



## Inventor of the Week

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#### The BraBall

It may sound like a trivial problem to some, but many women know that when you put a bra in the washing machine you have a pretty good chance of seeing it come out with unsightly lumps and bumps, punctures, and wrinkles that are virtually impossible to get out. When that happens, women are forced to wear the bras with their imperfections, or simply toss them out and hit the store for replacements.

This, of course, is impractical, and can become maddeningly expensive. As a result, many women resort to the time-consuming process of hand-washing their pretty, pricey bras when they can, but the chore quickly wears on the washer.

Vietnam native Kieu Phan became frustrated with this regular occurrence and decided that enough was enough. She set out to find a better way, a way that would allow women to wash their bras easily in the washing machine, with handwashing results.

She began tinkering with wire sheets and tape to come up with a device that would allow bras to keep their shapes when tossed into the washing machine and be held firmly in place while being washed. That way, she thought, when they came out of the machine they'd look exactly the way they did when they went in.

Phan worked hard for nearly four years, testing prototype after prototype until she had come up with the perfect form, a bright blue, plastic, ball-shaped cage that opens and snaps closed after you place a brassiere inside and put it in place with the cups against rounded molds that help them hold their shape. She enlisted the help of engineer Jack Lander to help her develop the device, which she dubbed the BraBall and for which she was issued U.S. Patent No. 6,742,683.

Meanwhile, Austin, Texas, resident Phan pursued a degree at the University of Texas, Austin's, McCombs School of Business. When she felt she had a marketable product on her hands, she took a break from school to start Phantastic Innovations, Inc., to manufacture and distribute the BraBall.

She sought help from [AsktheInventors.com](#), an organization that aims to help first-time inventors get their creations from concept to market. She learned a great deal about the importance of marketing and licensing and set up a Web site where consumers may purchase the device directly, or stores may place wholesale orders. (See [BraBalls.com](#)). The BraBall is also available via Amazon.com, and in retail stores in Canada and in the states of Arizona, Washington, Oregon, Minnesota, and California.

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As of this 2008 writing, Phan serves as President of Austin-based Phantastic Innovations. She markets the BraBall to consumers not only as a laundry device but also for travel use, to help prevent bras from getting crushed in customers' luggage. So far, the results of her efforts look promising. As one of her recent customer testimonials reads, "Girls, this is a must-have. My bras come out clean and in perfect shape!"

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