

# How toothpaste became popular – *and essential!*

This is the next article in a short series on how behavioural economics and 'being human' affects your business.



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Until a few decades ago, toothpaste was not a big thing. Indeed, brushing your teeth was not something that most people ever did, never mind twice a day. And yet a little more than a century later, very few of us don't use it.

How on earth did this transformation in human behaviour happen?

You can blame it on legendary advertising pioneer Claude Hopkins. In his work in the early 1900s, he had managed to dramatically increase sales of existing consumer products like beer, oats and soap bars. Interestingly, all the promises made in the campaigns were not about something new and spectacular about these products but, by intensely studying them and the companies that produced them, he was able to come up with some unique examples that he knew would appeal to customers, using what has today become known as 'augmentation-by-addition'.

For example, for Schlitz beer, he stated that they

cleaned their bottles with 'live steam' – but of course everyone did that. He created seductive fantasies for women by proclaiming that Cleopatra had washed with Palmolive soap, despite the outraged protests of Egyptologists and historians. But these thoughts somehow stuck and became ingrained in the daily behaviours and habits of consumers.

So, let's come back to toothpaste – and the brand Pepsodent in particular. There were some factors that created a good and rational reason for using toothpaste. As people around the world started prospering and living better, eating more processed foods and sugar led to tooth decay, and this became an endemic problem because the rate of cavities started rocketing. But still most people didn't brush their teeth despite what they saw happening around them. In fact, one estimate said that only 7% of Americans actually owned a toothbrush.

In his book published in 1923, he stated, "The most successful toothpaste advertiser never features tooth troubles in his headlines. Tests

“An idea is nothing more nor less than a new combination of old elements.”

James Webb Young,



Image courtesy of Rodnae Productions, Pexels

have proved them unappealing.” It's therefore understandable that at one stage, Hopkins thought it was a lost cause, and didn't see how he could persuade consumers through education.



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No, he had to try another tactic to change habits – an increase sales.

What desirable human cravings could he tap into that could act as cues or triggers to consumers brushing their teeth every day? He tried appealing to their sense of vanity – “your teeth will be whiter and look better”- but that had only small success. But his extensive research into the prospective consumers led him to identify something very important. Everyone has a natural film of plaque on their teeth, whether one brushes or not. This has existed for as long as humans have lived on the planet, and it was neither dangerous, nor did it seem to bother anyone. (Indeed, to get rid of it, all one had to do was rinse out your mouth, eat an apple, or brush with water alone. Toothpaste makes no difference.)

But what he did appeal to was the ‘yuck factor’. His advertising messages for Pepsodent distributed in all media and public places said things like: “Just run your tongue across your teeth... You’ll feel a film — that’s what makes your teeth look ‘off colour’ and invites decay.” (I bet as you read this you just did that!) And when this was combined with the problem of possible bad breath, it became irresistible for consumers, impossible to ignore. And there was a reward used to entice consumers. After all, who doesn’t want to be more beautiful and have a prettier smile? And who doesn’t want fresher breath? Particularly when all it takes is a quick brush with Pepsodent?

The power of this strategy is one that can be used in just about any business. It is definitely used in



the video game and electronics industry, by casinos, by food, sugar and cigarette companies, in sales, and many other industries. In its simplest form, it goes something like this ...

- Identify a simple craving that people have, and if you want to, create a new one that they never even thought about.
- Use this to trigger or cue a very specific behaviour that you want your customers to take.
- Immediately follow up with an enticing and powerful reward – even if it’s an emotional reward only.

- This then powers the new routines behaviours and habits.

The crucial, magic lever is that we need to learn the right human psychology regarding triggers and rewards. It’s the same in your personal life when you want to create a new habit, like a more regular fitness routine. If you get your running shoes on, even if you are tired after work, but promise yourself a drink with your friends afterwards. Or improving your diet: research on dieting shows that creating new food habits requires a prearranged and programmed cue — such as planning your menus in advance — and a simple reward when





you stick to your goals. This is not weird stuff. It's all based on science.

One final point needs to be emphasised here ... In the Pepsodent example, it wasn't only the clever tactics that made it successful, because it turns out that the same claims made about the film of plaque were made by other dental products. What was additionally different this time was that included in the tube of toothpaste was something that affected the taste. They also added citric acid and mint oil to the flavour that made your mouth tingle when you brushed your teeth, and consumers saw this as evidence that it was working.

Hopkins didn't only promote beautiful teeth, but also a sensation that people craved, and that they equated with cleanliness. As Charles Duhigg later wrote: "The tingling doesn't make the tooth-paste work any better. It just convinces people it's doing the job."

For your business, getting to grips with the science of cravings may be ground-breaking. If you can use these you will succeed far better than your rivals, and the best news is that all you have to do is take the time to observe yourself and the people around you. New habits are driven by cravings, not magic or mystery, and these cravings become the transformational triggers for what you want your customers to do. **SR**

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# Food safety: Chemistry testing

**W**hen you think of food products, do you think of chemicals? As a food or beverage manufacturer you should. Food chemistry – or chemistry testing to be more specific – plays a significant role in food safety and quality.

Sending your products to a chemistry testing lab is not only a necessity, but it can be beneficial to you. Remember, consumers are loyal to products that have consistently good quality. But, before you can get started, you must have a solid understanding of chemistry testing. So, here's what you need to know.

## The meaning of chemistry testing

Food chemistry testing is the process of confirming the contents of the product. That's the basic definition.

To dig deeper, it involves analysing samples of products to find various elements or specifications. For instance, chemistry testing can tell you how much of each macronutrient – like carbs, proteins and fats – are in your product.

It can also indicate whether there are allergens, heavy metals or toxic substances present and tell you the levels of moisture in the item. All of this helps you to ensure that your produce is safe for human consumption, and that it is of good quality.

## The laws on chemistry testing

The law doesn't say "you must do chemistry testing" in so many words. However, there are laws that necessitate chemistry testing. For example, the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants act, 1972 (Act 54 of 1972) requires that all products come with nutritional labels. To get the information for these labels, you must do nutritional profiling and, that is a form of chemistry testing.



Essentially, the law requires you to name the components present in your product and list the amounts of each per food item. This is exactly what is done in a chemistry lab.

Further, you will have to provide information about additives, preservatives, sweeteners, colourants, allergens and more, on your product. There are also laws on the number of preservatives and antioxidants allowed in products. Chemistry testing can help you comply with regulations in this case too.

The same goes for toxins. Certain toxins like mycotoxins and biotoxins – and heavy metals like mercury – can be very harmful when consumed. You are required to ensure that your products are free of these compounds, or only contain them in extremely small amounts.

## The benefits of chemistry testing

Apart from the fact that you need to do chemistry testing to ensure that you're abiding by regulations and standards, there are other reasons to do it too.

**Safety** – By doing chemistry testing, you can ensure that you keep consumers safe.

**Reputation** – As a result of the above, you can avoid having to recall products and thus avoid damage to your reputation and financial damage.

**Taste** – The process can also assist you in finding a balance between ensuring safety and making your products tastier.

**Product performance** – You can also ensure better quality in terms of shelf life and longevity. Chemistry testing also allows you to improve the appearance and texture of your product.

**Operational improvement** – Testing your products can also reveal presence of harmful chemicals in your facility.

**Consumer trust** – When you produce consistently good products and provide accurate labelling, people are likely to trust you more and keep coming back.

## The risks of not doing chemistry testing

If you decide against chemistry testing your products, you could end up in a lot of trouble, losing all the benefits mentioned above. You risk making people sick, financial loss, and even may face legal battles. Learn the lesson from other people's mistakes. For example, a beverage manufacturer had to recall its juice brand due to the presence of patulin (a mycotoxin) in some of the products. A recall involves a lot of work and a lot of refunding. It could also be a PR crisis if you aren't careful. It's best you avoid this at all costs.

## Bringing it all together

Sampling and testing your products may seem tedious. And, you may be put off by the additional expense. But the fact is that you can't do without it. What's more is that the benefits out-weigh the costs, so it's more than worth it. Contact AssureCloud to learn more. **SR**

