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For good measure: American firm scoops China to make Easton man's invention

By [Nancy Doniger](#) on February 16, 2014 in [Connecticut](#), [Features](#), [Lead News](#), [News](#) · [2 Comments](#)

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Drew Pickering Jr. credits his girlfriend, Victoria Wood, with supporting him every step of the way. They share a quiet moment with their daughter, McKenzie, 6, on a recent sunny Saturday morning.
Nancy Doniger photo

When Drew Pickering Jr. of Easton sees a problem, he seeks to solve it. What sets him apart from most problem solvers is that he knows how to make products to get the job done.

After making a mess while attempting to add a supplement powder to his water bottle after a July 16, 2003, workout, he knew there had to be a better way, and he set out to invent one.

The idea for a pouring scoop to deliver the exact amount of powder into a thin-necked container was born. "I came up with the idea coming out of my friend's gym," he said.

It didn't take long to get things rolling. On Sept. 15, he made the first prototype for the Scoop E-z at his father's machine shop. From there he went all out to produce and market the scoop. It turned into a 10-year project strewn with roadblocks all along the way. But his ambition paid off.

This month Mr. Pickering contracted to produce 2.5 million scoops. Contracts have been secured from GNC and Vitamin World, with many more in the works.

"We made our first shipment last week to Gamma Labs," he said. "They put our scoop into their powdered workout formula, G Fuel."

He hopes that is just the start.

The scoops have windowed and curved handles to allow excess powder to fall back into the container. Their fluted necks make it easy to pour powders into a



bottle of water or other vessel. They work well for individual-cup coffee makers without having to use pre-packaged coffee, and for adding baby formula to bottles, Mr. Pickering said.

The Scoop E-z is being manufactured and marketed by National Measures in Minnesota. But despite the fast-track beginning, the road from prototype to mass production was a hard-rock road.



Drew Pickering Jr. demonstrates how to use his Scoop E-z in his Easton kitchen. Nancy Doniger photo

Mr. Pickering, 41, is no stranger to adversity. Over the years he owned and operated a tool and die shop in Stratford, but during the manufacturing downturn he lost a lot of orders to China and ultimately lost the business. He had to reinvent himself. Molto Bene, an Italian restaurant and catering business in Ansonia, is among his many enterprises.

To China and back

Once he got the scoop out of the prototype stage, he had to have molds made. The first ones were aluminum and were for short runs. The next ones had to be better — and exactly what he needed — because they were costly.

He was on the way to Bristol-Meyers Squibb for a meeting about the scoop going into baby formula and struck up a conversation with a man on the plane. They started chatting about the book he was reading, *First in Thirst*, by Darren Rovell.

"I had worked with Darren's father and the book was about Gatorade being first to the market and how it became Gatorade," Mr. Pickering said. "The guy next to me on the plane was in that business making plastic injection parts for that industry, and I showed him the scoop."

The man, Brian Jones, worked at Seitz Corp. in Torrington. When Mr. Pickering got back he went to see Mr. Jones, he said, and they started making arrangements to have molds made. He had three sizes and would need two single-cavity molds, but he didn't have \$60,000. So company officials showed him literature about their new plant in China where he could get the molds made for \$8,000 each.

Since his tool and die shop was barely holding on at the time, it was hard to invest the time and money to go to China, but he wanted to see what it was all about, he said. He had parts off the molds in five weeks. He ordered 50,000 of each size and started packaging the retail three-packs himself.

At this point he got his product into GNC, which has 7,500 stores, and thought it was going to take off, he said. He started looking for a company that could make the parts and package them in China.

He found a firm and bought three eight-cavity molds and ordered 30,000 three-packs. He priced the molds here in the United States, and they were \$125,000 each — \$400,000 after troubleshooting.

"I got all three molds made in China for \$30,000," he said. "That was such a huge difference in price I couldn't not do it. But then quality dropped and lead times were six months out, and they couldn't do short runs. It was a nightmare. I couldn't get parts and I needed them."

He ended up having the molds shipped to the United States. Meanwhile, he called some local molders to get pricing and found he could get them made for less than what he was paying in China by the time he calculated freight, customs and long lead times.

Things started looking up. He talked with all the people who had helped him along the way and asked what they thought about going to the largest scoop manufacturer in the United States and showing it the product.

"I would make less of a margin, but they have all the customers," he said.

He called National Measures in Minnesota, and the rest is history. The product went live the first week in February. National Measures has the molds and runs and maintains them; the company then takes the orders, ships the scoops and pays Mr. Pickering. It's a simple manufacturing agreement, not a license, he said.

His website, scoop-ez.com, sends customers to National Measures, and the company's website has all of Scoop E-z's information. Mr. Pickering still manages the three-pack retail business, but the wholesale business is managed by National Measures.

He started the patent process back in 2004 and received his utility patent, US7441676 Device for Dispensing Media, in 2008. He contracted with Edwards Wildman, a large Fairfield County patent firm, to do the job. Three other scoops have entered the market, which he plans on taking action against. He filed a case in federal court against one of them for full infringement.

Formerly of Shelton, Mr. Pickering moved to Easton four years ago with his girlfriend, Victoria, and daughter McKenzie, 6. They live on Judd Road in a sprawling former horse stable, converted into a home and office.

Mr. Pickering credits his father, Drew Pickering Sr., with teaching him everything he knows about making a product and bringing it to market. He gained the rest of his education from the Connecticut Tool and Die Apprenticeship program, from working for a customer for a few years and from a think tank of advisers who have been with him every step of the way, he said.

The members of his think tank include his father; his sister Nicole Fitzgerald, of Oxford-based I-Design, who designed the Scoop E-z packaging; Yale engineering lecturer Henry Bolanos, who helped with product development; and associates Dana Cotes, who helped with product design, and Joe Keenan on the sales side.

"But most important is Vicky, my girlfriend," he said. "She has been with me for over seven years, trying to get this thing off the ground. She supports me with all the ups and downs that come with launching a product."

He said he loves Easton and everything about it and gives high marks to Samuel Staples Elementary School, where McKenzie is a student.

The Scoop E-z is just the start and will pay the way for a lot of other inventions waiting in the pipeline if things go as planned, Mr. Pickering said.

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