

A TEST

Promote a Pencil Sharpener That Will Change the World

I was once asked to write corporate communications content to promote an exciting new invention of monumental importance that promised a transformational impact ...

... a pencil sharpener

Actually, this was a writing test required by a prospective employer. In this assignment, I was asked to write an intranet article about a fictitious product for the employees of a fictional company, as well as a letter from their CEO and a press release – all positioning their new pencil sharpener as a breakthrough invention.

Here are the brief parameters I was given:

SCENARIO & INSTRUCTIONS

Your client (PencilPoint) has just invented an exciting new product, an electronic pencil sharpener, and would like you to develop new marketing and communication materials for this product. As such, your job is to draft the following materials to highlight this new invention:

- 1) A letter from the CEO (Christine Williams) that indicates the transformational role this new invention will play in the company's future
- 2) A press release from the company about the invention
- 3) An article for an online employee newsletter

In addition to creating a fictional company with fictional executives talking about a fictional product ... I incorporated some real-world facts I found on my own –

2 billion pencils sold in the US

82,000 trees annually required to produce those pencils

Global pencil sales revenue nearly \$3 billion annually

Global pencil sales actually rising by as much as 4% per year during this decade

(Notes to Editors)

— I adhered to AP style in the formal press release

— I deliberately deviated from AP style within the letter from the CEO and the intranet article for the sake of writing in a personal conversational voice.

All in all, it was an odd little lark that gave me a chance to demonstrate how to accomplish the seemingly impossible task of glorifying a pencil sharpener.

It's a quirky read, but I hope you enjoy it.

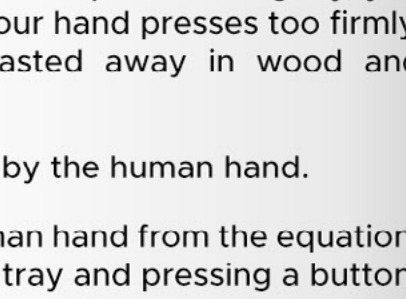
POINTS OF INTEREST

The PencilPoint Online Employee Newsletter

Our New Secret Weapon to Conquer the World

The designers, technology specialists, and engineers working in our third-floor R&D Department don't consider themselves mad scientists. They instead picture themselves in the role of "Q," the tech wizard who provides James Bond with all those cool gadgets.

Some of you have heard rumors. But we can now reveal the whole story behind the breakthrough invention our wizards have produced. With this new device, PencilPoint will surpass our competitors, corner the market, take a bigger slice of a \$3 billion global business, save the forests, and give us all greater job security.



This amazing new invention is ...
"drum roll" ... the SmartPoint Electronic Pencil Sharpener

Excuse me, what did you say?

As you read this, most of you are scratching your heads and thinking, "How can adding another pencil sharpener model to our product line change my world?"

Indeed, most workers in the offices we supply give no thought to the pencil sharpener. Our electric pencil sharpeners are practically invisible, making no impact on anyone's work day. So, it's understandable that you would ask, "What makes this 'SmartPoint' stand out?"

The SmartPoint pencil sharpener is not just electric ... it's electronic.

Here's the problem



The hand-crank pencil sharpeners your grandparents used in school, and the electric pencil sharpeners you grew up with have what our R&D experts call "a Goldilocks problem." You either sharpen too little, or too much. If your hand presses the pencil into the sharpener too lightly, you still have a dull pencil point. If your hand presses too firmly, too much of the pencil is wasted away in wood and graphite shavings.

It's your fault. The problem of too little or too much force is caused by the human hand.

The SmartPoint Electronic Pencil Sharpener removes the fallible human hand from the equation. Using the SmartPoint is as simple as placing a pencil in the receiver tray and pressing a button. The tray then gently guides the pencil against the sharpening blades with the precise amount of force calibrated by an internal computer chip. At the same time, a laser sensor measures the changing shape of the pencil tip until it becomes a mathematically precise cone. At that point, the motor immediately stops. This entire process takes only three seconds.

Our Chief Science Officer Raj Patel related the difficulty of talking to people about the SmartPoint. "When I try to explain this project I've been working on for the past year to people inside or outside the company, they look at me like I'm crazy. They say, 'You're building a 21st-century device with a computer chip and a laser just to sharpen a pencil? Why would anyone buy such an overkill contraption?'"

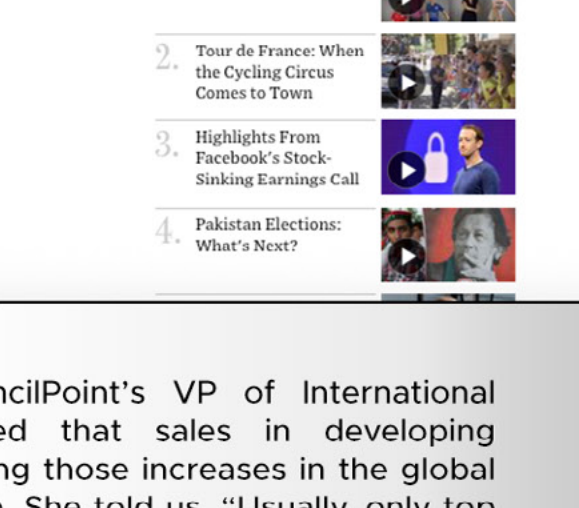


The SmartPoint offers two benefits that make it all worthwhile.

- One end result the SmartPoint delivers to the customer is an impossibly sharp pencil. The graphite tip is so narrow you can't see it without a microscope. It measures as little as 2 microns wide (the width of common bacteria). But you may justifiably ask, "Who cares?"
- The second benefit the SmartPoint offers is the most significant – a surprisingly small of wasted material in the shavings reservoir.

The 38% solution

The key to the SmartPoint's success is found in the pencil shavings reservoir.



A hand-fed electric sharpener that chops off too much material, wastes too much of the pencil. How much waste? In side-by-side comparisons, we find 38% less wasted shavings produced by the SmartPoint versus electric sharpeners.

PencilPoint CFO Randolph Wentworth explained the impact of that number. "Every company has a pencil-neck pencil-pusher like me looking for ways to cut costs and improve the bottom line. To us, 38% is a huge number. That's 38% more hours of use. It's like getting an 11-inch pencil for the price of a standard 8-inch. To a purchasing agent, a 38% reduction in the usage cost of any office supply is quite significant."

Look at the whole planet

CFO Patel added, "You need to look at the big picture when you think of that 38%. In the US, customers still buy 2 billion pencils a year. And the pencil market is even bigger worldwide."

Patel referenced a Wall Street Journal article "Remember Pens and Pencils? They're Doing Just Fine." In that article, reporter Ranni Mola took a global perspective as she pointed to worldwide pencil sales of \$3 billion per year. And that number isn't falling. Mola found statistics showing that pencil sales have actually grown as high as 4% per year during much of this decade.

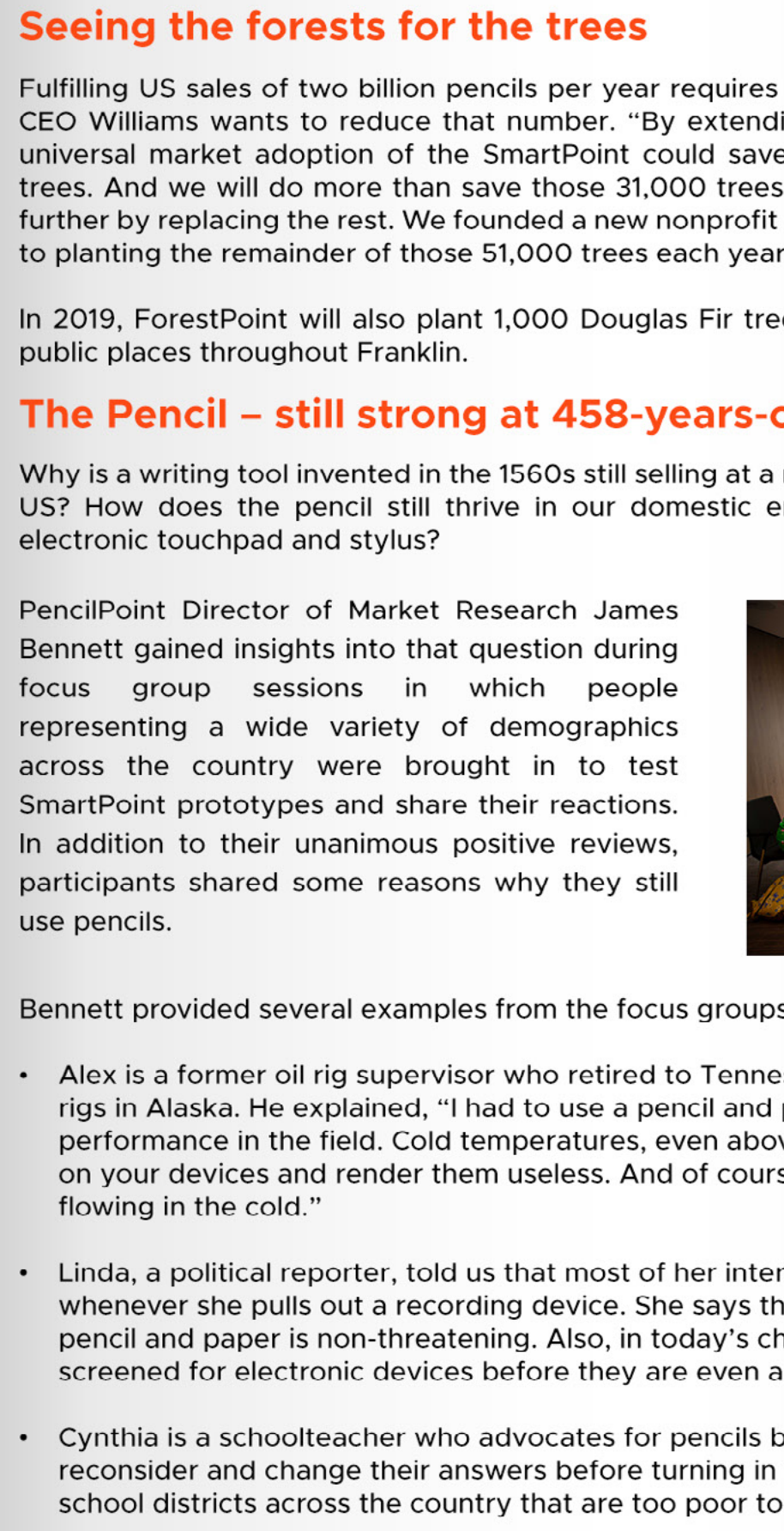
Patel commented, "If you think 38% isn't significant, think 38% of three billion dollars."

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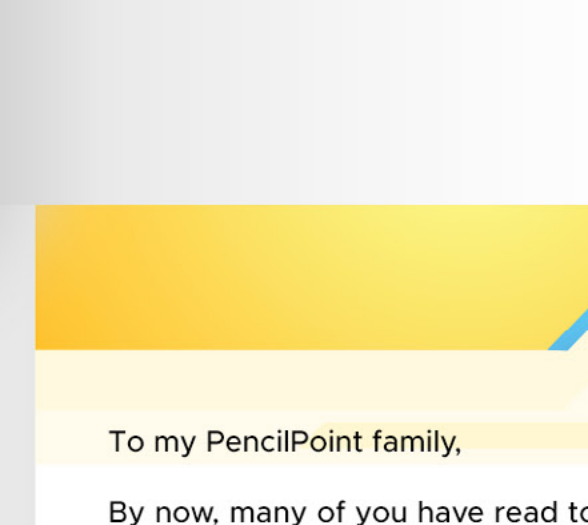
Remember Pens and Pencils? They're Doing Just Fine
By Ranni Mola
Oct 16, 2014 11:51am ET



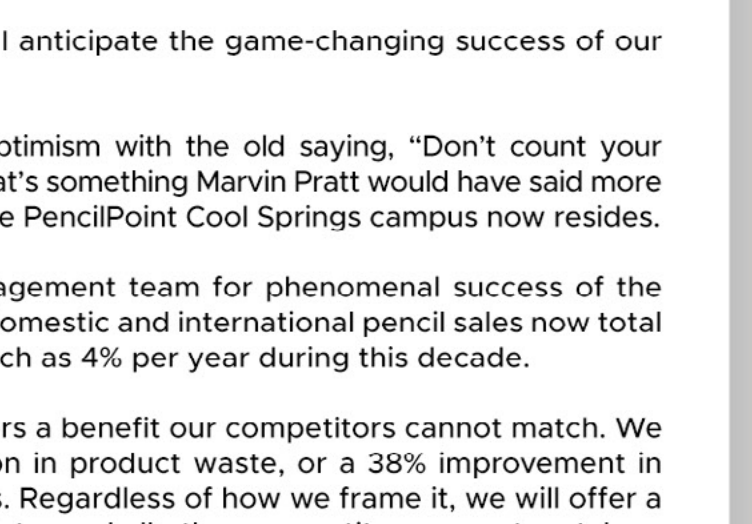
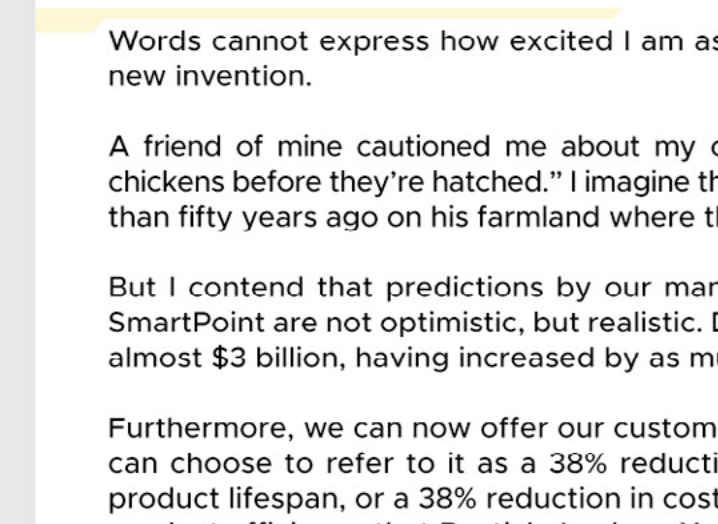
Yvonne Holt, PencilPoint's VP of International Marketing revealed that sales in developing countries are driving those increases in the global annual growth rate. She told us, "Usually, only top tier professionals in these countries produce their daily work on computers and printers. For most people in the Third World, the tasks of commerce, education, record-keeping, and correspondence are all performed with pencil and paper. Therefore, my international sales reps don't have to work very hard to pitch a new tool that can save their cash-strapped clients 38% in purchasing costs. We are already taking advance overseas orders for the SmartPoint."

On the domestic side, PencilPoint sales reps report that demonstrations of SmartPoint prototypes at companies across the country have been well received. As a result, Office Depot and Staples have welcomed negotiations with us to add the SmartPoint to their retail inventories. PencilPoint management anticipates announcing several new major retailer supply contracts very soon.

In addition, our Washington, D.C. sales team reports a keen interest from Department of Education officials looking for ways to cut costs and stretch classroom resources nationwide.



PencilPoint CEO Christine Williams commented –
It's ironic that a device with a computer chip will breathe new life into a product that technology was supposed to kill. We are bringing a 16th-century tool into the 21st century.



Seeing the forests for the trees

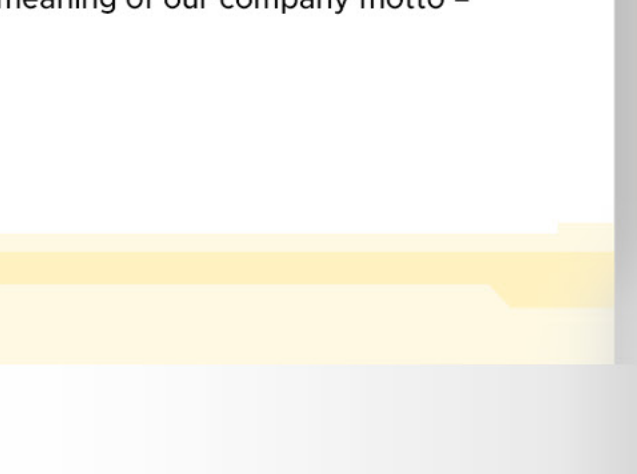
Fulfilling US sales of two billion pencils per year requires the annual sacrifice of 82,000 trees. CEO Williams wants to reduce that number. "By extending the useful life of pencils by 38%, universal market adoption of the SmartPoint could save a corresponding 38% of harvested trees. And we will do more than save those 31,000 trees. PencilPoint will expand that benefit further by replacing the rest. We founded a new nonprofit organization, ForestPoint, committed to planting the remainder of those 51,000 trees each year," she said.

In 2019, ForestPoint will also plant 1,000 Douglas Fir trees on the PencilPoint campus and in public places throughout Franklin.

The Pencil – still strong at 458-years-old

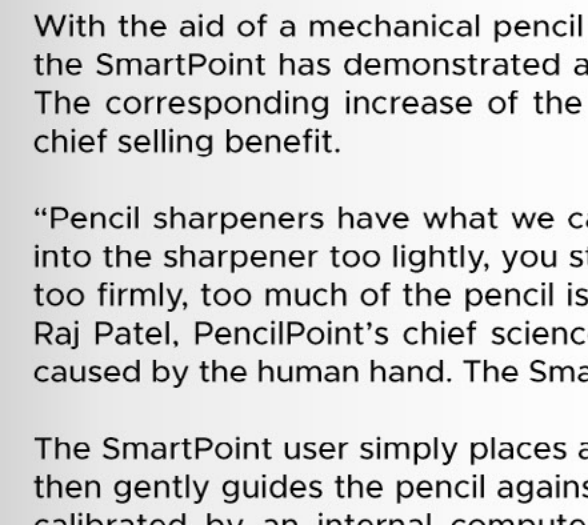
Why is a writing tool invented in the 1560s still selling at a rate of 2 billion pencils per year in the US? How does the pencil still thrive in our domestic environment of the digital keyboard, electronic touchpad and stylus?

PencilPoint Director of Market Research James Bennett gained insights into that question during focus group sessions in which people representing a wide variety of demographics across the country were brought in to test SmartPoint prototypes and share their reactions. In addition to their unanimous positive reviews, participants shared some reasons why they still use pencils.



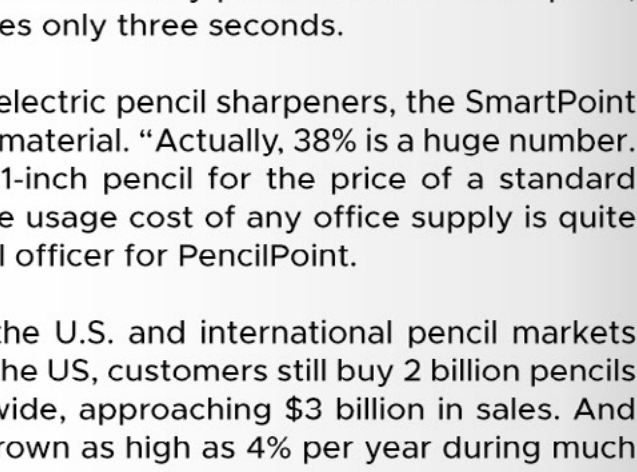
Bennett provided several examples from the focus groups:

- Alex is a former oil rig supervisor who retired to Tennessee after spending thirty years on rigs in Alaska. He explained, "I had to use a pencil and paper for taking notes of machinery performance in the field. Cold temperatures, even above freezing, will lock up LCD screens on your devices and render them useless. And of course, pen ink turns into sludge and stops flowing in the cold."
- Linda, a political reporter, told us that most of her interview subjects become uneasy whenever she pulls out a recording device. She says the alternative of taking notes with a pencil and paper is non-threatening. Also, in today's charged environment, reporters can be screened for electronic devices before they are even allowed to enter some political events.
- Cynthia is a schoolteacher who advocates for pencils because they allow her students to reconsider and change their answers before turning in their work. She also pointed to many school districts across the country that are too poor to provide computers in the classroom.
- Parker is a police sketch artist who only uses pencil. He complains that an electronic pad screen and stylus does not allow an artist to draw with fine detail and subtle shading.



Bennett concluded, "But most frequently, we found that many professionals who produce their work on computers actually prefer to begin the creative process on paper. Architects, fashion designers, graphic designers, copywriters, car designers, and authors often choose to brainstorm their ideas and play with a variety of different options with a pencil and sketch pad first before turning to a computer screen."

Bennett's favorite focus group response came from the youngest participant, Kacie, a 7-year-old student in the second grade. She liked the sounds SmartPoint made when sharpening her pencils. "It makes a purring sound like a kitten, then a pretty beep when it's done," Kacie said. She knows how to text, but she prefers writing when she wants to say something special. Kacie explained, "Whenever I write my Mommy a note and I tell her I love her, she cries because she knows I wrote it from the heart."



Kacie gives a renewed meaning to our familiar longtime PencilPoint tag line – "The Point of Writing."

PencilPoint

The Point of Writing

To my PencilPoint family,

By now, many of you have read today's article in our Points of Interest newsletter in which we offer an in-depth reveal of the unique benefits and powerful potential in our new SmartPoint electronic pencil sharpener.

Words cannot express how excited I am as I anticipate the game-changing success of our new invention.

A friend of mine cautioned me about my optimism with the old saying, "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched." I imagine that's something Marvin Pratt would have said more than fifty years ago on his farmland where the PencilPoint Coolvin Springs campus now resides.

But I contend that predictions by our management team for phenomenal success of the SmartPoint are not optimistic, but realistic. Domestic and international pencil sales now total almost \$3 billion, having increased by as much as 4% per year during this decade.

Furthermore, we can now offer our customers a benefit our competitors cannot match. We can choose to refer to it as a 38% reduction in product waste, or a 38% improvement in product lifespan, or a 38% reduction in costs. Regardless of how we frame it, we will offer a product efficiency that Bostich, Lankyo, X-Acto, and all other competitors cannot match.

We can take the lion's share of the domestic sharpener business, increase our penetration of overseas markets, and become the next international export success story in America.

The potential of the SmartPoint is already proven by the interest shown by Office Depot, Staples, and the U.S. Department of Education. Our confidence is so strong, we will now begin retooling half of our production lines for the SmartPoint and start hiring employees to add a 2nd shift in September. We make these moves under the guidance of our Board of Directors, comprised of Fortune 500 CEOs with a track record of shrewd judgement. We act boldly because PencilPoint has demonstrated a historic natural resistance to economic downturns.

I hesitate to use the expression "recession-proof," but those of you who were with us during the recession that began in 2008 recall what happened here in those days. While high-tech equipment sales took a nose dive, pencil and sharpener sales actually increased. We enjoyed the security of keeping our jobs while many around us suffered.

Imagine what we can do when the economy is strong.

This is a great time to be part of the PencilPoint family. I want to thank all the people that made this day possible, including our R&D team, our production engineers, our marketing focus groups, and the purchasing specialists who sourced the materials and components for the SmartPoint.

Here at PencilPoint, each of us finds a sense of purpose in reaching our personal potential, providing security and happiness for our families, and making a positive impact on our world. Within all these heartfelt desires, we find the meaning of our company motto – *The Point of Writing.*

Sincerely,
Christine Williams
Christine Williams
CEO

PRESS RELEASE

PencilPoint Introduces World's First Smart Pencil Sharpener

The SmartPoint can reduce wasted pencil portions by as much as 38%.

Nashville, Tenn. – June 10, 2018 – PencilPoint today announced their introduction of a new electronically enhanced pencil sharpener dubbed the SmartPoint to their 2019 model line.

With the aid of a mechanical pencil feed, guided by a computer chip and laser sensor inside, the SmartPoint has demonstrated a reduction in wasted pencil shavings by as much as 38%. The corresponding increase of the pencil's useful lifespan provides the company with their chief selling benefit.

"Pencil sharpeners have what we call 'a Goldilocks problem.' If your hand presses the pencil into the sharpener too lightly, you still have a dull pencil point afterward. If your hand presses too firmly, too much of the pencil is wasted away in wood and graphite shavings," explained Raj Patel, PencilPoint's chief science officer. "The problem of too little or too much force is caused by the human hand. The SmartPoint removes the fallible human hand from the equation."

The SmartPoint user simply places a pencil in the receiver tray and presses a button. The tray then gently guides the pencil against the sharpening blades with the precise amount of force calibrated by an internal computer chip. At the same time, a laser sensor measures the changing shape of the pencil tip until it becomes a mathematically precise cone. At that point, the motor immediately stops. This entire process takes only three seconds.

In side-by-side comparisons with standard hand-fed electric pencil sharpeners, the SmartPoint provided an average 38% reduction of wasted pencil material. "Actually, 38% is a huge number. That's 38% more hours of use. It's like getting an 11-inch pencil for the price of a standard 8-inch. To a purchasing agent, a 38% reduction in the usage cost of any office supply is quite significant," said Randolph Wentworth, chief financial officer for PencilPoint.

PencilPoint executives reference the sheer size of the U.S. and international pencil markets when they consider the impact of a 38% savings. "In the US, customers still buy 2 billion pencils a year. And the pencil market is even bigger worldwide, approaching \$3 billion in sales. And that number isn't falling. Pencil sales have actually grown as high as 4% per year during much of this decade," said PencilPoint's Patel. "If you think 38% isn't significant, think 38% of three billion dollars."

Focus groups have given the SmartPoint uniformly positive reviews, which are echoed in the interest expressed by major U.S. office supply chains. Those focus groups provided PencilPoint's Director of Market Research, James Bennett with some insights into why the 458-year-old pencil still thrives in the digital world.

"We found that many professionals who produce their work on computers actually prefer to begin the creative process on paper. Architects, fashion designers, graphic designers, copywriters, car designers, and authors often choose to brainstorm their ideas and play with a variety of different options with a pencil and sketch pad first before turning to a computer screen," said Bennett.

PencilPoint CEO Christine Williams summarized the historical juxtaposition. "It's ironic that a device with a computer chip will breathe new life into a product that technology was supposed to kill. We are bringing a 16th-century tool into the 21st century," she said.

PencilPoint will retool half of their production lines for the SmartPoint and begin hiring employees to add a 2nd shift in September.

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