

# Instantly recognized and understood: The Happy Tooth

In a world in which companies struggle to find instantly-recognisable symbols to guide consumers to healthier brands – and research shows that shoppers, too, would find life easier if there was a symbol for healthy eating that they could trust – the red and white logo with a smiling tooth under an umbrella is a model example of effective, globally-recognised health communications. PATRICIA WIKLUND reports.

Established to promote dental health, Toothfriendly International is a non-profit association based in Basel in Switzerland. It was founded in 1989, building on the experience of national initiatives with similar missions (Switzerland 1982; Germany 1985). The association's main function is to license the Happy Tooth registered trademark to confectionery manufacturers producing chewing gums, mints, lollipops, chocolate or other sweets that are not harmful to teeth. In order for products to carry the logo they have to be scientifically tested and proven to be without significant cariogenic and erosive material. Based on the measurement of the pH of dental plaque and saliva, the test is a standardized one carried out by three appointed independent university institutes.

Depending on the volumes and territory of sales, the license fee varies. Today 59 confectionery firms use the logo on 92 brands, covering a geographical area of some 40 countries. For example, in Switzerland, where awareness of the Happy Tooth logo is high, 90% of chewing gum products carry the logo and by value, 40% of the confectionery market is represented by Happy Tooth marked products. In addition to confectionery companies, two toothbrush manufacturers – Banat and Oral-B – are entitled to the logo because they are supportive partners in the social programmes carried out by Toothfriendly.

Executive Director of the Toothfriendly Foundation, Dr. Albert Bär, explains that Toothfriendly International works with the general public, health professionals and the industry. For consumers the logo serves as a reliable guide to toothfriendly confectionery; for dentists it offers a means for providing positive dietary advice about confectionery to patients, and for the confectionery industry, the logo represents a quality mark that helps communicate the product's and the company's engagement for better dental health.

## A VALUE SHIFT FROM SUGAR-FREE TO TOOTHFRIENDLY

Chewing gum is the dominating category applying the logo, due to its strongly developed

sugar-free proposition. "During the past 20 years the perception of chewing gum has changed significantly from having had something of a junk food image to being a healthy product today", says Dr. Bär. According to Bär, the turning point was reached around the time xylitol made a breakthrough and Wrigley launched sugar free products. "The proposition that emerged was about caries prevention and dental health". Today sugar free products have become more or less a requirement for many brands and Dr. Bär gathers that the industry is preparing itself to leverage the established health proposition of chewing gum to other candies too. He says functional candy is still an untapped market to be explored. He is especially excited about new toothfriendly bulk ingredients recently brought to market like isomaltulose (Cargill-Cerestar, Palatinit) and D-tagatose (Arla Food Ingredients). These are however both sugars and can therefore not carry the sugar free message. He feels that the alternative proposition is to profile as 'toothfriendly', products containing these ingredients. And here, being a strong and easily understood symbol, the Happy Tooth presents a great communication tool. He says: "Candy is technically an easier and more interesting concept for dental health than chewing gum. Emphasizing its wide variety of possibilities, he says candy can be functionalized. "It will be the next market to learn the lesson".

## LITTLE TEETH NEED BIG FRIENDS

Established last year, the Toothfriendly Foundation functions as the charitable arm of the association. It carries out prevention programmes in less developed countries. Dr. Bär says especially important are those areas where sugar consumption is increasing due to more westernized consumption behaviour, but dental services are still unavailable. "Caries pose a serious problem", he adds. "The combination of poor oral hygiene and expanding sugar consumption is particularly harmful". The foundation obtains its money partly from sweetener and ingredients

manufacturers, partly from licensing the toothfriendly logo. Major contributors are Cargill-Cerestar, Palatinit and Roquette Frères. Dr. Bär also adds that "by contributing to the Foundation's programme, confectionery manufacturers like Cadbury, Perfetti and Chupa Chups demonstrate their social engagement in caries prevention."



Launched in 2001, a social programme aimed at preventing dental caries in Turkish children is the flagship of the foundation. This first programme – Disler Yolunda – has targeted children from underprivileged families. The mission is to integrate practical and regular dental health education in the school programme. Thousands of children have gained knowledge on dental health, and have learned how to use a toothbrush and toothpaste correctly, as well as how to prevent caries by eating a healthy diet. The foundation provides educational material and trains the educators. Volunteering dentists provide free dental treatment to children from the most needy families. The programme's primary method is to teach the teacher, in this way children learn about healthy dental habits from someone they trust. Dr. Bär stresses the importance of these social programmes. Caries are a preventable disease that can be tackled by dental health education and communication.