

FAST COMPANY

MARCH
2009

the
world's
MOST
INNOVATIVE
COMPANIES



50



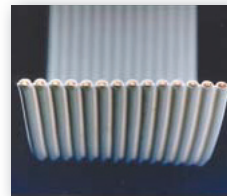
Even in these tough times, surprising and extraordinary efforts are under way in businesses across the globe. From politics to technology, energy, and transportation; from marketing to retail, health care, and design, each company illustrates the power and potential of innovative ideas and creative execution. These are the kinds of enterprises that will redefine our future and point the way to a better tomorrow.



W.L. Gore & Associates



Plastics, indeed. Gore has spun a fortune from constantly reinventing the polymer polytetrafluoroethylene. In its 50th-anniversary year, the \$2 billion-plus private company is on pace for record revenues and profits. How does it do it? “We start at the top of a market and work our way down,” says Jack Kramer, global technology leader and a 26-year Gore veteran.



1958

Gore is born in the founder's basement. Its first product: Multi-Tet insulated wire and cable, used primarily in the defense and computing industries.



1976

The company's best-known product, Gore-Tex fabric, first goes on sale as part of tents and rain gear.



1992

Gore's next big consumer breakthrough: no-shred dental floss. Gore sold Glide to Procter & Gamble in 2003 but still manufactures the fiber for the floss.



2001

The medical division releases the Helix Septal Occluder in Europe, Africa, Australia, and South America to treat atrial-septum defects in children, which would otherwise require open-heart surgery.



2008

InLighten Made not with fiberglass or metal but a plastic polymer, inLighten window screens not only let more light in but also are easier to clean. The most common size is three times more expensive than a traditional screen, yet vendors such as Pella are selling them in bunches. Fire-resistant material This still-unnamed product is a flame-retardant laminate that greatly reduces heat transfer, is self-extinguishing, won't melt on the skin, and can add fire resistance to nylon or polyester without losing their benefits. Optifade To create a camouflage for high-end hunting-gear maker Sitka, Gore researched how deer and other ungulates see. The result combines a macropattern to break up symmetry with a micropattern that lets the wearer blend into the background.



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