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The Smile Boutique in the Dentist's Office

By ALIX STRAUSS
Published: January 10, 2008

DR. PIA LIEB, a cosmetic dentist, held an unusual food tasting last month in a Chelsea loft. Plenty of red wine and gobbs of delectable nibbles were on hand, including beet and goat cheese salad and raspberry mini-tarts. Dr. Lieb's aim wasn't to delight guests but to discolor their teeth.



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

GRIN THERAPY Dr. Pia Lieb, a cosmetic dentist, has designed SexySmile, a tooth whitener, lip gloss and lip plumper.



It was all a stunt to have the three dozen guests fall for a new version of SexySmile, a product designed by Dr. Lieb that combines a tooth whitener, lip gloss and lip plumper in one package. By April the product, whose whitener she claims is safe to use up to three times daily, will be available for \$36 at stores like Sephora and Bergdorf's and, of course, at her Upper East Side office.

"I love beauty and I wanted to combine the two," said Dr. Lieb, who intends to roll out an entire product line, including an oral beauty travel kit, by 2011. "You can't have white teeth and not take care of your lips. Besides, I'm a woman and that gives me a different insight than a male who is selling a teeth-whitening product."

First, dermatologists came out with skin-care lines to attract a higher tier of clientele and tout their multitasking. Now, more dentists than ever dabble in research and development to create so-called "smile beauty" lines they hope will make them a mint.

No organization tracks how many oral-care products are designed by dentists. But industry analysts say more than a dozen doctors have brought out items in the last year or

plan to this year.

"Cosmetic [dentistry](#) was an under-served market and another beauty target," said Michele Harris, the chief executive of Smarti Solutions, a marketing consultancy.

"Teeth-whitening woke everyone up and set the platform for new products and innovation. Along with that comes the need to differentiate and brand yourself."

Which is why the second-generation of dentist-designed toothpastes, whitening gel pens and deluxe mouth rinses are coming to fruition now. Dentists vying to have their products noticed argue that they offer active ingredients that are a cut above drugstore brands. But critics say that is not always the case, and why buy products from a doctor who stands to

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profit from the sale?

Regardless of whether dentist-made brands are more effective, some consumers think they are, according to an online survey last year by Mintel, a consumer research company. Eighty-seven percent of 2,000 respondents nationwide thought that store-bought products were not as effective as a whitening product from a dental office.

“No question there’s an increased demand for appearance-enhancing dental products and procedures,” said Dr. Mike Fleming, who is on the dental products advisory panel at the [Food and Drug Administration](#). “A number of dentists with an entrepreneurial flair have responded to this demand by developing and marketing toothpastes, bleaching systems and mouth rinses that appear at first glance to be novel in their approach and superior in effectiveness.”

Take Dr. Debra Glassman, a cosmetic dentist on the Upper West Side. She spent \$250,000 developing, designing and packaging her StarBrite toothpaste, which contains xylitol, an ingredient Dr. Glassman says fights [cavities](#) and bacteria.

She also lobbied to have it sold at the Wynn hotel and the Venetian in Las Vegas. “I flew out to Vegas, met with the hotels, got the toothpaste into their gift shops and now we’re talking about placing it in the rooms,” she said. Victoria’s Secret also carried \$6.50 StarBrite tubes during its first few months in 13 stores. (It has not decided whether to re-order for 2008).

Roughly 300 tubes are sold monthly at the practice that she shares with her husband, Dr. Steven Glassman. In May, she will add dental floss, mouthwash and whitening gel pens to the StarBrite brand. Like her toothpaste, each will contain the crystalline sweetener xylitol, which “makes enamel stronger,” she said.

Some dentists turned product developers say their brands improve upon messy trays and ill-fitting strips, or cut alcohol out of mouthwash, or detergent or synthetic materials out of toothpaste.

Dr. Jennifer Jablow, a cosmetic dentist in Midtown Manhattan, created her own whitener (making its debut in April) after numerous patient complaints about drugstore brands and her own disappointment. “Paint-on products don’t always adhere to the teeth,” Dr. Jablow said. “Many products can cause gum and tongue irritation. People also get sore throats because they’re ingesting 7 percent worth of peroxide.”

But without adequate comparative studies, it is hard to say a dentist-made whitener is more effective than, say, the 51 whitening toothpastes and 14 whitening kits sold by the Duane Reade chain.

“The active ingredients that dentists market in their products are often very similar to what Crest and Colgate are offering,” said Dr. Fleming, who practices in Durham, N.C.

Both drugstore and dentist items must conform to F.D.A. standards for proper labeling and use, but no studies compare the two.

Dr. Fleming said, “Dentist-created products might lack certain additives like preservatives” or be sweetener-free, which could appeal to label-conscious consumers.

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The Smile Boutique in the Dentist's Office

Published: January 10, 2008

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A handful of dentists got into R&D years ago. One pioneering entrepreneur was Dr. Jonathan B. Levine, whose whitening ampuls hit the shelves at beauty retailers like Sephora in 2002, six years after he started selling them to patients at his practice in Manhattan. Now, GoSmile, his company, has 17 products available at 500 department stores nationwide, including two \$30 whitening pastes, one for mornings, the other for "nighttime therapy."



Angela Jimenez for The New York Times. Dr. Jennifer Jablow, also a cosmetic dentist, is coming out with a whitener in April.

More dentists are selling their own products, in part because it's no longer considered odd for a doctor to have a boutique skin cream. "Dentists are late to come into this market because for a long time selling items out of your office seemed like a conflict of interest, but that thinking seems to be dissolving," said Billy Hulkower, a senior analyst at Mintel and the editor of their oral-care reports.

It used to be that patients lost faith in their doctors if they thought "they're being sold something," Mr. Hulkower said.

Plenty of dentists stick to patient care, in part to avoid a conflict of interest. Dr. Jerry Sanchez, a cosmetic dentist near San Francisco, would rather focus on his clients. "Creating a product is a distraction, and most take-home products that dentists have created aren't stronger or better than what you can buy at a drugstore," he said.

But some consumers seek out doctor-made whiteners. Three years ago, Jessica Naim, a fashion designer who drinks a lot of tea, tried Crest Whitestrips. "They slipped off and tasted bad," she said. Rather than try another over-the-counter brand, she went to her dentist, who sold her an at-home whitener that he and his dental hygienist use. "It was more expensive, but worth it," she added. "A dentist-recommended product has authenticity."

She is hardly the only one to buy into her dentist's recommendation, even if product sales enrich them. "Today's consumer would rather spend a few dollars more on products created by a dentist because they're getting a professional who's looked at your mouth and knows your oral health," said Laura Kelly, the president of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. "They want that expert advice."

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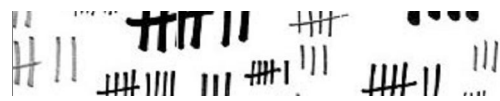
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