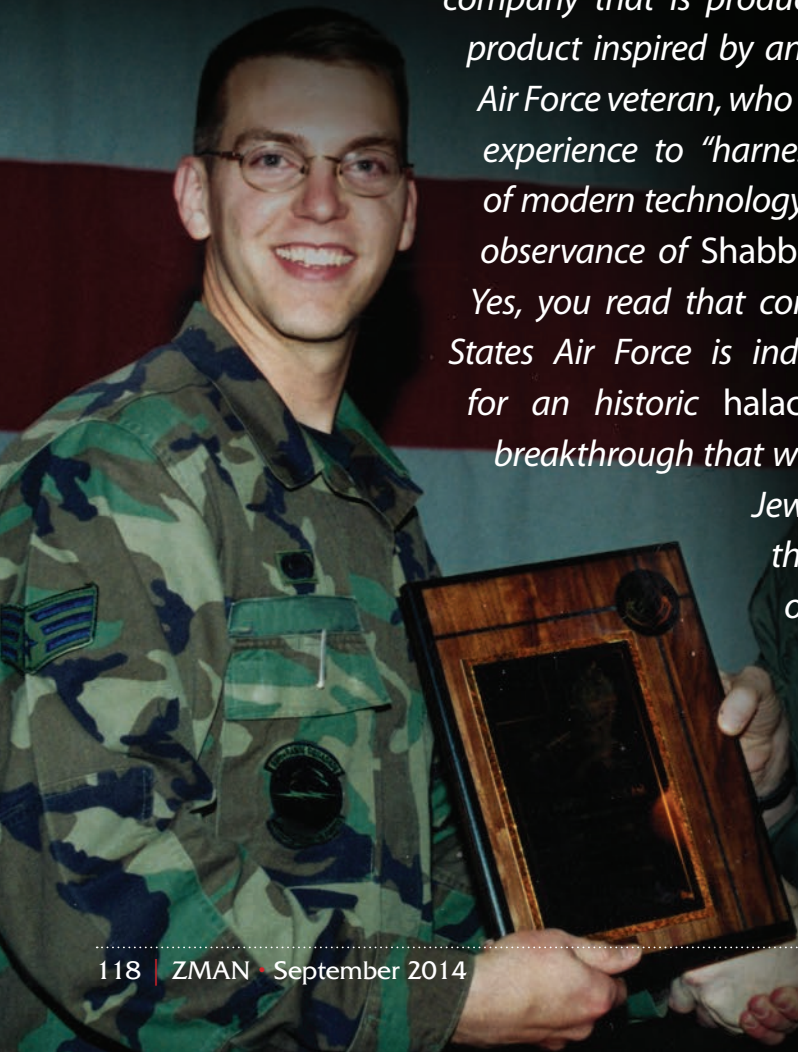


Zman Switch and Its Long Journey from the Air Force to Jewish Homes

Timely Technology

Zman Magazine was granted an exclusive tour of the headquarters of Zman Technologies (no relationship with Zman Magazine), a company that is producing an advanced product inspired by an observant Jewish Air Force veteran, who is using his military experience to “harness the capabilities of modern technology... to enhance the observance of Shabbos and Yom Tov.” Yes, you read that correctly: The United States Air Force is indirectly responsible for an historic halachic technological breakthrough that will literally brighten Jewish homes! Read the fascinating story of Yonasan Bloch and his efforts to revolutionize the way we experience Shabbos.



- By Yakov Goldfarb

On a pleasant Wednesday afternoon several weeks ago, I was witness to an unusual scene. At the headquarters of a leading American electrical products company, I sat in on a unique business meeting. Around the large conference table sat a curious mix of executives—a business advisor, a marketing specialist, an electrical engineer, an air force veteran, and a rabbi.

The eclectic group discussed and debated some of the most recent inventions the company was in the process of developing. The conversation was fast and furious. *Halachic* and other terminologies were tossed about in rapid fire. Each time a different design or technology was mentioned everyone invariably turned toward the rabbi for his opinion. If his response was negative the idea was immediately shelved. The electrical engineer would need to return to the drawing board and come up with a new plan.

The company in question is no small-time start-up. It's a large, established business that helps bring some of the most popular electrical equipment to the market. In fact, *Zman* Magazine had to sign a non-disclosure agreement stating that we will not disclose unauthorized topics discussed at the meeting.

The executives work for corporations with billion-dollar market capitalizations. Yet, despite their involvement with big business, these executives decided it was worthwhile to spend time and resources to produce a series of remarkable products designed to address difficult *halachic* problems that affect Jewish homes on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*.

This new project is very positive news for at least two reasons. First, the fact that such a large American company decided to produce electronics designed especially for observant Jewish homes is a sign that the Torah community has grown to the point that it is worth investing in. Second, the plans we heard under discussion at the R&D (research and development) meeting promise to solve many knotty *halachic* issues facing the use of modern electric equipment

and keeping *Shabbos*, making it both harder to transgress and more enjoyable to observe.

Common Problem

Typically, the trouble occurs on Friday night while the entire family is sitting around the dining room table partaking in the *Shabbos* meal. In the middle of dipping your spoon into your chicken soup the room suddenly goes dark. One of the little children was careless and leaned against the light switch. Now the room is plunged into darkness for the remainder of the *Shabbos*.

Nor is it always the child's fault. Perhaps the *Shabbos* timer was turned during the week, or you forgot to turn the timer on before *Shabbos* altogether.

What can you do now? A common reaction might be to go out to the street and look for a non-Jew to turn the lights on, which has its own *halachic* and practical challenges. Some people mistakenly believe that it is permissible to turn the dial on the *Shabbos* timer, especially if the lights do not turn on immediately as a result.

Furthermore, the issue affects far more than just the dining room. How many times has it happened that you prepared to go to bed only to discover that the light was left on in your bedroom? Worse, it may have been accidentally switched on after *Shabbos* started although you were careful to remember to turn it off before *Shabbos* began. And if it happened in your bedroom a few times, how many times did it happen in the children's room?

Rabbi Zvi Ortner, author of the *Machsheves Tzvi* series on *halachah*, is a respected Torah authority in Boro Park. In 2010, he formed Halachic Tech USA, to research *Halachic* issues in technological applications, which has partnered with Zman Technologies to provide *Halachic* direction. Rabbi Ortner described the challenge in a conversation with *Zman*:

We all know basic Shabbos concepts of rest and oneg [pleasure]. The Ramban



A Zman Technologies research and development conference. Seen: Rabbi Ortner (third from right), founder of Halachah Tech USA, Yonasan Bloch (second from right) and William Thea (third from left).

says that at the foundation of the Shabbos restrictions with all their pertinent halachos is the goal to experience a meaningful and enjoyable Shabbos.

Today, when every Jewish home is supplied with electricity, any number of problems can and do arise. This may involve the lights, the air conditioning, etc. For many years it has been common practice to use Shabbos timers, but there are people who are not comfortable setting a Shabbos timer. Friday afternoon is one of the most pressured times in a Jewish home, and that's right when you need to remember to set the timer. Almost every third or fourth week a problem crops up and the Shabbos enjoyment is threatened.

This is where Zman Technologies stepped forward by developing an innovative *Shabbos* switch. On the outside, it looks very much like a regular switch on the wall. Inside, however, is an advanced piece of modern technology: it is preprogrammed with the times for every *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* anywhere in North America for the next 35 years!

When you install the Zman *Shabbos* switch you set it only once. You choose the location and punch in the date and time. You can also choose which *halachic* time frame you follow for the end of *Shabbos* (such as 72 minutes after sunset). From then on the switch keeps track of when each *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* begins and ends for you.

History of Shabbos Timers

Exactly who first used a timer for *Shabbos* purposes is unknown, but a glance at *halachic* sources shows that the basic concept was already addressed 200 years ago. In *Masa D'Yerushalayim* authored by Rabbi Moshe Leib Halevi Litch-Rosenbaum, a *dayan* in Pressburg (today Bratislava, capital of Slovakia) and a student of the Chasam Sofer, the following is recorded:

And so I heard from my rebbi, the gaon Chasam Sofer, that the outstanding Torah scholars of Frankfurt am Main who woke up to learn Torah on Friday night and wanted to drink hot coffee came up with a clever invention. They piled up small