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[return to previous page](#)

[Home](#) [Home](#) [What makes a good rep?](#) [What makes a good rep?](#)

What makes a good rep?

dental practitioners, I have an ambivalent attitude towards reps who I divide into two clear categories: those whose expertise and knowledge will help me do a better job and can teach me about new products and those that have less noble thoughts.

Woody Allen once said, "There are worse things in life than death. Have you ever spent an evening with an insurance salesman?" With due deference to Mr Allen, he's clearly never spent valuable practice time with a poor dental supplies sales rep.



As an endodontist, I have spent many years studying, continually striving for the greatest standards of care and enhanced success rates that I deliver to patients and I firmly believe that the "good" commercial sector has as much to offer us as dental school. By "good" I mean those companies that are committed to clinical and scientific research and development, and understand the ethical responsibility that should be inherent in the healthcare market.

Such companies and the reps they employ are essential to all of us in the dental profession. The lovely Janice at QED, Louise of maillefer come to mind. They keep us abreast of new developments, they know we want evidence-based scientific or clinical research, and they are there for the long haul, building strong and lasting relationships with their clients unlike their commission driven colleagues who need to sell as much as they can as quickly as possible.

Of course, my first priority and responsibility is to my patients. The successful rep understands that and shares that sense of responsibility, so when they want to interest me in a new product they know where I stand and the questions I will want answered. For example, I am not alone in yearning for a needleless injection technique and I'm sure I wasn't alone in being excited at the prospect of just that when a sales rep announced its availability. The new contraption delivered such a pressurised force that the head of the poor human guinea pig recoiled and there was considerable bleeding. Safe to say that what was sold as this gentle calm technique complete with the picture of a happy smiling child was not quite as expected – it was never used by me again although I did pass it onto a paedodontist friend to try.

Dentistry, and particularly endodontics, is exciting and at the cutting edge of technological innovation so companies that have invested time and money are justifiably keen to recoup that through sales. Good companies recognise what they're actually selling is knowledge and accordingly, offer education, development and training. The rest are simply selling stuff in boxes that we can probably do without.

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