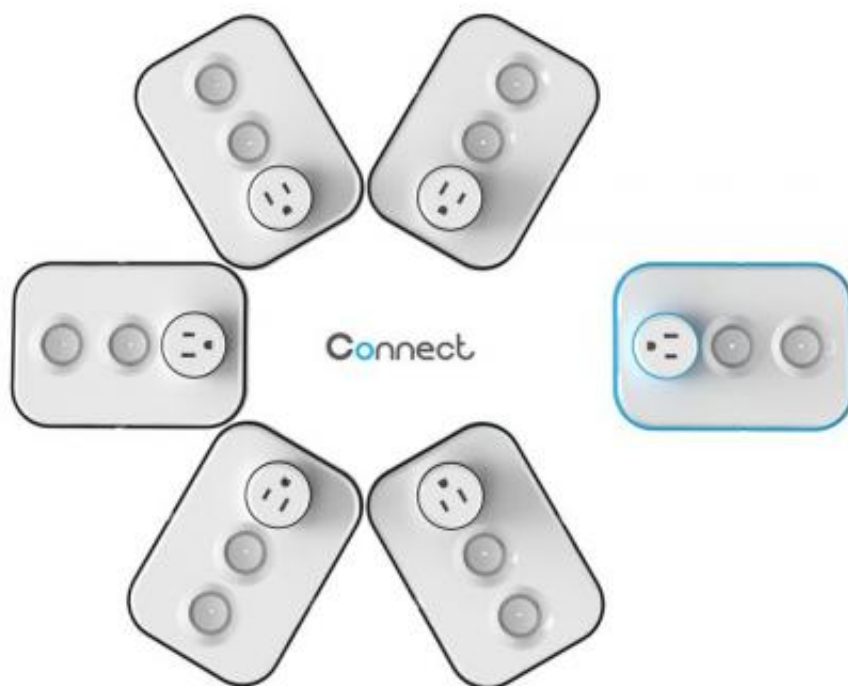


UH industrial designer 'Connects' with International Housewares Association honors

March 25 2014



Matthew Burton's 'Connect' took top honors in the International Housewares Association Student Competition. Credit: Matthew Burton

Simple tasks are easy to take for granted. People rarely give a second thought to routine activities such as plugging in a laptop or other electronic devices. For those with physical disabilities, however, those

everyday tasks present persistent challenges.

While attending the University of Houston, industrial design student Matthew Burton met business student Justin Farley. Farley has cerebral palsy and knows firsthand about the difficulties in performing tasks such as handling electric plugs. Although he faces physical limitations, his determination is boundless. He approached UH Industrial Design professor Eunsook Kwon and invited her students into his daily world. Students worked with him on developing products that can benefit people with disabilities.

Burton was among those students and discovered that one of the issues Farley faced was inserting a plug into an electrical outlet. This sparked an idea for "Connect," an adapter system that makes inserting and removing a plug much easier. Burton's "Connect" recently earned first place the International Housewares Association's (IHA) 2014 Student Design Competition. This is the third year in a row that a UH Industrial Design student has placed first in this competition.

"Connect" includes a [base station](#) that plugs into a standard outlet and an adapter that connects to an appliance's plug. A magnetic connection allows the user to easily attach the plug/adapter into the charged base station. A handle is affixed to the base station for easy removal from the outlet.

Burton graduated in May but developed the project during his junior year at UH. As part of his IHA prize, Burton had the opportunity to showcase "Connect" at the International Home + Housewares Show in Chicago.

"It applies across different markets," Burton said. "It can be used by anyone and removes excess clutter. It has more functionality and more ease."

While conducting research for "Connect," Burton paid close attention to Farley's challenges of plugging in his electric wheelchair. Also, his numerous electronic items required connections to electrical outlets.

"In my research, I noted that he used plugs more than kitchen utensils," Burton said. "That was surprising. As I tried to understand the areas in his life that needed assistance, I immediately noticed that."

Following his research, Burton developed a functional mock-up that was successfully used and a nonoperational prototype, which he submitted to the IHA student competition.

Since graduating from UH, Burton's design skills have found a home at Point Innovation, a design consultancy firm in Dallas. He also contributes his energies to Matter, a nonprofit organization he founded.

Matter's mission is to promote a philosophy of thoughtful and meaningful design while contributing to the growth of motivated students through an annual scholarship. The organization also aims to partner industrial design students with professional designers on projects aimed at facilitating positive change – or making design matter.

Burton's work in UH's Industrial Design program complements other IHA award-winning projects including "Smart Measure" by Juan Jimenez (a spill-proof measuring spoon) and "Ambos" by Mariel Piña (a stainless steel grater and colander).

Provided by University of Houston

Citation: UH industrial designer 'Connects' with International Housewares Association honors (2014, March 25) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-03-uh-industrial-international-housewares-association.html>

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