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# Entrepreneur

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## Band of brothers

A tech designer's wedding rings make grooms swoon

**ENTREPRENEUR:** Jeff McWhinney, owner of San Rafael, Calif.-based McWhinney Designs, which produces men's custom wedding rings with hinged mechanisms that allow for perfect fit and easy removal.

**"AHA" MOMENT:** McWhinney is a machinist who spent years at 3M and now works as a designer and programmer for Paragon Machine Works, a manufacturer of titanium bicycle components. "I've been designing and making things out of metal my whole career," he says. When he was getting married, McWhinney "wanted something special and something practical," so he created a ring for himself with a sleek hinge. It occurred to him that other men—sportsmen, artisans, technicians or anyone who doesn't want a bland gold band—might be interested in a similar piece of jewelry.

**I THEE DREAD:** McWhinney, an avid sportsman, says traditional rings can be boring to look at and bothersome to wear while bicycling, golfing or running. Rings also can present serious safety issues for people dealing with ropes or machinery, such as rock climbers, sailors, carpenters and mechanics.

**I DO:** McWhinney's hinged designs allow for quick removal. Low-profile for a "naked feel," the modern designs are made of American titanium and stainless steel with precious-metal accents. "I was trying to get men as excited about their rings as women have been about theirs," McWhinney says.

Since the hinges eliminate the need for the rings to clear the knuckle, they can be sized with extreme precision. When McWhinney receives an order, he designs the rings using CAD software, then employs 3-D printing firm Shapeways to make three plastic models: one in the size that was ordered and the others slightly smaller and larger. The plastic rings cost him \$2 apiece, and he absorbs shipping costs (about \$25 per order), but it means getting the fit exactly right. Customers are encouraged to wear the model rings for as long as it takes to decide which size is just right for them.

**FOR RICHER OR POORER:** Custom rings take two to four weeks from order to delivery and can cost \$4,000 or more, but McWhinney plans to start stocking completed designs priced at \$725 for immediate delivery.

**REAL COMMITMENT:** McWhinney's biggest investment for his company was the Haas Automation 4-Axis CNC mill he uses to craft the sleek rings, which set him back nearly \$70,000. This year he aims to devote 50 percent of his time to Paragon and 50 percent to McWhinney Designs. He hopes that one day ring-making will be his full-time job.

**MALE BONDING:** McWhinney's rings are available only through his website. A mention in the December issue of *Mountain Bike Action* magazine created an "immediate spike" in inquiries. Otherwise, he relies on word-of-mouth and social media to drum up business. McWhinney believes men have been shortchanged when it comes to covetable wedding rings. "I'm trying to tip it back the other way," he says. "I'm trying to make rings that guys would want to show off to their buddies." —Michael Austin

