Paper-folding tool on cutting edge

Calgarian Kelly Hesleton knows what it's like to work on the edge.
Of paper, that is.
Paper cuts are a serious occupational hazard for someone who has to make hundreds of folds in various sizes of paper every day.
In the printing and document-reproduction businesses, "there is a constant requirement for paper to be folded to a more manageable size," Hesleton says.
She worked for years in a local print shop, becoming increasingly frustrated with the paper-folding tools on the market.
A German-made bone tool with smooth edges doesn't smudge the ink on papers. But this "paper-folding bone," as printers call it, costs more than $10 each. Drop it on a hard floor and it'll break or chip, Hesleton says.
There are at least two brands of plastic paper-folding bones available. But with continual use -as Hesleton shows with some samples -friction turns their plastic edges ragged and distorted. They'll no longer deliver a neat, clean crease.
Hesleton teamed up a couple of years ago with Noelle Blair, an industrial design graduate student from University of Calgary's environmental design faculty. Their mission: give the world a better folding bone.
"I've got an entrepreneurial side to me," says Hesleton, 38, office services administrator with SNC Lavalin Inc.
She and Blair designed a 15 centimetre-long (six inches), ruler-shaped tool with angled edges, making it easy to pick up on a flat surface. Prototypes were made from hard wood and Teflon, but they tended to smudge certain inks and leave creases in some paper stocks.
Hesleton then located a company selling large sheets of hard, recycled plastic of just the right thickness. She bought the plastic in three colors, so -unlike bone -her tool would be easy to find in a blizzard of white paper.
She and Blair spent two days using a power band saw to cut out 500 of the tools, sanding the edges by hand.
Hesleton later hired a company to heat-imprint the tool's name: Foldin' Bone.

NEAT CREASE: Kelly Hesleton holds her improved version of a printer's paper-folding bone

"Inventor's Corner" spot lights the bright ideas of Calgary and area innovators. It appears periodically on the Science & Technology page, depending on the number and merit of ideas received.
If you have Invented some thing, have a good Idea or an innovative approach, or a suggestion for a story, submit it for consideration to science writer Mark Lowey at the phone number or e-mail on this page. You can fax it to him at 235- 7379 or drop It off or mail it to him at Calgary Herald: 215 16th St. S.E. P.O. Box 2400, Stn. M: Calgary, AB: T2P OW8.

She has now sold 100 of her Foldin' Bones at $8.25 each including GST (call 270-4262), even though she hasn't had much time or money to market them. Customers include printing shops, seismic-mapping firms, community newsletter groups and the local calligraphy guild.
About 40 people at West Canadian Graphics, a large printing firm in the city, use Foldin' Bones, says company sales manager Terry French. "The verdict is, we would die with some of our (paper-folding) jobs without them," he says.
Hesleton recently revisited some of her first customers, who have been using a nameless version of her tool for more than a year, to ask If they wanted to trade for a name-imprinted version. No one wanted to give up their old bones -time had made their angled edges even more smooth and efficient.
Hesleton also has produced a smaller, five centimetre-long (two inches) version of the Foldin' Bone, that children have used in Origami, the Japanese art of paper folding.
"There's paper everywhere," she notes. ""And If there's paper, there's the potential that it needs to be folded."