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inventors Ladislo and Georg Biro, ballpoint pens were still relatively new in the postwar era and had tremendous mass-market sales potential. By 1946, Eskesen had set himself up in the pen-manufacturing business.

It took five more years for Eskesen to perfect his design for the floating action pen, which the company markets under the trademarked name "photoramic." The first photoramic pen was made in 1951 for Esso (now Exxon) and featured a floating oil drum in its clear plastic barrel.

Original Eskesen floaty pens were made with mostly metal components and sometimes featured three-dimensional floaters. By the 1960s, it became difficult for the company to find artists to individually hand-paint the floaters and the use of metal components was no longer cost-effective, so the switch to plastic pens with celluloid film inserts was made.

Eskesen did not originate the idea of placing "floating" art inside the barrel of the pen, but he did perfect it by developing a leak-proof plastic barrel. To this day, Eskesen's sealing process remains a secret. Visitors to the factory are prohibited from entering the sealing room and the process has not been patented because the company does not want to reveal it.

Over the years, Eskesen expanded its floaty repertoire to include floaty key chains and cigarette lighters, letter openers

Frolicking dolphins in a tropical setting are featured in the pen at far left.



*Charles de Gaulle and Chicago mayor Richard Daley also commissioned floaty pens for their personal use.*

and school supplies, toothbrushes and even pocket-sized screwdrivers. It also produces plastic souvenir key chains with painted film inserts, but floaty pens account for about 75 percent of the company's sales.

After Eskesen's death in 1988, the company was sold to Per Staal and Jens Dromph. When Mr. Staal retired in 1998, Dromph took full ownership of the company.

Ever since the original Esso pen, promotional pens made for corporate clients have remained a core part of Eskesen's business. The old-style clickable Heinz ketchup pen, in which ketchup pours out over a plate of French fries, has become coveted by collectors ever since it was "retired" in 2001. Coca-Cola, Wells Fargo Bank and Otis Elevator Co. are among Eskesen's many corporate clients.

Character pens, such as those created for Disney, are another key business segment. Pens featuring the German cartoon character Diddl, introduced in the late 1990s, were the most popular in the company's history. A new Harry Potter pen, commissioned by United Kingdom retailer Marks & Spencer, debuted at the same time as the second Harry Potter film.

Historically the best-known Eskesen pens are the "tip 'n strip" group, in which shapely women and men lose their bathing suits when the pens are tilted. The latest group of tip 'n strip girls, models from northern England, was introduced in 1996. Eskesen sells approximately four million tip 'n strip pens annually.