

Different Decade, Same Challenges

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Editor's note: With Don Petersen on much-deserved vacation for a few weeks, we perused our issue archives and came up with this article (originally titled "I Found It on Aisle Twelve"), published in print only way back in May 1989. While a few of his observations may be a bit outdated after 21 years, his fundamental points regarding the chiropractic profession remain eerily true to this day.

I went to the grocery store with my wife the other day, and I couldn't help noticing how many brands of laundry detergent were displayed. As I read through the different boxes, I was even more surprised to discover that they were all manufactured by only two or three companies. This struck my interest, so I decided to take some time to read what kind of PR each brand presented to the consumer.

Some were made for cold-water washing. Some were made for hot. One boldly stated it worked best in "all temperatures." Some claimed they would brighten. Some claimed they would whiten. Another said it was the soap you *know and trust*. Some had special additives. Some were all-purpose. Most were "new and improved" in some way. But with all they had to say and all of the claims that were made, they never felt the need to condemn another brand.

Thinking about it, I asked myself, what can really be said about laundry soap? Either it gets the clothes clean or it doesn't. Seems simple to me.

Now, I know there are colored clothes and white clothes, and occasionally you dump a plate of spaghetti down the front of your shirt, creating a "hard to get out" stain. So why is it that in a market that features such strict product application and limits to the kinds of claims that can be made, each brand doesn't try to discredit the other brands on the shelf?

Maybe the reason why they don't try to discredit one another is because many of these brands are produced by the same manufacturer. Or perhaps it is because each detergent maker understands that to harm the reputation of any brand of laundry soap would also harm the reputation of all laundry detergents in general. (Is there a lesson here?)

This brings up another question. Surely the cost of producing 15 different brands of laundry soap (each with their own box, marketing, advertising, etc.) is far greater than the cost of manufacturing a single brand. So why doesn't each of the three major soap companies produce one brand only? Each company would present the consumer with the best detergent they could make. It would work in all temperatures, be all-purpose, whiten, brighten, need no additives, and ultimately be the detergent you know and trust. In fact, why is there more than one laundry detergent manufacturer? Aren't all detergents pretty much the same?

The answers to these questions obviously do not lie with the manufacturers. They would much rather produce one product, I'm sure. The answer, then, must involve the consumer. The answers are probably the same as the answers to such questions as why we have so many brands of toothpaste, bar soap, deodorant, etc.: Because we like a choice!

Choice is the battle cry of the modern consumer. The need for choice creates new brands, new divisions, new companies and even new industries. Likewise, the desire for an alternative to the medical philosophy and protocol is one of the primary motivations behind the move toward chiropractic care. The ability to provide the public with multiple choices not only creates greater consumer appeal, but also expands the market.

How many more laundry products are sold now that consumers have so much to choose from? In my home, we have our "all-purpose" detergent plus Clorox, Borateem, Borax, Spray-and-Wash and Bounce. (Maybe there is a lesson here also.)

In the world of business strategy, chiropractic is in a position to grow and expand. But there are still a few ingredients missing:

- *Public Awareness:* We must continue to present chiropractic to the entire public through projects like "*Reader's Digest I and II*" and "Muscle Magazine" (a program on ESPN cable television). [Unless you've been a DC for 20-plus years, you probably don't remember either of these projects, considered the profession's earliest nationwide marketing efforts.]
- *Elimination of Restrictions:* In order to sell detergent through the major distribution chains in all of the grocery stores across the country, detergent manufacturers had to establish agreements and remove trade barriers. Our profession must rectify all situations (insurance reimbursement, standards of care, national scope of practice, etc.) that restrict the establishment of chiropractic care for everyone. Every person in the world who has a spine should have a chiropractor.
- *Presenting a Full "Product Line":* Just as laundry soap makers "brag" about the multitude of options available to the consumer, chiropractic presents the same broad spectrum. Although I can't prove it, I feel confident that if I were to return the laundry detergent aisle after hours, I wouldn't hear the boxes arguing and degrading each other. They would just sit there in *their own aisle*, providing the public with choices, alternatives and specialties. Chiropractic presents a "full product line," but because of our myopia, we are intolerant of any "product" that doesn't match ours. A good marketing firm would make our diversity a selling point, not a point of disunity.

Each chiropractor presents a different array of services to the consumers of their community. The real question is: How can we let the public know that we exist not in one dimension, but as a profession that offers choice, alternatives and specialties in the health care arena?

We do more than whiten and brighten. We provide a distinct alternative to the prospective health care patient. The Avis rent-a-car company made a name for itself with little badges that said, "We try harder" in more than 300 different languages. Today, they are sharing the majority of the market with Hertz.

There are more than 200 million people in the U.S. alone waiting to discover chiropractic. Are we trying harder?

Read more findings on my blog: <http://blog.toyourhealth.com/wrblog/>. You can also visit me on [Facebook](#).

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