

Why Dental Floss Is a Marketing Scam

Dentists unite to sell you the dream, but the science is shaky

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The perfect teeth!

On my last visit to my dentist, I left angry. I walked out of the surgery feeling conned. In my hand, I grasped two packets of high-quality dental floss. I've never flossed before and to date, I've still never flossed.

A British dentist at the University of Birmingham, Prof Damien Walmsley, said there is only "weak evidence" to suggest flossing is beneficial.

How on earth was I conned into buying dental floss? Does this product even have any benefit? Why would I want to buy something I have no intention of ever using?

There's clearly several issues at play here:

1. I was sold the dream of having perfect gleaming teeth.
2. At the time of purchase, I had every intention of flossing.
3. I panicked at the horror of not flossing or sold the nightmare of owning teeth more rickety and diseased than Freddy Kreuger's face.
4. Is flossing medically proven to have a beneficial effect?
5. My dentist needs to make quota for the month.
6. My dentist hates me and wants to sell a product to a gullible person. He then took advantage of my weakened state, fuzzy head and vulnerable position, to sell me floss.

On occasion, I have the mistaken belief that my dentist is evil and number six was his true motivation. Deep down I suspect I panicked. Like the time I bought jeans that didn't fit, or ordered a curry when all I wanted was pizza. I'm a panic buyer, which is why the internet is a godsend for me.

How Do You Market a Product That Nobody Needs?

First, you need to present your product as the solution to a problem.

The problem here is rotten teeth. Who wants that? This is an easy sell in a dentist. The patient already has a need, their teeth ache or it's a check-up and they've arrived at your business. It's now a question of when to present the worst scenario that foretells the loss of teeth.

And it's not just the loss of teeth. The social impact has a major psychological grip on my sense of worth. With bad teeth I can't get a date. Without a date I'll be lonely. Being lonely will lead me to depression. Being depressed... well, you get the picture. A spiraling decline in my mental health all because of bad teeth.

It gets worse. You're seeking employment. You have bad breath caused by food stuck in your teeth. You have an interview coming up. Without flossing you could be doomed. Without a job, you can't get a date. Without a date, you'll be lonely. Yeah, I know, it all leads back to sex.

All this runs through my mind as I sit sprawled in the dentist's chair unable to answer back coherently.

"You wouldn't want to have bad breath would you Reuben?" asks the Gentle Dental.
"Murhhmughhhh muuummmrrrrgrhl ll mmooorrrrhhhh" I would reply.

What? Didn't I say I was in a vulnerable position?

"Tell me Reuben... do you date?" He doesn't wait for an answer. "Because you'll not be wanting to kiss anyone with food stuck in your teeth, would you now?" He's a pessimist my dentist. Probably because he's made the choice of staring at people's bad teeth every single day of his life.

The nightmare scenario rapidly plays through my head and within ten seconds I have died, alone, somewhere in Palmerston North (formerly the worse place to live on Earth).

Need. Check.

Prevention message. Check.

Now all he needs to do is close the sale.

This Is Where He Applies More Gas

I'm kidding. It's at this point he hits me with some hard data to back up his message. The facts of not flossing. He's acknowledged my pain and wants to help.

This is the point where I get conned.

“The scientific evidence for flossing *is* weak,” said Dr. Wayne Aldredge, president of the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP). However, he told the *AP* the benefits of flossing might be clearer if studies focused on people with the highest risk of gum disease, such as smokers and diabetics.

Flossing studies are conducted by flossing manufacturers. Two major floss producers, Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson, have both said that flossing helps to remove plaque. Of course they’d say that.

Flossing Can Be Beneficial—But It’s Not Essential

Brushing your teeth regularly should take care of all build-up. Your dentist knows this. Flossing isn’t necessary.

I left the surgery \$40 lighter. In my hand, I grasped the newly acquired dental floss. I had bought into the nightmare. I had craved redemption from a life path that would lead me to desolation. **I NEEDED to floss.**

Six months later, the packet stares at me in the bathroom. It mocks me every morning with the bad choice I made. A reminder of my gullibility.

Dental floss. The world’s best marketing need.

Written by Reuben Salsa: Salsa is a fever dream. A whisper carried over the mountains. He’s an illusion. An idea that sways the masses. He’s spoiling for a fight. Don’t look too close.



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