did you find anyone in particular that was supportive or helpful in the industry in terms of marketing?

It was during the 2004 conference that she met Joe and Speedy Peacock, the owners of Metal Clay Supply. They formed a relationship and they became the manufacturer and distributor of HattieS Patties® and then later on other HattieS® products and instructional DVD's.

Being relieved of the manufacturing and distribution duties was a huge turning point. As her distributor, Metal Clay Supply took care of most of the marketing and the entire order fulfillment. She could once again take on a life as an artist and teacher. She does some of the marketing by running ads in metal clay publications as well as through my website.

8. Was the product received well by the consumer?

Yes. Of course, today you can make your own ring sizing inserts or purchase competing products. When the first competing products came out, Hattie admits it took a bit of getting used to that “her” idea was being duplicated. However, it was confirmation that Hattie had a good idea!

9. How long did it take to get the product to market from the initial conception of the idea?

About a year.

10. Do you see your product having a long life span? Why or Why not? Hattie is happy to say that HattieS PattieS® are still going strong and she believe they have staying power in the marketplace.

Comments: When Joe and Speedy Peacock approached Hattie at the 2004 PMC conference, they said she had a good idea. Timing was perfect; Hattie didn't want to be a manufacturer. Hattie started with a non-disclosure agreement and she got a registered trademark. They pay for everything by fronting all the money and then they worked out a royalty. Hattie advertises on her own, but doesn't have to. Hattie commented that it was a lot of work, and it was more about a passion, then getting rich. Hattie has approximately 25 products now available.

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Gwen Bernecker

Two Olives Photopolymer Plate Kit

Two Olives Studio

Website: <http://www.twoolivesstudio.com>

Phone: 610-772-1843

Profile: Gwen Bernecker is a Metal Clay artisan, metalsmith, teacher, and speaker. Her formal education earned her Bachelor's degree in Architectural Engineering from The Pennsylvania State University.

1. What is your product and what is its function?

Two Olives Photopolymer Plate Kit. Contains everything you need to create custom photopolymer plates using your own artwork – including half tones, photography and handwriting. The kit features a UV light, portable stand, exposure frame, a steel backed photopolymer plate, photo-negative transparency film for inkjet, and complete instructions. Requires 120V electrical outlet, water, basin, and soft brush.

2. What made you design this product?

Since first learning about photopolymer plate from Maggie Bergman, Gwen couldn't wait to make her own. She soon discovered that she had limited success with the process, and was throwing away more plates than she was keeping. Gwen was also frustrated that photopolymer plates for metal clay were limited to “Black and White Art – No Half-tones!” She knew that lithography wasn't limited to half tones – books and illustrations are made with photopolymer plates – why was this limited to black and white only?

The process she first learned was to expose the plates 3-7 minutes, and that there were risks of both under and over-exposure. What she discovered was the 3-7 minute exposures time came from the plate manufacturer and was based on very powerful, commercial UV lights.

The small ‘manicure’ and black light type systems did not provide enough radiation to properly expose photopolymer. Using a Stouffer gage to measure the results, Gwen was able to get to the desired result with 32 hours of exposure using a standard fluorescent black light. While it was good to achieve the right result, 32 hours just isn't reasonable in the artist studio. So she set out to find a better lamp. Something that would be more powerful than a black light or a manicure type light, but something less powerful than what was used for commercial printing.

Being married to a professor of lighting design, she knew where to go to get some help. Dozens of test plates later, she had a light that worked. For around \$125 and a two-hour time period, she could develop plates with infinite detail and get consistent results for creating half tones. For solid black & white art, exposure time was only 10 minutes.

3. Did you see a particular need for yourself or others?

Yes. Artists and students were always telling her they want to use their own artwork, photography and handwriting. It lends both a level of intricate texture to work, as well as a hallmark of originality.

4. Have you ever invented something before?

Gwen was the inventor on a patented system used to evacuate airborne infectious contaminants in operating rooms. The

system, known as CVAC, is installed at major hospitals in the US and internationally. She was honored with the Consulting Engineers Council Grand Conceptor award in 1993, as well as a governor's award from the State of Minnesota. U.S. Patents Number 5,264,026.

5. What resources did you find helpful in developing this item? Please list company names or people and how they helped you.

My husband is a lighting professor at Parson's School of Design. He agreed to help her determine the type of UV lamp that would approximate the requirements of the photopolymer plate manufacturers.

6. How did you go about making a prototype?

She shopped home improvement stores to find the best, low cost components. The bulk of the cost is for the lamp, but it is rated for over 7,500 hours of use.

7. How did you go about testing?

The testing was trial and error. Different lamps were tested with the Stouffer Transmission Guide. The exposure time, number of lights, type of lights and type of plate were all documented.

8. Did you have success immediately or were there some failures? Please explain.

Gwen thought she was done when she got the target results with the Stouffer gage, only to discover her plates weren't washing out completely. The light was so strong that it was going THROUGH the ink. Eventually, she found a printer and transparency film that was specific to photo-negative processes.

9. How did you develop your marketing strategy?

The system has been very popular with the BETA sales. By soliciting feedback from customers, Gwen completed the technical instructions – with photos – including artwork, setting up the kit, developing, using, cleaning and storing. This product will be distributed beginning this summer

10. Where did you launch the product?

The BETA launch has been through limited sales at conferences and trade shows. The official launch is Summer 2010.

- Did you send out Press Releases?

The distributors will handle marketing.

- Where did you advertise?

The distributors will handle advertising.

11. Was the product received well by the consumer? Yes.

12. How long did it take to get the product to market from the initial conception of the idea?

It has been about 2 years.

13. Was there any problems/revisions needed to the product once it was released?

We found a lamp we liked better early on into the process, so we replaced the existing lamps that had been sold.

14. What percentage of your business is this product?

I have only sold this during shows. For the weeks following the shows, fulfilling orders took 100% of Gwen's time, so she hired people to help. Her house turned into a warehouse. She looks forward to handing this to distributors so she can return to the studio.

15. Do you see your product having a long life span? Why or Why not?

Yes, Gwen thinks there will be a very long life for this product. Photopolymer plate technology holds a lot of possibilities for artists. Anything from a photograph, to handwriting, to textiles can be transformed into 3 dimensional art. You can take your child's handwriting, reduce it, and make jewelry! It adds a fantastic level of personalization and originality. Anyone can buy pre-made textures, but this is truly your OWN artwork. She thinks that the use of photopolymer plates with clay will continue to evolve as we are just on the brink of it all.

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Name: Mardel Rein

Cool Tools

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Phone: 888-478-5060

Bio: Mardel Rein is a metal smith, metal clay artist and the creator of the Cool Tool brand of products. Before starting Cool Tools, Mardel was a technical illustrator and graphic designer. For a few years, she handled all the design and graphic work for motivational speaker, Terry Cole Whitaker through the advertising agency she worked for in San Diego, California. But jewelry making was her

true passion, and she spent every spare minute working with beads, wire and silver. At 16, a neighbor introduced her to the basics of working with silver, so when in 1999 she heard about an amazing substance called metal clay that made working in silver as easy as ceramic clay, she signed up for the first class she could find.

1. What is your product and what is its function?

Mardel designed the Integrated Findings Template so metal clay artists could create findings, connectors and bails that are a part of the finished piece.

2. What made you design this product?

Mardel did not like the look of embedded wires and findings in metal clay. Embedded wire or findings do not shrink during firing, leaving a visible lump where it is embedded. They often have a different look and feel than the rest of the piece and just don't match the way she'd like. Embedded wires can look amateurish in the finished piece and do not always offer the strength needed for the job they are being asked to do. Mardel wanted to find a way to help people make good looking, strong, findings that were a part of the finished piece so nothing had to be embedded or pasted on.

3. Did you see a particular need for yourself or others?

Mardel wanted to give metal clay artists an easier, less expensive, more elegant solution to adding findings, connectors and bails to their metal clay work.

4. Have you ever invented something before?

Mardel's first product under the Cool Tools brand was Texture Tips. Uninspired by the oversized, grungy rubber stamps provided by the instructor, Mardel went home after her first Metal Clay class and carved artists erasers into jewelry sized texturing tools and hand-carved textures so she could make original designs. Her classmates loved her mini-texture tools (she says they got to use them more than she did), and she realized she might be able to turn her little erasers into a product that would give metal clay artists more design options.

She was afraid that her idea might not be good enough, so she put it aside for several years. She couldn't get the idea out of her head and nobody else had come up with anything like it, so she invested \$5000 to develop the product idea in 2003 and introduced Texture Tips in 2004.

5. What resources did you find helpful in developing this item? Please list company names or people and how they helped you.

Mardel was able to develop the Integrated Findings Template by making prototypes from a plastic sheet and a craft knife, refining the idea and the shapes by trial and error.

6. How did you go about testing?

Mardel tested the Integrated Findings Template by using it with metal clay, making subtle adjustments to the design until she was satisfied with the results.

7. Did you have success immediately or were there some failures? Please explain.

Making changes to the design would have been expensive, so Mardel spent extra time to be sure the design was just right before going into production.

8. How did you develop your marketing strategy?

Mardel introduced the Integrated Findings Template at the 2010 Bead&Button Show followed up by display advertising and email product announcements. She also provided samples to various magazines and metal clay artists to test.

9. Where did you launch the product?

Mardel introduced her Integrated Findings Template at the 2010 Bead&Button Show. (This is handled in the answer above)

- Did you send out Press Releases?

Mardel sent press releases following the Bead & Button Show.

- Where did you advertise?

Mardel placed online ads in Google and Yahoo, print ads in Bead & Button, Jewelry Artist and Art Jewelry magazines.

- Did you find anyone in particular that was supportive or helpful in the industry in terms of marketing?

Metal clay artists have always been a great support for Cool Tools products. They let Mardel know what they like and don't like about a product so it can be refined and improved. They also spread the word about a new product through social media when they like something, and the Integrated Findings Template has received overwhelming support from the community.

10. Was the product received well by the consumer?

The Integrated Findings Template looks wacky, and most people did not understand how to use the template. When demonstrated, people were thrilled with the product, so Mardel created a video to show the unique way she uses her template.

11. How long did it take to get the product to market from the initial conception of the idea?

Mardel spent about 2 months testing and refining the design, and manufacturing took about 1 month. She says she could

have used a desktop CNC router to create the template in house in a matter of minutes, but she would have had to use a material that she did not consider appropriate for the design and had a relationship with a company who was producing all of her distinctive blue templates and decided to stick with them rather than purchase CNC equipment.

12. Were there any problems/revisions needed to the product once it was released?

Mardel was very disappointed when her Integrated Findings Template was knocked-off and credit for its creation taken by another company only days after it's introduction. She says that this is one of those unfortunate things are looked upon in the business world as "just business".

13. Do you see your product having a long life span? Why or Why not?

Mardel believes that this innovative product and the techniques she developed for working with it will have a long and useful life in the metal clay, polymer, glass and ceramic clay community because it's so simple, inexpensive and useful.

Holly Gage of Gage Designs has a pioneering spirit that allows her to explore unusual methods and materials, develop new techniques, and teaching her findings to others who possess a similar curiosity and a thirst to learn. She is a full-time contemporary jewelry artist, certified metal clay instructor in PA, and conference speaker. Her jewelry and articles can be found in over 35 regional and national publications. You can find more information about Holly's jewelry and awards on her website at <http://www.hollygage.com>.