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Scotch Transparent Tape: 75 Years of Holding Things Together

A Look Back at the Story of 3M's Indispensable Invention

ST. PAUL, Minn., June 13, 2005—For 75 years, Scotch transparent tape has been holding things together. Since its invention in 1930, more than 400 varieties of adhesive tape have hit the market under the Scotch and 3M brand names. Scotch brand tapes are everywhere on the globe, and most people consider tape an indispensable part of their lives. However, it wasn't always that way...

A young banjo-playing 3M engineer named Richard Drew, who abandoned a musical career for a job at 3M, had become an expert in the area of pressure-sensitive adhesives after developing the first-ever masking tape. In the late 1920s, he was called on by people looking for a way to seal a new transparent material known as cellophane. The material was a hit with food distributors because it was moisture proof, but they needed a good way to seal it. That problem was solved after Drew and his colleagues spent more than a year developing Scotch cellulose tape. It was a difficult problem. The cellulose tape backing curled near heat, split when it was machine-coated and didn't accept adhesive evenly. At the end of each day, 3M needed a truck to haul away the spoiled material.

But, 3M and Dick Drew weren't quitters. One by one they solved the production problems. They designed new coating machinery, applied a primer coat to the film backing so the adhesive could be evenly spread and developed a new, almost clear adhesive. Scotch cellulose tape was a hit with cellophane users, but there were still problems. Sales in the first year, 1930, were just \$33.

Things didn't look good at all, because not long after the tape's introduction, another company invented a process that used heat to seal the cellophane. Quickly, tape became obsolete for this use. In the end, the setback was just temporary. Other manufacturers used the tape to seal packages and, after consumers discovered the new tape, they began using it for things the inventor had never even imagined. Soon, the tape was selling itself.

Most products introduced during the Great Depression were failures, but this was a period when consumers had to scrimp and conserve. Scotch cellulose tape helped prolong the usefulness of items and let people "make do." It was good for 3M and its employees, too. Because the tape was so popular, 3M was one of the few manufacturing companies in the world that didn't have to lay off people during this difficult period.

During World War II, 3M ran advertisements apologizing to homemakers for the scarcity of the tape and explaining that all available supplies had been diverted to the war effort. The company even came up with a hundred more kinds of tape designed specifically for use during the war.

In the sixty years since the end of World War II, 3M has created a whole family of transparent tapes. The tape is now available with both permanent and removable adhesives, coated on one side of the tape or two sides. Tape surface finishes include glossy, satin and matte to best match the paper they are being applied to. And you can buy the tapes in traditional rolls or in pre-cut strips that pop up from a dispenser one at a time.

With hundreds of tapes now sold under the Scotch brand name, there is now a tape for nearly every need or occasion. Scotch brand tapes include a wide variety of transparent, colored and light-proof tapes; tapes that stretch and tear without a sharp edge; tapes for high temperatures and extreme cold; tapes that seal packages and can be used for labels. And, there are a wide variety of dispensers and applicators to easily apply these tapes to surfaces.

Scotch brand tapes hold millions of things together all over the world. And the innovative thinking that helped 3M diversify in 1930 has become part of the company's culture.

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About 3M -- A Global, Diversified Technology Company

Every day, 3M people find new ways to make amazing things happen. Wherever they are, whatever they do, the company's customers know they can rely on 3M to help make their lives better. 3M's brands include Scotch, Post-it, Scotchgard, Thinsulate, Scotch-Brite, Filtrete, Command and Vikuiti. Serving customers in more than 200 countries around the world, the company's 67,000 people use their expertise, technologies and global strength to lead in major markets including consumer and office; display and graphics; electronics and telecommunications; safety, security and protection services; health care; industrial and transportation. For more information, including the latest product and technology news, visit www.3M.com.

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