

# A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

BLACKDOT'S STATE-OF-THE-ART TECH DRAWS A BRAVE NEW WORLD FOR TATTOO CULTURE.

BY MIGUEL COSTA

Prior to the late 1990s, tattoo culture primarily existed on the outskirts of the mainstream. A badge of honor amongst sailors in the U.S. Navy and cultural subgroups, as well as an artistically rebellious symbol of expression for curators of punk, metal, goth music, and more. Subsequently, during the 2000s, the painfully enticing trend of getting inked transcended emo, hip-hop, the NBA, Hollywood, and the corporate world. Near the turn of the 2020s, a number of tech companies began implementing inventive ways of tatting up their clientele with new software, 3D tattooing, eco-friendly methods, and more. In November, Blackdot, a tech company based in Austin, Texas, introduced the “V1 Device” as part of a game-changing initiative that also includes an online tattoo marketplace where consumers can purchase signature designs from entrepreneurial-minded artists all over

the world. Blackdot’s V1 Device generates body art in high definition, utilizing an unprecedented technique that serves as a fresh alternative to modern wireless tattoo machines and traditional hand-tapping methods. The future is here. But, according to the company’s CEO/Founder Joel Pennington, it should not deter tattoo enthusiasts and artists who view the time-honored process as a rite of passage.

“Blackdot is not a substitute for the experience found by way of various traditional tattooing methods,” explained Pennington. “Instead, Blackdot offers an entirely different tattooing experience; it’s an interesting option for tattoo seekers looking for something new and forward-looking...The Blackdot device can be thought of as a futuristic stick-and-poke device whereby each dot that we tattoo is intentional...We use continuous suction for ink removal and are therefore able to tattoo without the need to wipe-think-tattoo-repeat.”

Alongside Pennington at the forefront of the Blackdot technocentric movement is the company’s Chief Technology Officer Yan Azdoud. The pair of business partners met in 2017 after Pennington took on a mentorship role with a startup established by Azdoud called Project Canary. This experience gave Pennington an up close and personal view of Azdoud’s penchant for navigating scientific principles. It also sparked a resolution about how their ideals in the tech world could add a new dimension to the tattoo industry.

“After the three-month program, I debriefed with Yan Azdoud,” recalled Pennington. “Yan had a great deal of experience with hyper-elastic surfaces, medical devices, and mechanical design—he was uniquely qualified to help bring my vision to fruition.”

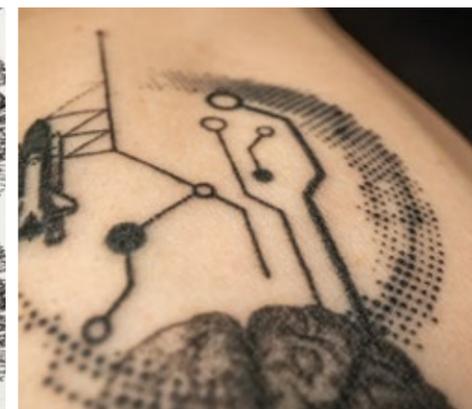
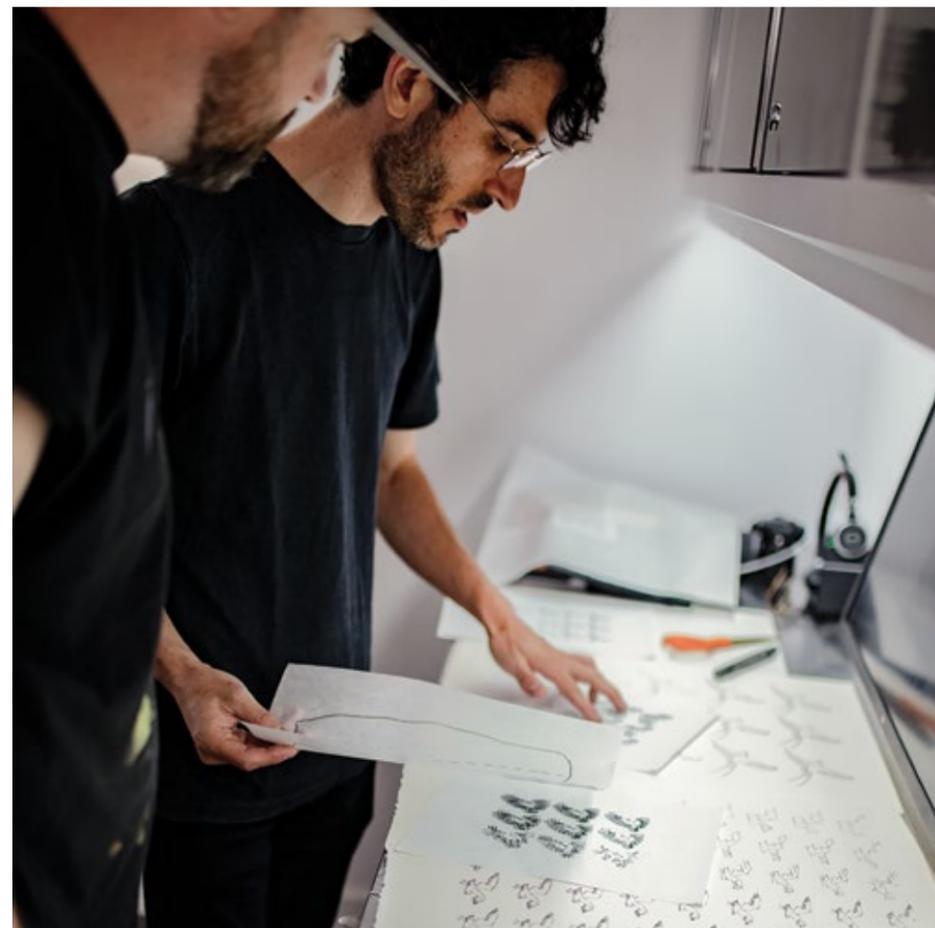
Shortly thereafter, Blackdot entered a developmental phase that lasted nearly half a decade. Two years into the stealth period,

during the Summer of 2019, the company administered its first-ever tattoo on human skin. In addition to presenting Blackdot’s inaugural recipient with hi-res body art, Pennington wanted to ensure that the gift from his company also came with quality that would stand the test of time without the common necessity of tattoo retouching.

“Our first human tattoo was executed on a gentleman named Chris Harvey,” Pennington said. “We then developed the first version of our automated tattooing device (the V1), followed by the commercially viable version we’re using today—the V1c... Blackdot is able to minimize the discomfort associated with tattooing. As for healing, we use a slim needle and do not tattoo deeper than necessary. We’ve conducted [more than 90] tattooing sessions over the past five years

and have never caused bleeding or scarring.”

Today, Blackdot is fully operational with plans to expand to major U.S. cities like Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and Las Vegas. In recent years, these regions have hosted some of the biggest live events in sports entertainment, from Super Bowl LVI, WrestleMania 39, and Rolling Loud to ComicCon, EDC, and the Met Gala. During his exclusive interview with *Inked Magazine*, Pennington floated the idea of teaming up with notable fashion lines to provide attendees at similar affairs with customized body art ranging from the song lyrics of iconic recording artists to Marvel Comics’ sketches and skateboard decks from old-school skaters. For now, shoppers can purchase their next tattoos at the company’s flagship location in Austin, Texas, or remotely through



the Blackdot Certified Artist Program. The BCA allows online shoppers to survey *Flyway* designs drawn by prominent visual artists such as Tyler Hobbs and other notable creators.

Kevin Rose, a California-based entrepreneur, recently stopped by Blackdot’s headquarters where he became one of the first costumers to procure Hobbs’ signature Flyway design. The on-camera session depicted the founder of Revision3 resting comfortably in an exam chair while the V1 Device tattooed the image of three birds on his inner right arm. As for the founder of Blackdot? Pennington suggested that the next time he is under the V1 Device, he will get a tattoo that combines the love of his youngest daughter, Naiya, with his admiration for the Smashing Pumpkins. Pennington and his staff met up with Jimmy Chamberlin and Jeff Schroeder from the two-time Grammy Award-winning band in the Winter of 2022 after being given backstage access.

“I found myself sitting on the couch beside [Schroeder], a Pumpkins guitarist,” Pennington said. “I struck up a conversation and eventually asked if I might show him some tattoo designs made by my young daughter...His favorite was the dragon holding the guitar. He let me take a photo of him holding the drawing and signed the back of it. Naiya would be thrilled. I looked up to see my team was already chatting with [Chamberlin]...They were discussing how he might potentially be able to help Blackdot...I later showed [Chamberlin] Naiya’s designs and asked him the same question. He also went for the dragon holding the guitar and signed the back of it. Naiya’s drawing of a dragon holding a guitar, affectionately referred to as ‘The Pumpkins-approved tattoo,’ is likely my next tattoo.”

Blackdot was made with advanced technology. But if Joel Pennington’s company grows into a well-known commodity, it will likely be due to principles based on diversity, where everyday people and his kids have input just like his business partners and favorite Rock stars.