



# NEWSLETTER



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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## Alumni Interview: Travis Thul, Inventor

Travis Thul, MS '08, is the inventor of The Ramen Now! With his Keurig-style ramen maker, you don't need a microwave, stove or even bowls to enjoy your favorite noodles.

Read on for an exclusive interview.



### Tell me more about The Ramen Now. How did it start?

A couple years after I graduated from WEMPEC, I was in the military, and I had gotten food poisoning on base. I was doing a 24-hour shift, and I was starving, and I had a box full of 100

ramen packages. I'm like, "Man, I'd love to eat this." We had a little kitchen there, but there were no pots or pans. There was a microwave, but the microwave looked like somebody had exploded a bowl of spaghetti in there. Everything was gross, and I thought, "How hard can it be to fricking heat water to make ramen noodle soup?"

You can't cook in a coffee maker because of temperature and the carafe. But I thought an engineer could take some of the ways that a coffee maker worked and turn it into a Keurig for noodles. The next day, I called a mechanical engineering buddy of mine. I explained it to him, and he said, "Oh, yeah, that'd be super easy." So therein began the journey of a Keurig machine for ramen. We invented it and got it patented, with support from the Wisconsin Law and Entrepreneurship Clinic.

### From a technical perspective, how does The Ramen Now work?

There's a reservoir in the back of the machine. The water goes into a heating element that floats into a bubble pump, and then into what we call a binary distribution channel, which effectively pushes the steam or water vapor across your ramen noodle brick. Our bowl interlocks with the machine itself to capture heat and moisture. There's a gasket that creates a semi-seal maximizing the retention of the thermal energy and moisture coming out of the machine, so that it cooks your ramen noodles, oatmeal or mac and cheese quickly and efficiently.



## Alumni Interview, cont'd

### What kind of research did you do at WEMPEC? What are some of your memories?

I was investigating highly resonant coils for the use of wireless, inductive power transfer. My advisor was Bob Lorenz, who's now passed. Bob was a mechanical engineer and an electrical engineer, but I think his heart was in mechanical engineering. Bob changed my life.

I graduated with an applied electrical engineering technology BS from the Milwaukee School of Engineering, and I wanted to do a graduate degree that was also applied. When I was working at Johnson Controls as an intern, for whatever reason, WEMPEC came up. I'm like, "Holy crap, this is awesome. They build electric cars, and solar power, and it's all laboratory based, and you're blowing stuff up. This is my jam."

It was around Christmas time when I sent out emails to a bunch of faculty at WEMPEC and other departments at the University of Wisconsin. Within 15 minutes of sending that email — again, this is the holidays — Bob Lorenz gets back to me and says, "I like your resume. Let's meet next week."

I distinctly remember the interview. I was very intimidated. Bob was a very intimidating fellow and he's clearly very sharp. As a young guy, you're inherently insecure, or at least I was. I interviewed, and I was terrified, and nonetheless he was able to swing me a full ride assistantship and fellowship.

My time at WEMPEC was fantastic. Studying under Bob was highly educational. I spent time with some really amazing humans whose intellect was only trumped by their warmth.

## Check out these recent WEMPEC publications!

### Modeling Heterodyne Frequency Modulation for 3 $\phi$ AC Current-Stiff Converters

- This paper models a topologically compact single stage 3 $\phi$  AC - 3 $\phi$  AC bidirectional, isolated (or non-isolated) power converter using a modulation scheme to synthesize a high-frequency AC current link.
- 3 $\phi$  AC-AC topologies with monolithic bidirectional switches in place of a DC link increase power density. This paper's Fourier analysis of a high-frequency current-stiff converter cell creates the basis for using the part as a building block in shipboard or aerospace power distribution architectures.

### Design and Comparison of Power-Dense Surface Inset Permanent Magnet Machine and Surface Permanent Magnet Machine without Heavy Rare Earth Magnets for Traction Applications

- This paper presents two machine designs: a surface inset permanent magnet (SIPM) machine and a surface permanent magnet (SPM) machine, both without heavy rare-earth magnets, that achieve 50 kW/L active power density and a constant-power speed ratio of 3 for EV traction applications.

