

Behind The Invention: The mophie Juice Pack

How a failure of a product became the kleenex of backup power.

If you ever see me smirk a bit when I board a flight, it's not because I enjoy being locked in a metal tube for hours on end- but rather because it's impossible to look around and not see countless travelers holding something with the name of my two golden retrievers (molly + sophie) emblazoned on the front face.

It's rumored that the mophie juice pack now brings in hundreds of millions of dollars a year in revenue. Despite countless knock-offs, the mophie brand has become the "kleenex" of external power, and is used by millions of people worldwide. mophie was by no means an overnight success and certainly did not take a linear path to greatness.

As part of my ongoing quest to Make Invention Accessible, I believe companies should provide a behind-the-curtain view of how products are born in an effort to inspire future invention.

This is the story of the early days of mophie. The twists and turns that seemed like colossal misses at the time, but somehow led to greatness.

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Common sense would tell you the story of the Juice Pack began in 2007 with the launch of the first iPhone, but in fact, this story goes back over two years

before Steve Jobs came on stage with that beautiful beautiful aluminum bodied phone.

I began working on the mechanical system in 2005, and launched several mediocre products using our “sled” design that didn't quite take hold.

We launched the first battery case in January 2006, and no one cared or wanted it. The need for extra power pre-iPhone just wasn't there.

In mid 2007, we sold the mophie brand and the assets associated with the Juice Pack for pennies on the dollar because my investors deemed it a failure.

I wouldn't change a thing, and here's why.

The blow by blow:

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Our Very First Product

Juice Pack's roots can be traced all the way back to the Song Sling, mophie's first product designed in March of 2005. It may seem unlikely that a poorly designed lanyard headphone could have played a part in the invention of the battery-case, but it most certainly did.

The “big idea” behind the Song Sling was to integrate headphones into a lanyard. The resulting product would eliminate the mess of cords many people were experiencing when they used the lanyard provided with the original iPod shuffle.

Apple's design for their included Shuffle lanyard was in some ways very smart. It hung the iPod upside down so that when you grabbed it- the controls would be facing you. The downside to this, however, was that the headphone cables now needed to travel extra distance to clear all the lanyard cables, causing a big mess and lots of tangles.

Looking back, something very small, that seemed obvious and insignificant at the time, played an indelible role in shaping the mophie you know today.



Notice the 3.5mm jack, integrated into the case. This would give way to the 30 pin, and later the lightning cable placement on the Juice Pack design.

The bottom of Song Sling was a bumper style case with a male 3.5MM (headphone) jack molded in. The sides of the case were built up just enough to hide a wire that would relocate the audio wire all the way up through the neck of the lanyard- therefore eliminating 2 out of the 4 cables Shuffle customers were accustomed to using while adding protection for the iPod itself.

At the time, molding electronics directly into a case and using the structure of the case as a way to facilitate the connection to the iPod was incredibly novel. Most of the big accessories at the time (Griffin iTrip, etc) were all “dongles” and hung off of the iPod, in order to achieve its function.

I've long described Song Sling as a miserable failure. I'm utterly embarrassed that this was the idea I had convinced my parents to remortgage their house for. That said, if I look back on Song Sling in the context of this story- it played a hugely significant part.



Song Sling, Modeled by Cindy Taylor

Figuring out how to mold connectors into cases, in 2005- and using that technology/manufacturing technique to shape future products was pivotal.

Beyond that, it was kind of surreal when Steve Jobs walked on stage a year later and showed Apple's new lanyard design, which had integrated headphones

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Apple Levels The Playing Field

In September of 2005 Apple continued their long history of keeping iPod Accessory market on their toes. For a newcomer like mophie, this was a huge opportunity.

That month, Apple introduced two products simultaneously.

First was the “video” iPod- which removed the long used 9-pin remote jack, and introduced the 30 pin connector that we all became very accustomed to.

The second product they announced was the iPod Nano which brought with its own little controversy, it moved the headphone jack to the bottom of the player.

We can all laugh at this now and agree Apple made the right move- but at the time, this caused a huge ruckus in the accessory industry.



9 Pin jack used by most accessories pre-september 2005.

Every existing accessory being sold by every single company (large and small) was rendered obsolete. Griffin's wildly successful iTrip, DLO's docks, Speck's cases— everything was gone. The entire iPod accessory market instantly became a level-playing field with no clear leader.

Seeing this as a huge opportunity, I raced to develop a full product line to bring to Macworld 2006 in early January.

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Putting Stuff Inside Cases: MacWorld 2006

mophie came to Macworld 2006 with a new line of gear. It was called the mophie Relo line. It was a full & robust line of accessories, cases & electronics.

The Relo line was the combination of two key insights & realizations:

1. Most people used cases on their iPods, but were forced to remove them if they wanted to use any accessory (speakers, docks, armbands etc).
2. Dongles were really freaking annoying and electronics should be built into cases themselves.

Relo allowed you to keep your case on and simply slide them into accessories that were specially made to work with our cases.

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