

TRASH *talk*

For TerraCycle CEO Tom Szaky,
one man's garbage is his treasure.

By Julie Jacobs
Photos courtesy of TerraCycle

For Tom Szaky, the old adage “one man's trash is another man's treasure” could not be more appropriate. The CEO of TerraCycle, an environmentally minded company headquartered in Trenton, New Jersey, has taken recycling to a new level, transforming garbage into home and office wares, lawn and garden products, and toys. So enamored is Szaky with the potential uses for waste that he admits to taking a peek inside nearly every trash can he passes.

“I don't see garbage anymore, just opportunity, so I have a tendency to check out what people are throwing away,” Szaky admits.

His curiosity has led to new uses for a range of refuse, from corkscrews and circuit boards to juice pouches and yogurt cups. With healthy doses of ingenuity and determination, Szaky and the TerraCycle staff have turned rubbish into backpacks, folders, pencil cases, and lunch boxes—all of which are available online at terracycle.net and at major retailers like Target and CVS. They've also upcycled cookie wrappers into kites, which are marketed at Wal-Mart, and vinyl billboards into laptop bags, sold at Office Max. The concept looks to double TerraCycle's sales to around \$15 million this year, and has catapulted the company into the national media spotlight. In addition to being named one of the 100 most innovative enterprises in the U.S., TerraCycle was given honorable mention in



Earth Day salutes on *Oprah* and *Good Morning America*, and in their new documentary-style television series, *Garbage Moguls*, airing on the National Geographic Channel.

Szaky chronicles the genesis and growth of TerraCycle in *Revolution in a Bottle*, released in March 2009. And even the book is tied to the business's objective—the inside cover, an envelope printed with prepaid postage, enables readers who eat Bear Naked organic granola to send their empty granola bags to TerraCycle free of charge. Bear Naked is donating \$1 to the Arbor Day Foundation for every cover that is returned.

The TerraCycle story began in 2001, when the Hungarian-born, Canadian-raised Szaky was a freshman at Princeton University. While visiting some friends who were feeding worms compost and using the excrement as a plant nutrient, he experienced a transformative moment.

“What really hit me was the idea of garbage, that it's one of our most powerful raw materials. Everything becomes waste,” Szaky says. “Very few people realize that in nature, garbage doesn't exist in any way. It's totally man-made,