

TOP INNOVATORS

Air is the result. It dries in two to four hours, and Patterson claims it is the lightest men's underwear ever created. The underwear weighs an average 1.5 ounces, and the undershirt 2.0 ounces. "It's half the weight of any product we've created previously."

"Our customer, the Tommy John guy, likes evolution, innovation. We're never going to be the cheapest, but we're going to be the best quality, and that allows us to build really high customer loyalty," says Patterson. "Guys always want to feel that they have an edge. We pay attention to the small details we think may make a difference. ... We work with manufacturers and mills across the world to solve problems we feel are in the market that other brands haven't told a story about."

That said, "we don't launch a new product unless we have a reason to," says Patterson, who says the company doesn't subscribe to the "Cheesecake Factory menu" philosophy, i.e. there are so many choices that it takes forever to figure out what you want. Tommy John sticks with a strategy more resembling the menu of In-N-Out Burger — a limited number of offerings, but each the very best. "We have the best micro modal, the best cotton," he says.

Indeed, Tommy John is definitely not your five-to-a-pack underwear. Its undergarments are sold in units of one at retailers such as Bloomingdales, Nordstrom, Mitchell's, Stanley Korshak and about 500 other stores across the country and Canada. It also sells online, and ships to more than 50 countries.

Tommy John has clearly struck a chord, with the company growing two and a half times in the past two years, and forecasting 100 percent growth this year. "Men have had to take a MacGyver approach to jerry-rigging their underwear. ... I've heard of guys attaching garter clips from the bottom of their shirts to the top of their socks to keep them in place.

"Men don't talk about [the challenges of undergarments] ... and they can't even remember the underwear they're wearing, but they remember the first time they wear Tommy John. When they try it, it's an 'a-ha' moment: 'Hey, this is not constricting or smashing my important assets.' Guys don't like to feel restricted.

We're getting guys to talk about underwear at holiday parties, at dinners. They've found something that has finally solved all of their problems," Patterson concludes.

— Jordan K. Speer



CCW Breakaways

New Cumberland, Pa. | www.ccwbreakaways.com

NOMINATED BY: Self



We can't all have 007's tailor, but thanks to CCW Breakaways, law enforcement, military and security personnel have new clothing options specifically designed with them in mind. Specially designed concealed-carry pants from CCW Breakaways are also available to the general public.

Aimed at a very particular market, the CCW designs are the result of extensive research and experimentation. The pants are fashionable and well made, and they incorporate a unique holster pocket that allows for less conspicuous and more comfortable carrying of weapons. The products are used in the military and for law enforcement, and they're especially useful in "covert" situations where carriers wish to remain inconspicuous.

The design of these garments is so unique that the designers, Jay and Georgeann French — both certified NRA instructors — have obtained five related patents. These are men's pants with built-in holster pockets made of rip-stop nylon that have adjustable depth, Velcro straps and enlargeable openings. Basically, they're designed to make carrying a handgun more comfortable and accessing the weapon faster and easier, with only one hand needed.

These pockets replace the traditional holster, which hasn't seen much change in design over the years.

This update improves comfort and performance, and the products available include shorts, cargo pants, khakis and jeans. The wearer can comfortably squat, sit, bend over, or lie down, thanks to the placement of the breakaway pocket.

In addition to better comfort, CCW Breakaway's products give the wearer a tactical advantage. Concealment is more complete, and deploying the weapon is much faster than with conventional holsters. According to Jay French, this deployment is "pre-staged," because the weapon's position is more accessible, allowing the user to obtain a full grip while the weapon is still concealed.

These concealed carry pants are a prime example of a product developed to solve a specific problem. The design is unique and use of the pants has been shown to reduce draw time by as much as 60 percent. The company reports that its customers can deploy their weapons in .66 seconds.

In business since 2010, the company continues to add new products, including belts and other accessories. Plans include production of a ladies' purse for the near future. The products are currently available online and at specialty events held around the country.

— Liz Hartnett



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COVERSTORY

This year’s crop of Innovators is on the front lines when it comes to harnessing technology to please their customers and make their businesses run better. In the profiles that follow, you’ll learn how companies are innovating in a multitude of ways, from new product ideation, to tapping into data to improve fit and maximize fabric yield, to refining garments for particular professions, to embracing BI for greater insight into supply chains and inventory, to forging new digital strategies and much, much more.

BY JORDAN K. SPEER, JESSICA BINNS, DEENA M. AMATO-MCCOY AND LIZ HARTNETT

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